



## LIVING ON OR TEXTUAL AFTERLIFE: *FRANKENSTEIN AND PARADISE LOST*

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**RESUMO:** Propomo-nos a ler *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley como uma adaptação de *Paradise Lost*, de John Milton. Adaptação, na nossa leitura, se inicia na qualidade “palimpsestosa” ou lógica suplementar inerente a este processo de criação, como teorizado por Julie Sanders e Linda Hutcheon, e chega ao momento em que um texto (*Frankenstein*), em face do evento de outro texto (*Paradise Lost*), tenta responder ou produzir uma contra-assinatura (Jacques Derrida). Neste sentido, a adaptação não é nem imitação, nem reprodução, nem metalinguagem, mas um reconhecimento da fluidez dos textos ao longo do tempo (história, história literária) e espaço (culturas, diferentes posições do sujeito). Em última análise, a questão não é como um escritor ou um texto influencia outro, ou como podemos visualizar trajetórias textuais na tradição literária, mas a possibilidade de a adaptação se tornar uma resposta pontual, crítica, finita de um texto a outro, uma espécie de leitura como contra-assinatura (Derrida).

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Adaptação; contra-assinatura; Milton; Shelley.

**ABSTRACT:** We propose to read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as an adaptation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Adaptation, as we assess it, departs from the “palimpsestuous” quality of or supplementary logic inherent in this process of creation, as theorized by Julie Sanders and Linda Hutcheon, and reaches the moment when a text (*Frankenstein*), in the face of the event of another's text (*Paradise Lost*), tries to respond or to countersign it (Jacques Derrida). In this sense, adaptation is neither imitation, nor reproduction, nor metalanguage, but an acknowledgment of the fluidity of texts over time (history, literary history), and space (cultures, different subject positions). Ultimately the question is not how one writer or text influences another or how we can visualize textual trajectories in literary tradition, but the extent to which adaptation becomes a pointed, critical, finite response of one text to another, a kind of reading as countersignature (Derrida).

**KEYWORDS:** Adaptation; countersignature; Milton; Shelley.

In reference to Jean Genet and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Jacques Derrida affirms that “Playing with proximities and contradictions, one can say that they are close in what opposes them and in what connects them”<sup>1</sup>. This very dynamic between proximities and contradictions is what makes the two-handed engine of countersignature work:

that is, of authentication and repetition without imitation, without counterfeiting, a doubling of the “yes” in the irreplaceable idiom of each “yes”, as at a wedding where each “yes” says “yes” to the other, doubling it without repeating it—and I could insist on this paradigm of the wedding, the conjugal couple, spousal conjugality, countersignature joining two conjoined affirmations, absolutely identical and different, similar and radically other.<sup>2</sup>

Departing from Derrida’s view of countersignature, we propose to read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an adaptation of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Adaptation, in our reading, starts in the “palimpsestuous” quality of or supplementary logic inherent in this process of creation, as theorized by Julie Sanders<sup>3</sup> and Linda Hutcheon<sup>4</sup>, and reaches the moment when a text (*Frankenstein*), in the face of the event of another’s text (*Paradise Lost*), tries to respond or to countersign it. In this sense, adaptation is neither imitation, nor reproduction, nor metalanguage, but an acknowledgement

of the fluidity of texts and of the afterlives they take upon themselves as they live on.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately the question is not how one writer or text influences another or how we can visualize textual trajectories in literary tradition, but the extent to which adaptation becomes a pointed, critical, finite response of one text to another, a kind of reading as countersignature. The challenge of this essay is not only to acknowledge the validity of *Frankenstein* as a fluid text but also to study its mode of deviation: proximities and contradictions are enhanced by return trips, counter paths, wanderings. From the epigraph citing Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to the scene where the Creature makes it known that he reads Milton’s epic as true history, *Frankenstein* makes apparent that it is a derivation without being derivative<sup>6</sup> and that it is a “revisionary” adaptation<sup>7</sup>. From the Creature’s reading of Milton’s major work, in order to comprehend his condition in relation to his creator, to the plethora of analogies that can be drawn between the characters of the epic poem and the characters of the novel (Frankenstein as Adam and Eve, Frankenstein as God, Frankenstein as Satan, the Creature as Adam and Eve, the Creature as Satan), Shelley’s proximities with and contradictions to the epic are highlighted. Regarding theme, *Frankenstein* drives its point home very clearly: it is not a mere product of a linear evolution/deviation of the media, from epic to novel, or, say, from script to print to screen, but

