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Address to the Letter: Frankenstein, Pamela, and the Epistolary Novel

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, is rarely classified as an epistolary novel. Many readers actually forget that the novel begins as a series of letters between an arctic explorer and his sister. The framing device of the letter used by Shelley cites the revered history of the epistolary novel in the previous century, most notably those of Samuel Richardson. Richardson used the epistolary form in his novels to create what Ian Watt refers to as "formal realism". Richardson presents his novels as truth objects by employing the epistolary frame, but Shelley uses the form to reject the claims made by the domestic novels of Richardson and the empirical formulations of the Enlightenment. Shelley places the genre of the epistolary novel into constant conflict with both her characters, and the other genres, constantly emerging throughout the text. Shelley uses this conflict to provide a more intricate interiority to her characters where she may analyze masculine anxiety towards domestic space.

Address to the Letter: Frankenstein, Pamela, and the Epistolary Novel

The letter was the main form of communication within eighteenth century England, as the postal service became more established and open to public usage the century prior to 1635. The establishment of a postal service open to the public reflects two developments. First, there was a growing number of the non-aristocratic class of England that were literate. The second is the expanding of a person's social sphere. Before the establishment of the postal service or letter writing, a person's social acquaintances could easily be limited to the people they physically encountered within their daily lives. The establishment of the postal service and the form of the letter gave rise to a widening in an individual's radius of communication. While the price of actually sending a letter might have limited its use to certain classes, the establishment of the postal service certainly provided the non-aristocratic population of England a new avenue of correspondence, a new series of voices and forms to engage. The form of the letter and its physical presence and materiality also provide an important development in the literature of eighteenth century England. The letter became central to the early development of the English novel in the works of Richardson, and also to the development of Augustan poetry which began to exploit the form of the epistle as one of the main vehicles for poetic expression. The letter could be said to stand at a convergence point for these two disparate genres in the eighteenth century, providing each genre a form through which to achieve its generic goals.

The novels of Samuel Richardson, while not being the first attempt to convey a narrative through the use of letters, are certainly the culmination of a genre known as the epistolary novel. Richardson was able to use the epistolary form to provide two of the most important generic aspects of the early English novel. First, through the use of the letters, and his original position as an anonymous editor of the volume, Richardson was able to provide verisimilitude to his novels.

Verisimilitude refers to certain aspects of the novel that resemble truth and actual experience, and was an important concept to the early writers of the novel. Daniel Defoe and other writers, along with Richardson attempted to provide stories that convey truthful narratives, a narrative within a contemporary place and time, a sharp departure from previous prose fictions, which focused on distant and removed spaces. This adherence to the physical world could perhaps be related to the rise and importance of empiricism, which had developed throughout the seventeenth century. The importance of empirical experience can be seen in the works of John Locke, Francis Bacon, and the establishment of the Royal Society of England. The second generic characteristic the epistolary novel allowed Richardson to participate in was the establishment of interiority. With the establishment of the importance of individual experience in the work of Descartes and Locke, the novel became the genre to fully establish the literary merit of individual experience. The letter provided a vehicle adequate for Richardson to achieve the performance of the individual while also representing it as a truth object. Richardson attempts to provide truth objects or facts of individual experience. When he claims to simply be the editor of *Pamela*, not only does he claim there is an actual Pamela, he places a value on her consciousness. The early epistolary novels of Richardson provides this interesting dichotomy between the value of verisimilitude and individual experience.

While the epistolary novels such as those of Richardson were certainly popular in the late eighteenth century, the genre did not sustain itself through the beginning of the Romantic period. The free-indirect discourse of Jane Austen's novel seemed to illuminate many of the issues that occur within Richardson's novels, such as Pamela's writing to the moment, the disbelief of a character writing the action of the novel as it occurs. While many of the values of Richardson's novels are sustained through the Romantic age, such as the adherence to the truth of individual

experience, the authors found more economical and less clumsy ways to present them; until Mary Shelley published her most known work, *Frankenstein*, when she was sixteen in 1818. The novel is regarded as one of the most important works of the Romantic Era, yet it reverts back to the form of the epistolary novel, a form whose issues Romanticism had seemingly resolved. The novel presents a broken use of the epistolary form, which only appears in the beginning and end of the story, although the entire narrative occurs within the context of the letters of Robert Walton to his sister, as he travels to the arctic where he finds Dr. Frankenstein amid the ice. While most of the narrative can be divided between the voices of Dr. Frankenstein and the monster, the entirety of the story is encapsulated in Walton's letters. The novel forces the reader to ask, which voice are we hearing? Which voice dominates the text, or is there in fact no difference between the voices, instead all encapsulating one singular consciousness? This confluence of voices in the texts leads one to a larger question about the overall purpose of the novel as a form, its mechanism to portray empirical realism and the process through which it encapsulates interiority, truth to individual experience, which in *Frankenstein* becomes the fracture between three distinct voices, struggling for dominance in the text. *Frankenstein* provides an important endpoint for the development of the epistolary novel, one which questions the novel's position in literature, and challenges the preconceived notions about the genre's appeal to empiricism and truth to individual experience, which the novel ultimately suggests always exist in conflict. While Shelly uses the genre of the epistolary novel to expose this dynamic, it is not the only purpose the generic construction of the letters serves. Shelley uses the epistolary form and other genres such as Adventure narratives and their conversion to create a deeper interiority for her character and expose the construction of the domestic sphere in the

eighteenth century novel, and the anxiety towards the domestic inherent in Romantic masculinity.

The Early History of the Novel

Mikhail Bakhtin wrote extensively on the novel and its development. In his essay “Epic and Novel” Bakhtin contrasts the novel with the poetic form of epic, praising the novel as able to achieve certain things an epic poem could never attempt because of its generic limitations. He sees the genre of Epic to be stagnant as the genre of the novel is ever-developing and changing along with the social realm: “the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” (3). Another contrasting element that exists between the two is the concept of distance. The epic poem that an “absolute distance” exist between the story and the reader. The Novel exists in a temporal plane recognizable to the reader, the characters are recognizable to the reader because they exist in the same space and time, unlike the heroes of Epic poetry who are so removed from a reader, it is almost impossible to connect with them because of the distance separating the work and the reader, a distance that is immutable and impenetrable. The epic poem continuously removes the reader from an active engagement and connection with the text, an engagement central to the function of the novel. The mutability and unfinished-ness of the novel allows it to connect with a modern reader: “No matter how distant this object is from us in time, it is connected to our incomplete, present-day, continuing temporal transitions, it developing a relationship with our unpreparedness, with our present. But meanwhile our present has been moved into an inconclusive future. And in this inconclusive context all the semantic stability of the object is lost; its sense and significance are renewed and grow as the context continues to unfold” (30). The novel for Bakhtin is the only genre that connects with a modern reader, in the age of mechanical reproduction. By being unfinished, a product that does not

present itself as a single cohesive voice, the novel allows an endless amount of “contexts to unfold” through its engagement of multi-vocalic narratives and characters. The multitude of voices of the novel is a very important development for Bakhtin in how the novel came to be the most treasured genre of the modern reader. As social categories begun to break down, and the middle class became a prominent fixture of society, they were in fact granted audible social voices. The armies and legions of the voiceless declined and with that, the social conversation expanded, adding more voices shouting out their positions and their ideologies. The novel is the eventual fictionalization of this dynamic.