1. DERRIDA. *Countersignature*, p. 24-25.

2. DERRIDA. *Countersignature*, p. 26.

3. SANDERS. *Adaptation and Appropriation: The New Critical Idiom*, 2005.

4. HUTCHEON. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2006.

5. In relation to other major contributions to adaptation studies, besides the seminal studies by Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders, see Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins’ *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*: “Adaptation studies ought to focus on the space of disjunction between texts and media to ask what that space, that necessary difference, enables. One is reminded of Derrida’s concept of the ‘aporia’ of texts. [...] If ‘understanding’ a text always implies that some part of it remains ineffable, then adaptations, rather than ‘adapting,’ in the simple sense, a prior text, actually create a new text with its own manifold relationships to source text(s).” (2010, p. 20). Minor contributions – because still entangled in the bushes of “fidelity” to the author, to film theory, and to the “impure” gendered screen/text – come from Deborah Cartmell, Timothy Corrigan, and Imelda Whelehan.

6. HUTCHEON. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2006.

7. DERRIDA. *Countersignature*, p. 26.

it stresses the incommensurability of a Paradise Within being rewritten as a Hell Within, among other thematic detours.

*Frankenstein* is one of the few novels valued by both literary critics and the general public. With regard to the good reception from both sides of the “readerly” divide, academic and general public, Paul Cantor’s reason “is that the understanding of creativity embodied in *Frankenstein* is close to the common-sense understanding: while creativity can be exhilarating, it can also be dangerous, and passes over easily into destructiveness”<sup>8</sup>. As long as the general reception of Shelley’s novel is concerned, in his introduction to a collection of essays on *Frankenstein*, Harold Bloom affirms:

... what makes *Frankenstein* an important book, though it is only a strong, flawed novel with frequent clumsiness in its narrative and characterization, is that it contains one of the most vivid versions we have of the Romantic mythology of the self, one that resembles Blake’s *Book of Urizen*, Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, and Byron’s *Manfred*, among other works. Because it lacks the sophistication and imaginative complexity of such works, *Frankenstein* affords a unique introduction to the archetypal world of the Romantics<sup>9</sup>

Mary Shelley’s clear narrative combined with many Romantic characteristics, such as the admiration for a rebellious figure, the allusions to mythology, and the idea that

imagination exceeds literary traditions, made *Frankenstein* one of the most read Romantic works. In sum, we want to show that the good or strong adaptation, in the case of *Frankenstein*, marks itself as an adaptation, it does not dissolve into the pure idiom of the source. As such, the novel may be said to be an adaptation of the epic poem exactly because *Frankenstein* is unique and introduces readers to an archetypal world of the Romantics and simultaneously it is a something else (another text) which responds or corresponds in an equally singular, which is to say irreducible and irreplaceable, new way to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Bluntly said, *Frankenstein* is an outstanding Romantic response to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Not only does the novel allude to the lost paradise and its inhabitants, but it also sheds new light on, or says “yes, yes” to, the Miltonic characters and themes through a Romantic perspective. Regarding the proximities and contradictions of both *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost*, Lucy Newlyn defends that:

*Frankenstein* takes its place in the genre both as a typical product of the Gothic and as a self-conscious commentary on Romanticism. It adds the further ingredient of conscious and sustained Miltonic allusion, manipulated in such a way as to suggest a revisionary reading of *Paradise Lost* alongside a questioning of religion.<sup>10</sup>

8. CANTOR. *The Nightmare of Romantic Realism*, p. 109.

9. BLOOM. *Introduction*, p. 4.

10. NEWLYN. *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, p. 134.

Milton's epic is present in *Frankenstein* not simply in terms of direct quotation or (in)direct references, but also as a new, radical element conjoined in Shelley's story. There are many references to *Paradise Lost* and its themes and characters throughout the novel. The epigraph is the first and functions as a bridge linking these two works: the novel doubles the epic without repeating it. In terms of doubling, it is possible to draw a variety of analogies between Milton's and Shelley's characters or concentrate on the creature reading the epic as true history.