Perhaps one of the most important studies of the early English novel occurs in Ian Watt’s book *The Rise of the Novel*. First published in 1957, it remains an important cornerstone in critical discussions of the development of the novel. Watt’s theory begins with Descartes’ declaration for individual experience “Cogito ergo sum”, which according to Watt, this statement would direct the next generation of philosophers and writers towards a greater emphasis on individualization as the driving factor towards truth and experience. This type of emphasis on individual experience can very clearly be seen in the works of Locke, who claimed experience as the beginning point of consciousness. For Watt, this type of philosophical discussion and emphasis on the individual experience is clearly mirrored by the development of the early novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding: “The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovation reorientation” (13). This focus on the individual is a stark departure from previous literary forms. Just as Bakhtin points to a difference between the distance of the epic poem as compared to the proximity of the novel, Watt illuminates the different approach of the novel to move towards a discussion of truth: “Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the

major test of truth... this literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience” (13). The emphasis on individual experiences, and departure from previous tradition and formulaic concerns, is mostly easily identified as beginning in the Renaissance, whose progression can be said to ultimately accommodate the rise of the novel: “But at the same time, from the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel” (14).

Watt coins this adherence to individual experience as “Formal realism”. Differing from the realism that would arise during the nineteenth century, Watt claims “the formal realism” of the eighteenth century does not gain its realism from content, but rather from the presentation: “The novel’s realism does not present in the kind of life it presents but in the way it presents itself” (12). The presentation of life in the eighteenth century focuses on the documentation of empirical experience of characters and their environments. While the environments of previous prose fiction or drama were unconcerned with the backdrop of the story beyond providing allegorical or historical significance, the environment of the novel, and the detail through which it is described and catalogued provide a more profound study of characters through the lens of “Formal Realism”: “The novel is surely distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentations of their environment” (17-18). According to Watt, the emphasis on exhaustive detail through which the novel achieves its effect, also alters the function of language within the novel. According to Watt: “The previous stylistic tradition for fiction was not primarily concerned with the correspondence of words to things, but rather with

the extrinsic beauties which could be bestowed upon description and action by the use of rhetoric” (28). Therefore, language becomes much more connected and concerned with the environment it is describing. Language no longer functions poetically in the novel for Watt, but is always “corresponding” to the experience and individual who is using it. Watt goes on to state that language in the novel performs a more “referential” function than in other literary forms, that the novel works through “Exhaustive presentations” instead of “elegant concentrations”. While the novel certainly has generic concerns, they certainly pale in comparison with previous forms of literature. When compared with the realm of previous poetry and drama, the novel falls glaringly short in formulaic attributes. To Watt, this is directly connected to the need of “realism” in the novel, and corresponds to the increased value placed on originality in the modern era, which would certainly make the adherence to “traditional conventions” of previous literary forms something that would be devalued by the modern reader. The novel functions on its apparent formlessness because as Watt states: “The poverty of the novel’s formal conventions would seem to be the price is must pay for its realism” (13).

Michael McKeon’s book *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*, traces the social changes that allowed for the novel to come to such prominence over the one hundred and forty years which he surveys. According to McKeon, the most important factor in the rise of the novel is the breaking down of social distinctions and classes. McKeon refers to these previous social distinctions as aristocratic ideology, which in its simplest incarnation, simply can be referred to as “birth equals worth”, yet, this term comes with a long history. Aristocratic ideology refers to many social and economic traditions which favored aristocratic birth as the singular factor in determining a person’s social worth. This ideology informed every aspect of daily life for the people of England. Being born outside of the aristocratic sphere meant that a member of the

lower class would have little opportunity to rise above the social rank into which they were born. This emphasis on social rank informed much of the political landscape of England, with aristocrats owning large portions of land, often renting smaller parts of it to people of non-aristocratic birth (131). This class system functioned largely unchallenged until the English Civil War and established the Commonwealth led by Oliver Cromwell. Seeing the beheading of their king, Charles I had a large impact on the direction of English society, and showed the first cracks in the foundation of the aristocratic social structure of England (150-154). As aristocratic Ideology started to come apart at the seams and social distinctions began to lose their value, a new mode of knowledge had to replace the previous dominion of aristocratic ideology. McKeon refers to this new mode of thinking as progressive ideology, which attempted to esteem certain attributes in the lower class, and use those attributes as way to ascend the social ranks. McKeon points to the increased importance of virtue and chastity in this period, along with the increased focus on truth and verisimilitude as a direct result of the breakdown of the social distinctions and the rise of progressive ideology (266-268).

How does this apply to the novel? For McKeon the two are directly related. As a result of the breaking down of the social distinctions of the time, McKeon argues that the novel arose from the fracture, the voiceless were now given voices, the worthless given value. Through this new claimed value, the novel arose, highlighting characters often of a lower class, or characters in non-esteemed positions and placing them in realistic scenarios, that this new valued class of people could connect with. McKeon states that before the rise of progressive ideology, the preferred literary genre was the romance, a story that is often removed from social conventions, removed from the reader's temporality in both time and space (26-28). The romance is challenged by what McKeon refers to as naïve empiricism, which is the attempt to project

verisimilitude or truth through prolonged and detailed descriptions of the world of the narrative (47-52). This type of description can be seen in a novel like *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe in which all of the aspects of Crusoe's life are described in painstaking detail through the journal he keeps of his activities throughout the day. This detail is meant to proclaim verisimilitude through its description; by painstakingly cataloguing every small detail of the environment and the characters, the author attempts to display and claim their fiction as truth. McKeon traces this truth claim back into the history of the seventeenth century, showing how the breakdown of social distinctions caused by the long period of political unrest within England, which ended with the Glorious Revolution, the installing of William and Mary on the throne and the increased power of Parliament, an event which devalued aristocratic ideology and brought value to progressive ideology is directly responsible for the rise of the English novel in the following century and its increase in popularity to a modern reader.

As individualization of the modern era begins to take root within the work of enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes and Locke, and the emphasis on individual experience is given paramount importance in comparison with adherence to formulaic tradition, the novel arises to produce a piece of literature that reflects the age in which it develops. The importance of recognizable characters in recognizable places becomes the newest literary tradition. The novel rejects the formulaic and generic traditions of the literature that came before it in order to situate the reader in an environment that is familiar and truthful in its function and its descriptions.

While McKeon and Watt's work dominates theories regarding the rise of the novel in eighteenth century England, Srinivas Aravamudan, in his book, *Enlightenment Orientalism; Resisting the Rise of the Novel*, attempts to resist the narrative of novelistic dominance

established by previous critics, and instead attempts to quantify the novel alongside the immense popularity of Oriental tales amongst the readership of eighteenth century England. While other theories about the rise of the novel in eighteenth century Britain certainly are aware of the other kinds of genres of fiction being written, the genres that Aravamudan focuses on, most theories do not give any real consideration to these works beyond their acknowledgement, rather creating a narrative where the novel emerges through its own sheer merit and force: “Novels did not arise organically by a crypto-Darwinian ecology of agentless modernity...rather, novels were actively promoted into prominence over other fictions that were scapegoated” (25). Instead, as with the novel, Aravamudan argues that these genres operated under an Enlightenment “understanding of distance, transmission, and absence as operational between the poles of communication, whether between individuals, objects of analysis or knowledge systems” (4). For Aravamudan, this type of connection to Enlightenment philosophy distinguishes “enlightenment Orientalism” from the more standardized and institutionalized Orientalism of the nineteenth century, connected to Edward Said. The “enlightenment Orientalism” that Aravamudan discusses is actually a genuine attempt to understand other cultures, to analyze the operational apparatus of absence.

Aravamudan insists “that genres are to be understood not just as containers for information but rather as apparatuses of meditation that traverse social distance, enable culture transmission, and make absence productive of new forms and new media” (4). The fact that genres such as oriental tales, or travel narratives, examine non-domestic spaces and foreign cultures, it is clear that they would always exist in direct opposition to the early English novel that examined localized domestic spaces.

According to the Aravamudan, in light of the rise of the domestic and local novel, the questions regarding genre, became moralized: “these fictions opposed the domestic yoke brought

by novel practitioners, whose eventually triumph as the translations and fabulist forms and oriental tales were downgraded as morally unacceptable” (4). The moralization around genres of prose fiction, corresponds with much larger discussions of morality throughout the eighteenth century, especially in relation to the imagination. Aravamudan states that as the “status of the imagination rose throughout the eighteenth century, it began to be carefully controlled” (23). This attempt to control the imagination by people such as Samuel Johnston, is directly connected to the act of reading, and therefore if the imagination is to be corralled by certain moral principles, then the genres of prose fiction must be carefully chosen to lead enlightened individuals to a responsible type of imagination.

The opposition against “enlightenment orientalism” is further established through the novels focus on domesticity and nationalism. The relationship between the two genres becomes one of opposition, the novel working against the oriental tale, and the oriental tale attempting to undo the novel. Aravamudan insists: “The early phases of the novel successfully invert this relationship, embracing history and the local and then drawing boundaries around the national to expel the foreign and transcultural” (6). The creation of the contrarian relationship between the domestic novel and oriental tale further cemented the qualities of the domestic and the English novel and the thematic superiority of it over other types of romance and prose fiction. Yet, as Aravamudan points out, even as the novel became the esteemed genre of the eighteenth century, Oriental tales still closely resembled the domestic genre, even as these distinctions were being made: “Novelistic culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off as domestic authenticity against Enlightenment Orientalism, and against other forms of romance and prose fictions that served as surrogates and even underground generic cousins” (8). Aravamudan points out that novels such as *Tristram Shandy* were using qualities that were popularized in the

“Arabian Nights”, yet in a local and domestic setting, in effect bleaching the oriental works of their foreignness. This type of connection between the two genres goes against the typical narrative of the novel, which according to Aravamudan, becomes the “timid inventor of its own specialness, discovering and also concealing fiction all at once” (19). Instead the novel came about in a moment of flux, where many different kinds of genres were circulated for the first time in English, and according to Aravamudan was chosen because of the principles and culture it examined.

The assertion that the novel arose in opposition to the Oriental narratives that Aravamudan discusses only further cements the importance of the domestic locale to the rise of the novel. The fact that novels that did not highlight the sphere of the home were so marginalized in the history of the novel only shows how intertwined the novel was to representation of domesticity. The epistolary novels of Richardson and the letter in a more general sense become imbued with the rhetoric of domesticity, and femininity.

The Failure of Empiricism and the Rise of Interiority

In the book, *Lyric Generations*, Gabrielle Starr examines the early English novel by incorporating the idea of generic distortion that is proposed by McKeon to discuss the novel in association with the lyric. Starr begins her argument by stating that by the early eighteenth century poetry began to move away from the mode of the lyric because: “Any mode that tended to focus on individual experience in isolation would encounter resistance. Accordingly, lyric gave way to the verse epistle as the dominant form of Augustan poetry” (8). The movements away from the lyric and towards the form of the epistle can be seen in the works of Alexander Pope, most clearly perhaps in his “Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot”, and Jonathan Swift’s “Stella” poems. These poems work within specific socialized relationships established between the

authors and real individuals. "The Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" is said to be written after Pope discovered that his friend, John Arbuthnot was dying. The poem is one of Pope's most unique because of how much it differs from the rest of poetical output. The poem continues to use the heroic couplets that Pope was known for, but the poem differs vastly in content from his other poems. Unlike his other work, the poem begins within Pope's own space:

Shut, shut the door, good John! fatigu'd, I said
Tie up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead (1-2)

The poem begins in an environment that could be said to be similar to the domestic and intimate space of the novel. While the poem comes to be about Pope's own place in the literary society of England, his unpopularity, and the fact he was often attacked by many of his contemporaries (Lady Mary Wortley Montagu perhaps being the most infamous and consistent of his detractors and vice versa), the poem begins in a space of mutual communication between friends. The poem is allowed to explore Pope own social standing, because it begins within the structure of correspondence:

Friend to my life! (which did not you prolong,
The world had wanted many an idle song)
What drop or nostrum can this plague remove?
Or which must end me, a fool's wrath or love?
A dire dilemma! either way I'm sped,
If foes, they write, if friends, they read me dead.
Seiz'd and tied down to judge, how wretched I! (27-33)