Not being able or willing to make too long a detour, we must state from the beginning that *Paradise Lost* is not the only text Mary Shelley uses to write her novel. The Creature's literary sources also include *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Plutarch's Lives*, not to mention *Prometheus Unbound* by Aeschylus. Each work seems to help both Shelley and the Creature to understand life from a different perspective. However, Milton's epic was the one text that undoubtedly impressed the Creature the most and that produced a kind of "spousal conjugality" between Mary Shelley and John Milton. The Creature, for instance, confirms it when he tells Victor that *Paradise Lost* "excited different and far deeper emotions"<sup>11</sup> in him. Lucy Newlyn again helps us sustain our hypothesis of adaptation as countersignature, or, in other words, that the two texts enter a play of absolutely identical and different, similar and radically other kind of

dynamics: "*Paradise Lost* is the monster's Bible: he reads it 'as a true History'; and it teaches him the values by which he measures both himself and his creator"<sup>12</sup> Milton's epic is praised (read as History) and debased (read by a "monster") simultaneously and this state of affairs works out proximities and contradictions to help the Creature to comprehend his condition in society and his relationship with his creator.

Being the first reference to *Paradise Lost*, the epigraph establishes the mood of the novel, mainly for the readers who have read the epic. By using Adam's word to introduce her novel, Mary Shelley shows the readers the agony and despair her wretched character feels. The epigraph adapts Adam's rhetorical question to the Creature's biggest concern about the purpose of his existence. Indeed, the following lines can be seen as evidence:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay  
To mold me man, did I solicit thee  
From darkness to promote me?<sup>13</sup>

They prepare the readers to follow the relentless pursuit of Milton's epic into the novel; where it is possible to find a miserable creature that proves to be more humane than his human creator. In these Miltonic verses, driven fiercely at us, we find important elements of the story and the lure of Milton's

11. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 154.

12. NEWLYN. *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, p. 135.

13. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 10, l. 743-5.



signature. The epigraph refers to the creation of a new being, and we understand that the relationship between the maker and his creature is unstable. It also shows the creature's rebellion against his maker. When Adam uses the word "darkness", it suggests that God makes him out of nowhere or of primordial Night and Chaos. However, in *Frankenstein's* case, the word "darkness" also represents obscurity and evil. The Creature's illegitimate existence is a product of death, darkness, and of Frankenstein's obscure self.<sup>14</sup>

In *Paradise Lost*, Adam questions his existence after the Fall; he wonders why he is created if he is doomed to "endless woes"<sup>15</sup> He thinks this burden is too hard for him to carry:

[...] As my will  
 Concurred not to my being, it were but right  
 And equal to reduce me to my dust,  
 Desirous to resign, and render back  
 All I received, unable to perform  
 Thy terms too hard, by which I was to hold<sup>16</sup>

Adam has always been closely advised by God, which makes this wondering seem rather selfish and unfair. If God has taken care of him and taught him what to do or not, why does Adam question God's acts? If God makes Adam free to choose and sends Raphael to warn him about the imminent

danger, why does Adam blame God for his mistake? Adam's suffering is derived from his own decision to eat the fruit; therefore, he needs to bear the consequences. On the other hand, the Creature is right to question Frankenstein about his existence; why is he created and freed in this world without any support or instruction? Why does Frankenstein create the Creature if he does not take care of him? The Creature recognizes that all his sorrows are Frankenstein's fault and starts pouring anger and revenge on his creator.

The proximities between the characters of *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost* are interwoven in several ways; for one, *Frankenstein's* character can be related to two or more Milton's characters. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that "*Frankenstein* is ultimately a mock *Paradise Lost* in which Victor and his monster [...] play all the neo-biblical parts over and over again".<sup>17</sup> This repetition is there for certain, but we must add that it is repetition with a difference and that the neo-biblical parts direct us to *Paradise Lost*. The "over again" is never simply an imitation or replication, but rather an iteration (repetition with a difference). The Creature, for instance, can be related to Adam and Eve, and to Satan, whereas Frankenstein may be compared mainly to Adam and Eve, God, and Satan.

The first centre staged, from the opening pages, the counterpoint or contradiction between, on the one hand,

14. George Levine defends that the Creature is Frankenstein's obscure double in his essay "The Ambiguous Heritage of Frankenstein".

15. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 10, l. 754.

16. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 10, l. 743-751.

17. GILBERT; GUBAR. *The Madwoman in the Attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*, p. 230.

the suppression, repression, withdrawal, exclusion of certain traits of the characters in the epic and the ones in the novel, and, on the other hand, how the readers' response may alter as the characters of the novel assume different Miltonic personas, we follow throughout Shelley's text. Lucy Newlyn even asserts that "the focus of sympathy has shifted [...] along with the Miltonic roles each character plays in the second half of the novel"<sup>18</sup>. The readers' responses vary throughout the novel; one may sympathize with a character in the beginning and despise him in the end because of the changes in the character's attitude. As to the shifting sympathies of the reader, Newlyn explains that:

We can, as readers, understand the curiosity which lies behind Frankenstein's experiments sufficiently to be drawn into his creative aspiration, but we are invited to question his wisdom in approaching divinity. Our sympathy is turned round at the moment when he rejects his creation.<sup>19</sup>

Shelley's framed narrative gives the reader direct access to the main characters, their ambitions and weaknesses. Thus, the reader knows them before drawing his/her conclusions about each character.

Victor Frankenstein is a scientist who immerses himself in the study of natural philosophy so that he may discover "the secrets of heaven and earth" and "the physical secrets of

the world".<sup>20</sup> Even after his father's warnings, he continues studying them avidly. This uncontrolled thirst for knowledge, added to curiosity, may be assessed in terms of proximity and contradiction, for they lead the first couple to eat from the forbidden tree for different reasons. It is also a rather similar, and simultaneously a diverse, desire that urges Adam to question Raphael about the secrets of heaven. In *Paradise Lost*, Raphael tells Adam, "Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid, leave them to God above";<sup>21</sup> and Adam obeys the angel without questioning the reasons why he cannot pursue this matter. In contrast, Victor ignores his father's warning, and while telling the story to Walton, he blames his father for not explaining to him that those theories are obsolete.

Frankenstein just perceives his mistake when he sees the Creature's "dull yellow eye"<sup>22</sup>. As Frankenstein cannot stand looking at the horrendous monster, he abandons his creation hoping he will never encounter the Creature again. Frankenstein's reaction is to a certain extent similar to Adam's. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve notice their nudity and, embarrassed, hide from God. However, they were humble enough to repent and face the consequences of their fall. In contrast, Frankenstein conceals his secret from all his family and acts as if the Creature were not his responsibility. He knows Justine is innocent of William's murder, but he omits that piece of information to defend her because it would bring up all the memories he

18. NEWLYN. *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, p. 135.

19. NEWLYN. *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, p. 227.

20. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 45.

21. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 8, l. 167-168.

22. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 68.

has struggled to forget. Frankenstein is like Adam and Eve, just in the beginning of the novel. When he accomplishes his dream, he becomes another character of *Paradise Lost*: God.

*Frankenstein* is certainly not a mock *Paradise Lost*, but Frankenstein is a mock version of Milton's God. Victor creates a new species, but he fails to take the responsibility of looking after it. George Levine contends that "Victor's worst sin is not the creation of the Monster but his refusal to take responsibility of it"<sup>23</sup>. Instead of teaching the Creature how to live in society, Frankenstein abandons the Creature and forces him to live and learn by himself. The Creature becomes so independent that Frankenstein "is totally unable to control the behavior of the demon"<sup>24</sup>. In *Paradise Lost*, all the secrets of life were hidden from and forbidden for man for a reason, supposing man would not know how to deal with such great and powerful knowledge. Frankenstein's experiment to create a new species generates a creature "in his own image, and the monster's hideousness implies the distortion of self"<sup>25</sup>. If God, who is perfect, creates man – a creature who is subject to falling –, how would Frankenstein create anything absolutely good and beautiful? Thus, he exposes his inner, hideous hubris, giving form to a creature so ugly that even he despises his creation. Frankenstein shares another characteristic with God in *Paradise Lost*; both are inactive characters most of the time. In *Paradise Lost*, God

is almighty and everything happens through his command, but He does not prevent the temptation or the accompanying Fall from taking place. In the novel, Frankenstein is the only one who can stop the Creature from killing his family and friends, but he refuses to act because he fears judgment on himself. Frankenstein may be termed weak and cowardly when he is unable to say a word that would save Justine and the rest of his family.