This trend in poetry to move into more domestic scenarios and spheres that function within a mutual social conversation is a trend that, according to Starr, greatly influenced the novel, especially the epistolary variety: If the epistle...takes over from the lyrics as the dominant Augustan poetic mode, it is, if not dominant in, fundamental to the emerging novel; this is not a coincidence of literary history, for it is largely in the epistolary novel that we find important connection with the lyric...The matter most important to writing becomes response and

interpretation, not action or event, and the letter writer's perception of and response to the world around her occupy both the scene of writing and its substance" (11). When Pope writes his epistle, the poem is not about his soon to be deceased friend, but becomes about the reaction to that news. The poem is more concerned about Pope's position and reaction than it is interested in the health of Arbuthnot. For Starr, this kind of reactionary writing, is what is thoroughly engaged in the texts of early English novels, especially the works of Richardson, which become all about Pamela's reactions to the events occurring around her: "Novels open up a range of emotions to serious literary treatment and redefine literary intimacy in accord with their own principles of representations... Intimacy becomes redefined in part by domesticity and domestic encounters, and literary encounters (between and among readers, poets, and narrators or characters) are shaped anew" (7). Similarly to how his epistle allows Pope to explore his own social position, something which might have been met with resistance if done within the form of the lyric, the novel allows new terms for representations, new emotions for thorough explorations, and new spaces and environments to provide important backdrops to characters engaging in social correspondence. Starr also illuminates the similarity in which the two genres were discussed in the period: "The movement between poetry and prose was enhanced by critical strains that reveal concerns shared by both forms. Verisimilitude, a term usually associated with the development of the novel, is also key in eighteenth century criticism of poetry" (9). These two genres rely on converging critical discussions only further establishes the connection between the poetry of the early eighteenth century and the rise of the English novel around the same time. The two genres influence each other, each engaging in new experiments with form which focused on two principles, firstly, the empirical truth of experience, and secondly, the development and creation of interiority justified and established within social correspondence.

Since these two genres seem to converge within the critical dialogue of the early eighteenth century, it is also interesting that they run into similar formulaic issues. Pope's "Epistle" while using its form to create an imagined correspondence between Pope and his friend John Arbuthnot, the poem still uses the mock heroic form of Pope's other works, which seems to conflict with the dialogic nature of the poem. While the poem presents itself as an intimate discussion between friends, the form of the heroic couplet interferes with the reader believing in the earnestness of that communication. Pope, while trying to create the impression of domestic intimacy that Starr refers to, still used the form he was perhaps most comfortable with, which interferes with the sentiment and the impression he attempts to create through the epistle since the heroic couplet was often used in Pope's longer satirical poems. The poetry of the eighteenth century, up until Wordsworth, Coleridge and the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, would spend its time trying to create a poetics that would combat this formal obstacle to create a poetics accessible to everyday speech and social relations.

The early English novel ran up against similar formulaic concerns, especially in the epistolary novel. Richardson's novel *Pamela* attempt to recreate the two most important concepts of the early novel, which have been discussed in this paper; interiority and empiricism. The interiority of the novel is created through the use of the epistolary form, and how it is used in the way Starr suggested, to create an intimacy of character. The empiricism of the novel is also similarly created through the form of the novel. Richardson upon the publication of the novel referred to himself as an anonymous editor. The purpose of this desire to not claim authorship of the letters clearly harkens back to the idea of naive empiricism. Richardson claims these letters act as social artifacts instead of social creations to establish their engagement, both in truthful social correspondences and their adherence to the critical strain of verisimilitude. The

importance of verisimilitude is made very clear in the original introduction to *Pamela*: “A narrative which has its foundation in TRUTH and NATURE; and at the same time that agreeably entertains, by a Variety of curious and affective INCIDENTS, entirely divested of all those images, which, in too many Pieces calculated for Amusement only, tend to inflame the Minds they should instruct” (1). The emphasis on truth and nature is apparent from the very beginning, but perhaps the most important aspect of this quote, comes in the final few words, where Richardson discusses inflaming of minds instead of the instruction of minds. In fact, this type of sentiment can be seen in many writings of the era, which present an apprehension towards the reading of novels, especially by women, because of the fear that they would not be able to separate the narrative from truth. Richardson claims the main purpose of his novel is to instruct, but also makes his reader aware of the danger of the type of prose fiction he is writing. Richardson and the novel seem unable to decide whether it wants to claim itself to be the story grounded in truth, or a story crafted for its didacticism. Henry Fielding questioned this type of reasoning in his satirical novels *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, where he illuminates the hypocrisy of Richardson. This inability on how to label the text continues with Richardson introduction, when further on he states:

The editor of these letters...ventures to assert, that all these desirable Ends are obtained in these sheets: And as he is therefore confident of the favorable Reception which he boldly bespeaks for this little work: he thinks any further Preface or Apology for it, unnecessary: and the rather for two reasons, 1st. Because he can Appeal from his own passions (which have been uncommonly moved in perusing these engaging scenes) to the passions of Every one who read them with the least attention: And, in the next place, because an Editor may reasonable be supposed to judge with an Impartiality, which is rarely to be met with in an Author towards his own works. (3-4)

Richardson, by claiming to be editor instead of author of the work, shifts his position from the active creator of the novel to the passive editor, “perusing” instead of writing. Not only does this

continue the claim of the empirical truth of *Pamela*, but also allows Richardson to proclaim the importance of the didactic function of the text by removing the bias of authorship. By having the work appear as an editorial project of gathering instead of the active project of writing and creating, Richardson establishes the instruction of the novel in apparently true events, which becomes more easily applied in real world situations. The passivity of the position of editor allows Richardson to engage the empirical demands the early English novel demanded from its author in a simple and elegant form, which also allowed for the clear establishment of interiority of character and the relationships and correspondence those author engage in.

While the epistolary form did provide Richardson with a simple solution to the early problems of the novel, it creates several formal problems on its own. While, as Starr suggests, the novel becomes more about reaction to events than the events that drive the novel forwards, that is to say, more about reflection than action, there are moments in Richardson's novel, when in the writing of her letters Pamela attempts to write to the moment. One of the most interesting passages occurs about halfway into the novel, after Pamela has resisted the sexual attempts by her master Mr. B, and is sent back to live with her parents. During her carriage ride back to her parents, Pamela reads a letter written by Mr. B in which he apologizes for his behavior towards her. As Pamela reacts to the letter from Mr. B in her own letter to her parents, she realizes her own feelings for Mr. B: "This was a happiness I had no reason to expect. But to be sure, I must own to you, that I shall never be able to think of anybody in the World but him!_ Presumption, you will say; and so it is: But Love is not a Volunteer Thing:-- Love, did I say!—But, come, I hope not!—At least it is not, I hope, gone so far, as to make me very uneasy; for I know not how it came, nor when it begun; but creep, creep it has, like a Thief upon me; and before I knew what was the Matter, it look'd like love" (248). In this passage, Pamela's own feelings seem to arrive

within her writing. Is this the reaction to Pamela's feeling or the actual event of realization? If it's the latter, this seems to contradict the empirical nature of the earlier novel. The novel is no longer a narration told through letters, but a narration about the actual writing of letters Pamela engages in. The letters no longer function as vehicles of narrative, but become the narrative in and of themselves. The action of reading the novel is changed and Richardson runs up against the problems of the epistolary form. While this passage still achieves the interiority that Starr suggests, it is only achieved through the failure of the empirical form Richardson has explored. The epistolary novel's desire for the appearance of an empirical object leads to its own undoing when narrative always must become about the object of the writing and not the narrative which the objects construct. As it's easy to point to how Wordsworth and Coleridge seemingly solved or eased the problems presented in Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot", one could also say that these issues presented in Richardson, are most obviously solved in the works of Jane Austen. Her use of free-indirect discourse seems to remove the problems that Richardson's novel encounters, when they must write to the moment, and the recognition of a social and material recedes in importance, replaced with the importance of character response and interiority.

Frankenstein and Generic Convergence

If Jane Austen seems to correct the issues presented by Richardson's works, it might seem odd to move directly past Austen to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, but Shelley novel does something interesting in the way it engages the epistolary form established by Richardson. Published in 1818, the book was revised by Shelley in 1831, which will be the version this text uses for two reasons. First, this edition is further removed from the presence of Percy Shelley that shrouds the first text. The first edition certainly contains the specter of influence and it ultimately becomes difficult to clearly distinguish between Mary's and Percy's language. The

second reason comes as a result of this distance from the influence of Percy. The 1831 text contains more passages which directly speak to the goals of this essay, the confluence of genres, and the destabilization of the domestic novel. Removed from her marriage to Percy, Mary Shelley is able to provide a larger and more sustained critique of empiricism, romanticism and the domestic. The book starts as a series of letters written by an arctic explorer to his sister. After the explorer discovers a man lost in the arctic wasteland named Victor Frankenstein, he begins to relay Victor's story to his sister. Here the epistolary form of the novel is abandoned for the narrative of Victor. This abandonment of the epistolary form for the use of a traditional narrative told by Victor, acknowledges the fiction of the form, a fiction that was rejected by Richardson. As his novel attempted to proclaim itself as a found object of social interaction between real characters, Shelley's use of the form informs the reader of a fiction and fantasy inherent in her tale. The early use of the epistle does something similar to *Pamela* as it establishes the story within the realm of social correspondence, in its standard for communication, as a social conversation. When the epistles are dropped, or at least veiled (for the story still functions as a long letter, written by Walton to his sister, Margaret) through Victor's narrative, a certain element of realism is abandoned for the fantasy of Frankenstein's monster. The discarding of the epistolary form suggests Shelley knows that an epistle is not the greatest narrative framework for such a story of fantasy, since a letter suggests a social communication, yet the story in all its attempts to be portrayed as a narrative is still within the context of the letters from Walton to his sister. While the book could be defined as an epistolary novel, the text is more slippery than that distinction allows. While Walton claims to be writing to his sister, never do we hear the sister's response. In Richardson's novels, the characters engage in full conversations, the receiver of the first letter responding to the sender, and vice versa. Walton never receives a response from his

sister, and one could even argue that Walton never actually sends the letters, especially as he moves deeper into the arctic, and further away from civilization. So, even as the form suggests social communication, Walton moves further away from the social sphere into the sphere of the supernatural, he moves deeper into his own consciousness. The letters Walton writes to his sister quickly lose their functionality as letters and empirical objects, and begin to become his own development of consciousness. This becomes even more obvious when the epistolary form is abandoned.

After meeting Victor Frankenstein, Walton decides to relay his story in his letters to his sister. In his last letter to his sister, before beginning the narrative of Victor, Walton discusses the different reactions he and his sister will doubtlessly have when hearing the story: “I have resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what he has related during the day. If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes. This manuscript will doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure: but to me, who know him, and who hear it from his own lips, with what interest and sympathy shall I read it in some future day” (20). Walton in this passage seems to be revealing the limits of the epistolary form. Walton talks about how the fact that he knows the man whose tale is being told, and is in direct proximity to it being told allows him greater pleasure in its telling, and how if he continued writing letters, relating Victor’s narrative through his own language, the story would not afford the greatest pleasure. This acknowledgment of distance contrasts greatly with the way Richardson presented his novel. This distance is further brought to light toward the end of the novel. Walton’s admission also illustrates what happens to the consciousness when the mind becomes empirical, when it functions as an object. Walton claims the story will not serve the same purpose for his sister as did for him because of their engagement of it, the difference in the story’s transmission.

His sister will read it, the narrative and Victor become written, and the overall effect of the entire story is lessened. Walton, in the presence of the story, is able to feel and engage the full mass of its literary weight, the full aspect of Victor's story and consciousness.

After telling Victor's story, Walton continues writing letters, discussing the truth of Victor's tale: "His tale is connected, and told with an appearance of simplest truth: yet I won to you that the letters of Felix and Safie which he shewed me, and the apparition of the monster seen from our ship, brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his assertions, however earnest and connected" (217). The "appearance of simplest truth" with which Victor tells his story is questioned in this passage as not enough to bring recognition of his narrative as truth. Walton required other factors such as letters of the people mentioned in the story, as well as the sight of the monster. This moment questions the validity of the epistolary novel and storytelling in general as a place where one can easily determine truth.

As the novel questions the validity of the epistolary novel, and the single voice of the letter writer, it maneuvers into a space that is multi-voiced. As Mary A. Favret discusses in her book, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters*, the novel is never about a single voice and the individual that is created through the empiricism of Richardson's novels, but about the confluence of voices within the text, their dialogue and exchange: "The novel works to show the limits of that individuality and to replace the individual voice with a network of voices. In spite of its title, *Frankenstein* refuses to be solely Victor Frankenstein's story. The novel has a new task, which requires the combination and confusion of identity" (178). Moving away from the novels of the eighteenth century that spent their efforts in developing single characters in their own voices within clear and defined spaces, *Frankenstein's* voices are always shifting, always changing forms, always influencing the other through their

utterances. Therefore, as all of the stories and voices of *Frankenstein* influence and define the others, there is no clear protagonist or story line through the novel. As Favret states: “The monster’s story does not exclude the story of his maker, nor does Walton’s tale displace the other two. Rather, the voices intersect, which causes them to create new utterances” (188).

This type of discussion towards *Frankenstein* and the multitude of voices occurring within its pages clearly echoes the theories of Bakhtin in regards to the novel. This dialogic quality of the novel overlays the text with an infinite amount of meanings, pressures and contexts:

Concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already ...overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped . . . by the ‘light’ of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (276)

The word, language and for Bakhtin, the novel exists in this realm of “complex interrelationships”, never fully concrete, disputed and revered at the same moment. The letters of Walton, and the narrative of Victor and the monster create this interplay of utterances, and creates new spaces, new voices, and new meanings. With three different narrators and three distinct storylines, there is a lot space between the novel’s principal narrators, and as Favret points out, this creation of space is where the true power of the novel lies: “The power of the novel rides in between-ness, in the spaces that open up between speakers, as between mountain peaks; in the crack that appear between statements...in the seams that emerge between stories” (195). The emergence of these spaces between characters and stories further opens the novel to new contexts, and new interpretations.

Frankenstein's use of generic constructions throughout the novel further confuse the work's various storylines. The epistolary novel becomes integrated into the travel narrative of Walton, and the arctic adventure of Victor and the monster chasing each other across the ice. The traditions of these genres do not seem to fit together, and were previously used in very different ways, yet Shelley begins *Frankenstein* by incorporating all three into a single narrative. As Favret asserts, the epistolary form was associated with domesticity and the feminine: "Critical discourse has written for us a fiction of letters, a fiction which gives the letter the figure of woman" (19). The adventure and travel narrative of Walton certainly contrasts with the domestic feel of the epistolary form, as they often presented masculinity within nature or the unfamiliar. Walton certainly appears to be the classic archetype for the kind of character one would see within a travel or adventure narrative as he states: "My life might have been passed in ease and luxury; but I preferred glory to every enticement of wealth placed in my path" (5). Walton is presented as having no desire for the household leisure his wealth has afforded him, instead pursuing the adventure of his journey to the arctic, but Shelley certainly undermines that notion by placing Walton within a genre that is so absolutely connected to the domestic. While Walton attempts to escape the familial nature of the home by citing glory as his chief concern, his connection to his sister still dominates the early narrative of the novel. Walton attempts to escape from his domestic responsibilities, but remains tied to them even as he travels half way across the earth to escape them.

Shelley does something very similar with the character of Victor, as his character provides a mirror for Walton. Victor also left the domestic bliss of his early childhood and wealth in order to pursue some type of masculine immortality. Victor's decision to create the monster is an attempt to remove himself from the household dynamic of his early childhood. By

creating the monster, Victor will achieve the glory often sought by the protagonists of adventure novels and thus Walton. Yet Victor's ultimate decision to create the monster places him back into the familial position of the father. Therefore Victor's initial disgust with the monster is not completely related to the grotesqueness of his form, but by the realization that by achieving the ultimate glory of reanimating matter, he has been placed back into the domestic situation that he refuses to partake in at any point throughout the novel.

Victor's narrative always is teetering on the edge of becoming a novel of domesticity that is only averted through Victor's own actions to constantly thwart the domestic narrative from taking place. The refusal to partake in the domestic novel begins when Victor first goes off to school. Victor's refusal to write letters to his father and his cousin Elizabeth illuminates his inability to participate in the domestic function of the epistle. Victor's lack of communication, especially in the form of letters, shows his reluctance to engage his family because to participate in that communication is to participate in the domestic sphere. This anxiety towards familial obligations becomes even more pronounced as Victor first "infuse(s) that spark of being into the lifeless thing". Upon first viewing the monster, Victor begins to describe its features: 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" (50). It is hard to take Victor's description of the monster seriously, as if he only realized that the monster he had been constructing from parts he collected while grave robbing is ugly. The monster is Victor's creation, but at the moment Victor sees it come to life, Victor slowly begins to remove himself

from the monster. He cannot stand to look at the creature, though he has been looking at some form of it for two years. This leads one to question whether Victor truly cannot look at the monster, or if he cannot handle the responsibility of fatherhood once his creation is brought to life. While other people react to the monster in the same way Victor does, it is unfair to compare their experiences to his. Victor's work on the monster contained two years, and for him to be surprised at the grotesqueness his creation is unrealistic.

After he describes the monster, Victor leaves the room and quickly falls asleep due to exhaustion. During his sleep, Victor dreams of Elizabeth. It is telling that after creating the monster, and therefore a son who he must be a father to, Victor subsequently dreams about the woman he is most expected to marry, the woman who will drag him into the domestic: "I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel" (51). Victor's dream gives insight into the anxieties behind the creation of the monster. Victor's real motivation behind the creation of the monster is to break out of the normative domesticity that he is expected to engage in with Elizabeth. There are a few reasons that could be behind this desire. Perhaps the reading of Victor's anxiety that is most informed by his dream is the inherent risk within childbirth. Since Mary Wollstonecraft died giving birth to Mary Shelley, this reading is certainly possible. Within his dream, Victor watches Elizabeth die in his arms, as she slowly begins to resemble his dead mother. This could point to the idea that while Victor may reject domesticity for his own gain, it could be because there is an inherent risk within the domestic for women. The anxiety for women within domesticity is further established

by Victor's mother's death in the beginning of the novel and Elizabeth's murder at the hands of the monster after her and Victor's marriage towards the end of the novel. The two women involved in domestic relations in Victor's life both die. Perhaps this is Shelley commenting on women's own precarious place within the home and society. Another view is that there is no place for domesticity within Victor's own narrative. This aversion to domestic relations causes Victor's utter abhorrence to the monster because Victor has created a son for himself to father, a familial obligation he has no interest in. Victor's disgust for the domestic is shown in his inability to engage in the writing of letters either to his father or his cousin Elizabeth. Upon receiving a letter from Elizabeth, Victor exclaims: "Dear, dear Elizabeth!" I exclaimed, when I had read her letter: "I will write instantly and relieve them from the anxiety they must feel." I wrote, and this exertion greatly fatigued me; but my convalescence had commenced, and proceeded regularly. In another fortnight I was able to leave my chamber" (61). While Victor's shows the letter of Elizabeth to Walton, he does not present a copy of the letter he supposedly wrote back to Elizabeth nor does he reiterate what he relayed within that letter. Instead, Victor can only relay how the writing exhausted him, and while he begins to recuperate from the illness he suffered after creating the monster, his inability to engage in the language of sentiment only further establishes his aversion to the world of the domestic. Victor becomes a similar character to that of Walton, unable to live in the domestic sphere, but also unable to fully incorporate themselves away from it. They return to it or engage in its formalities only for a brief time, for a period a rejuvenation or "convalescence", before quickly removing themselves from it and returning to the more masculine realm of adventure and homosocial relationships. While they do briefly return to domestic spaces and formalities, Favret correctly shows that these retreats into the domestic, especially through the act of letter writing, ultimately are failures: "The

conventional and familiar letter fails: “Victor never writes his family, Walton’s missive never ends and something monstrous escapes. The novel rips open the envelope of form, so to speak, and its letters give way to something illegitimate, without formal identity” (177). For Favret, the monster becomes the representation of this failure, the inability of the epistolary novel to contain the narrative of Victor and Walton: “The conventional epistolary novel could not contain the deformity figured in the monster, or in Walton’s fractured letters” (179). The appearance of the monster and his eventual tale cannot be contained by the epistolary novel, something associated with rationality, empiricism, and domesticity and demands a new form, a composite genre.

Victor is never able to sustain any prolonged engagement in the realm of the domestic, or time around Elizabeth or his father, without being filled with anxiety, and a desperate need to be alone in the Alps, or alongside his best friend, Clerval. Yet even during his brief escapes, Victor’s always is confronted by his inability to settle down in the realm of the family household. After William’s death, Victor travels on a walking retreat accompanied by Elizabeth. Victor eventually retreats into the alps, plagued by guilt over Justine’s and William’s death, yet it is also apparent that Victor becomes severely uncomfortable whenever near Elizabeth, the woman he is meant to marry, the women who could be the undoing of his masculine fantasy:

And could not such words from her whom I fondly prized before every other gift of fortune suffice to chase away the fiend that lurked in my heart? Even as she spoke I drew near to her, as if in terror, lest at that very moment the destroyer had been near to rob me of her. Thus not the tenderness of friendship, nor the beauty of earth, nor of heaven, could redeem my soul from woe; the very accents of love were ineffectual. I was encompassed by a cloud which no beneficial influence could penetrate. The wounded deer dragging its fainting limbs to some untrodden brake, there to gaze upon the arrow which had pierced it, and to die, was but a type of me” (89).

Victor’s relationship with Elizabeth is repeatedly inefficient in providing him with any type of solace or respite from his current situation. Elizabeth’s presence is a constant reminder of the

world Victor is attempting to run away from and undo through his experiments. Instead of remaining close to Elizabeth, as he expresses a desire to in the previous quote, Victor retreats into the Alps, away from Elizabeth, away from the domestic. Nature provides the respite from Victor's woe that Elizabeth was not able to:

The same lulling sounds acted as a lullaby to my too keen sensations; when I placed my head upon my pillow, sleep crept over me; I felt it as it came and blessed the giver of oblivion... These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling, and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquillized it. In some degree, also, they diverted my mind from the thoughts over which it had brooded for the last month... They congregated round me; the unstained snowy mountain-top, the glittering pinnacle, the pine woods, and ragged bare ravine, the eagle, soaring amidst the clouds—they all gathered round me and bade me be at peace. (91-92)

This passage obviously takes its voice from that of the romantic poet, and considering Shelley was in the company of Byron and Percy Shelley while writing *Frankenstein*, is it obvious some of their voices, especially that of Percy's, have made their way into the text. The romantic poet does provide a good mirror for Victor, as their retreat into nature could be said to work simultaneously as their retreat from domestic relations. Women and family seem ill-equipped to provide poets the solace they need, while nature in her sublimity, sustain the masculine quest for glory, timelessness, and savagery. Throughout the text, it becomes increasingly difficult to decipher the source of Victor's anxiety, whether it comes from his creation and the actions he has taken against Victor, or if they come from Victor's inability to partake in the heterosexual realm of the household. These two story lines, the revenge of Victor's monster, and Victor's imminent marriage to Elizabeth run throughout *Frankenstein*, and while Victor claims to love Elizabeth, his actions all seem to disrupt the prospect and future of their union. Favret concludes Victor's anxiety is caused by his inability to cope with any system of co-reliance: "In the mind of a man such as Frankenstein, however, intersection and interdependency constitute a threat. It is

the effort to escape into silence, to gain ascendancy and singularity” (192). This aversion to “interdependency” is why Victor’s retreat into the mountains is the only activity that can provide the solace he seeks. His relationship with Elizabeth and his father only deepen his grief, and only his retreat into the egotistical sublime of nature can soothe his woes.

Victor’s retreat into the mountains and his relationship to the domestic realm is further complicated when the monster approaches him during his excursion into the Alps. After the monster entreats Victor to show mercy and responsibility for his own creation, to partake in the familial position of father to the monster, Victor responds: “You reproach me with your creation, come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed”(95-96). When the monster demands Victor to occupy the responsibility of a father towards his son, Victor’s only reaction is to “extinguish” the connection he has to the monster, to remove the label of father all together. While Victor seemingly responds in anger towards the monster because of the murder of his little brother, William and the subsequent death of Justine, although this seems to be a death that Victor could have stopped or at least attempted to delay, the monster’s plea for familial responsibility is the first instance where Victor attempts to engage the monster physically. While the monster easily eludes him, the fact that Victor only responds in this manner after being reminded of his role as the father of the monster, further establishes Victor’s disgust of domesticity. By placing Victor’s confrontation with his creation after a romantic monologue about the ultimate healing power of nature, using Romanticism’s language and locating the event within the sublimity of nature, Mary Shelley highlights Victor’s inability to partake in the domestic realm, and shows his appeal to nature as being shattered by the Monster’s appeal to fatherly responsibility.

Victor's anxiety is only further displayed during his dealings with the monster. The monster requests that Victor creates a mate for him, and if Victor does this one task, he and his female counterpart will leave for South America. The monster uses the language of sentiment to discuss the importance of companionship to his existence: "You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do, and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede"(146). Victor tentatively assents to the agreement, and promises the monster to build him a female companion. After returning from the Alps, Victor becomes engaged to Elizabeth and leaves on a European tour accompanied by Clerval before his marriage. Clerval and Victor separate in Scotland so Victor can begin his work on a mate for the monster, yet he finds himself unable to continue building the creature. Victor's reasoning behind his decision not to create a female monster are again based around his fear and anxiety towards heterosexual domesticity. Before destroying the body of the female monster, Victor clarifies his reasoning to Walton: "Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (169-170). This reasoning seems to fall short for one sole reason. Victor as the builder and creator of the female monster could very easily leave out the reproductive organs of the creature and therefore make any propagation of children impossible. The true reason behind Victor's decision to destroy the female creature is his inability to accept his knowledge of restoring life to lifeless materials being as a tool to promote family relations and domesticity. While working on the creature's mate, Victor's comments on how his second experiment brought to light the utter grotesqueness of his work, but one could say that the aspect

of his work that truly disgusts him is how his earlier experiment to remove the need for reproductive relationships between men and women is now being used to create one. While Victor throughout the text attempts to escape the relationships that provide the source of his anxiety and his experiments, he is ultimately unable to escape the domestic realm, as his narrative is trapped in between Walton's letters to his sister. Victor becomes the exchange of family correspondence, a character in the epistolary novel he is unable to engage in.

The only sustained look into the domestic sphere, occurs during the monster's storyline, as he relays his time spent in the hovel, outside of the cottage of Felix and Agatha, yet even this examination of familial relations presents a convergence of genres, and an inability to sustain its domestic narrative. The monster's description of the family contains all of the hallmarks used to describe the domestic family unit: "He raised her and smiled with such kindness and affection that 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" (105). Unlike Victor's inability to perform his role in the family unit, the cottagers appear to be the perfect family, with each character performing their roles within the depiction of domesticity peered by the monster from his hovel. The exchange of these relations is described by the monster in a peculiar manner: "They performed towards him every little office of affection and duty with gentleness, and he rewarded them by his benevolent smiles" (108). First, the acts of affections are performed, as each character is fulfilling a clear role in the family unit; Felix chops wood, Agatha tends the garden, and the blind father plays his instrument and is taken care of by his children. The blind father still sits at the head of the household, rewarding his children for their participation in domesticity with "benevolent smiles". The "affection" of Felix and Agatha become part of their

“duty”. While the sphere of the household is shown functioning in the manner that Victor refuses to allow, Shelley still exposes the scaffolding that sustains these relations.

The sentimental picture of the cottage is soon disturbed by the arrival of Safie. At this point, another convergence of genre takes place, where a tale is told very similar to the tales described by Aravamudan as “enlightenment orientalism”. Safie’s arrival to the cottage is described by the monster: “She appeared affected by different feelings; wiping a few tears from her lovely eyes, she held out her hand to Felix, who kissed it rapturously and called her, as well as I could distinguish, his sweet Arabian. She did not appear to understand him, but smiled. He assisted her to dismount, and dismissing her guide, conducted her into the cottage” (116). Safie is referred to throughout much of the text as the Arabian, yet she has certain qualities that push against such a simple distinction. While Safie’s father is referred to as a Turk, and therefore a Muslim, her mother was a Christian, an affiliation that was passed on to Safie. Safie’s presence becomes about the exchange of cultures, and how through this relationship between the two, a greater understanding becomes available: “While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty, of rank, descent, and noble blood” (119). This type of interchange between different cultures certainly enforces Aravamudan’s theory regarding the early novel, yet *Frankenstein* seems to be using this intrusion by the foreign adventure into the sphere of sentimental fiction to show a threat to the spaces that domestic novels create.

The story behind the courtship of Felix and Safie feels like an adventure tale taken from *Arabian Nights*. Felix, upon finding a Turk falsely imprisoned in Paris, decides to help free the man from his captivity. The man, unable to find any ample reward, finds that Felix is enamored

with his daughter: "The Turk quickly perceived the impression that his daughter had made on the heart of Felix and endeavored to secure him more entirely in his interests by the promise of her hand in marriage so soon as he should be conveyed to a place of safety. Felix was too delicate to accept this offer, yet he looked forward to the probability of the event as to the consummation of his happiness" (122). After the Turk escapes, Felix's is imprisoned along with his family, as the Turk attempts to return to his homeland with Safie, who eventually escapes her father and joins Felix and his family in Germany. The story of Felix and Safie could very easily be classified in the genre of an adventure narratives, and seems to disrupt the earlier depictions of domestic bliss. Again, Shelley uses genres to disrupt the domestic as Felix brings a foreign influence into the sphere of the home. Yet, this is even complicated further by the monster's mention of the letters between the two young lovers, making the use of generic elements threefold within the monster's description of the cottagers. Shelley does this to show the precariousness of the home, always vulnerable to outside influence, and Felix in a way becomes a mirror for characters like Walton and Victor, desiring the exotic Safie, destroying the domestic bliss his family had in France before their exile.

As the monster spends more time around the cottagers, he decides to present himself to them and gain their trust and acceptance. The monster first presents himself to the blind father, but is quickly discovered by the other inhabitants of the cottage, who are horrified and flee. After the cottagers decide to move away, the monster burns down the cottage. The burning down of the cottage is the ultimate destruction of the domestic bliss that is constantly thwarted by the intrusions of other genres throughout the novel: "The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues" (139). The description of the flames of the cottage is likened to "forked and destroying

tongues”. This metaphor harkens back to the exoticism of the story of Felix and Safie, and the whole idea of oriental fiction and the monster’s decision to burn down the house mirrors Victor’s inability to write his family and his reluctance to marry Elizabeth. The novel does not allow the domestic and sentimental genre to ever sustain itself. Whether it is derailed by other genre’s inserting themselves, or a character’s inability to engage in the practices of domesticity, the domestic is always fraught with instability.

Frankenstein begins in an epistolary space it ultimately questions and invalidates. Shelley’s implementation of genre rejects the epistolary novel’s appeal to empiricism and its relationship to the development of character interiority, which is actually created through the breakdown of that relationship. Shelley uses the breakdown and convergence of genres within *Frankenstein* to provide interior spaces that are more actualized than those created in an epistolary novel. She places her characters and their quests for masculine achievement within genres that are feminized and domestic. The novel interrupts the narratives of Walton and Victor by destabilizing the adventure genre that each character is attempting to create through the use of the domesticated form of the letter, yet the feminine and domestic space provided by the letter is equally fraught with rapture. The letters of Walton, by the end of the novel, lose their epistolary features, reverting into a journal instead of a series of letters. Victor is unable to engage in the formalities of domesticity, and after he decides to marry Elizabeth, the woman that brought him into the domestic space is murdered by the monster he created to escape it. The monster becomes a force of destabilization throughout the novel. He is never validated through Walton’s letter or Victor’s story. His creation disrupts Victor’s quest for masculine glory through his experiments, he interrupts Victor’s entrance into the romantic sublime during his walk through the Alps, he

destroys the cottage and domestic bliss of the De Lanceys, and murders Elizabeth on her wedding night, the night she finally cemented Victor into a domestic relationship.

Frankenstein is a novel that fluctuates between genres and forms, between narrators, between the foreign and familiar, all to show the instability of the novel. For Shelley, the novel is not simply a domestic or an adventure novel, but a confluence of genres and voices. This is what makes *Frankenstein* so utterly impossible to label, it is all genres at once, all voices at once, its content is constantly contradicted by its form, and vice versa. Like the monster, the novel becomes the sum of its composite parts, its multiple genres and voices. The novel provides no certainties, and as readers, we are left gazing out at the monster leaping across the ice, longing for communication, longing for connection, yet simultaneously hoping for solitude, and singularity.

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