Frankenstein does not last long as a representation of Milton's God. As he fails to be a godlike figure, he may be compared to another character of *Paradise Lost*: Satan. Indeed, Frankenstein shares more similarities with Satan than with any other character in *Paradise Lost*. It is remarkable that not just Frankenstein but also the Creature end up being like Satan. Frankenstein aspires to have God's knowledge, power, and recognition. He wants to be blessed as "creator and source"<sup>26</sup> of a new species, which makes him similar to Satan, who also "aspired to omnipotence"<sup>27</sup>, and, like him, Frankenstein gets "chained in an eternal hell"<sup>28</sup> for his longing to be like God. Both aspire to something higher than their capacities and suffer the consequences of their disobedience. In Milton's epic, the notion of hell is understood not only as Satan's dwelling, "where no peace and rest can ever dwell"<sup>29</sup> but also as his inner state: "For within him Hell he brings"<sup>30</sup>. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley

23. LEVINE. *The Ambiguous Heritage of Frankenstein*, p. 10.

24. OATES. *Frankenstein's Fallen Angel*, p. 545.

25. LAMB. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Milton's Monstrous Myth*, p. 310.

26. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 64.

27. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 253.

28. . SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 253.

29. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 1, l. 65-66.

30. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 4, l. 20-1.

uses this method likewise. Frankenstein lives in a dark and dull place and often attends slaughter houses and cemeteries while conducting his experiments. He also journeys to the farthest and coldest end of Earth in his pursuit of revenge for Elizabeth's murder. Thus, he becomes as monstrous as his creation and starts to carry an "eternal hell" within.<sup>31</sup>

31. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 243.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is an assertive and eloquent character. He persuades the third part of the angels to support the rebellion against God,<sup>32</sup> and urges Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Frankenstein's speech proves to be as persuasive as Satan's. Walton tells his sister that Frankenstein

32. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 5, l. 710.

fills me with cheerful auguries. Even the sailors feel the power of his eloquence: when he speaks they no longer despair; he rouses their energies and, while they hear his voice, they believe these vast mountains of ice are molehills which will vanish before the resolutions of man.<sup>33</sup>

33. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 255.

In this passage, Frankenstein's speech is shown as a powerful weapon to manipulate the most agitated sailor. He makes them believe in things that may not ever happen, as Satan promises godlike knowledge to Eve. Despite their convincing speeches, Frankenstein and Satan do not reach their initial goal. Frankenstein is neither worshipped by his creation nor recognized by his society, and Satan fails to

destroy the first couple. However, Satan is more fortunate than Frankenstein, since Satan does not die for any of his sins. In fact, he affirms that it is "better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven"<sup>34</sup> and, in a way, he accomplishes his wish to reign by getting power over Hell and its demons.

Although Satan and Frankenstein have many things in common, Frankenstein is a mock version of Satan, who is much more persuasive, determined, and active. Besides that, Satan is a more consistent character, since his actions never contradict his objectives. Frankenstein is constantly driven by his feelings. For example, he is also filled with fear when he abandons the Creature<sup>35</sup> and he is "hurried away by fury"<sup>36</sup> when he decides to go after the monster. He also lets Justine die without helping her and destroys the Creature's mate right before completing his work. If Satan were Frankenstein, he would ponder a little more before taking any action. Thus, all these expressions of Frankenstein's feelings and his weakened character reinforce the idea that he is as human as everyone else in the story and subject to making mistakes; the only problem is that his mistake becomes a massive problem to him and his family.

Shifting our view to the Creature, he has peculiar characteristics that make him apparently a monster, like the ones we read about in fairy tales. His body structure is composed of human and animal parts found in slaughterhouses and

34. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 1, p. 263.

35. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 68.

36. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 240.



graveyards, which hints at his horrendous appearance since nothing taken from those places would be beautiful. The Creature is, according to Martin Tropp, “articulate, intelligent, and sensitive”.<sup>37</sup> He also claims that the Creature’s unnatural birth gave him “the supernatural power and destructiveness of a creature of myth”.<sup>38</sup> According to Oates, the scene in which the Creature sees himself in the water is a mirror of Eve’s admiration of her beauty<sup>39</sup>. In contrast, the Creature finds himself horrible and completely different from the cottagers or any other human being. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar even suggest that “the monster’s physical ugliness represents his social illegitimacy, his bastardy, his namelessness”.<sup>40</sup> Although the Creature’s appearance is closely related to his inner self and his unnatural birth, it does not prevent him from developing his intellect, neither does it represent his inner features. Oates also defends that “one of the secrets of *Frankenstein*, which helps to account for its abiding appeal, is the demon’s patient, unquestioning, utterly faithful, and utterly human love for his irresponsible creator”.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the Creature would probably be nice and kind if people treated him well in the first place. This possibility does not justify his crimes, but it raises the question as to whether he is the only one to blame in the story.

Besides the Creature’s inhuman appearance, his namelessness emphasizes the idea that he does not belong in this

world. By comparing biblical Adam and the Creature, Martin Tropp seems to equate namelessness with total otherness:

In Genesis 3:19–20, Adam’s dominion over plants and animals is demonstrated by his power to name them; knowing the name of something has traditionally conferred magical control over it, as well as giving it a place in an ordered universe. Frankenstein’s creation is simply “the Monster”—aptly communicating its total otherness and man’s impotence before it.<sup>42</sup>

The Creature’s existence is so repellent to his creator that Frankenstein does not bother to give his creature a proper name, perhaps out of impotence in face of the total other. Thus, the Creature is addressed by different names and becomes legion. Burton R. Pollin observes that “Frankenstein regularly refers to his creature in terms reminiscent of *Paradise Lost*: ‘the fiend’, ‘the daemon’, ‘adversary’, ‘devil’”.<sup>43</sup> Frankenstein’s failure to name his creation hints at the (mock) creator’s lack of power over the Creature. In his attempt to find his identity, the Creature wonders, “where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses [...] I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I?”.<sup>44</sup> He cannot identify himself with any other creature in this world; he is

37. TROPP. *The Monster*, p. 13.

38. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 14.

39. OATES. *Frankenstein’s Fallen Angel*, p. 547.

40. GILBERT; GUBAR. *The Madwoman in the Attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*, p. 241.

41. OATES. *Frankenstein’s Fallen Angel*, p. 545.

42. TROPP. *The Monster*, p. 14.

43. POLLIN. *Philosophical and Literary Sources of Frankenstein*, p. 104.

44. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 145.

as lonely as Adam is in the first moments of his life. Inspired by Adam's story, the Creature looks for Frankenstein and complains about his solitude: "man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create."<sup>45</sup> After some refusals, Frankenstein accepts the request and starts creating a female creature. However, he gives up on the "second" creature and destroys his new creation, condemning the Creature to eternal loneliness.

The Creature is born an adult and is "united by no link to any other being".<sup>46</sup> Like Adam, the Creature is the first of his kind. While Adam "had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator"<sup>47</sup>, the Creature "was wretched, helpless, and alone". In *Paradise Lost*, God prepares a beautiful and fruitful garden to accommodate his new creation, and he entitles Adam to name each animal. God provides everything Adam would possibly need, fulfills his wish to have a companion, and instructs him to avoid any harm. Unfortunately, the Creature does not have the same luck. He is born in a dark and isolated laboratory and is left alone and helpless in that place. In his tale, he tells Frankenstein how he discovers simple things and feelings, such as hunger, cold or fire:

It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half frightened, as if it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate ... I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept.<sup>48</sup>

His first perception of life is not as blissful as Adam's. However, he does not remain in this condition for a long time. He learns how to fish and make fire; he becomes a clever character. Moreover, the Creature considers language "a godlike science" which he "ardently desired to become acquainted with".<sup>49</sup> Chris Baldick defends that "the monster's most convincingly human characteristic is of course his power of speech".<sup>50</sup> The Creature's acquisition of language enables him to tell his personal experiences to his creator. According to Harold Bloom, "the monster is at once more intellectual and more emotional than his maker; indeed he excels Frankenstein as much (and in the same ways) as Milton's Adam excels Milton's God in *Paradise Lost*".<sup>51</sup> The Creature proves to be more courageous and determined than his creator, who keeps failing to take responsibility for his creation.

After comparing himself to Adam, the Creature finds out they have little in common. Thus, he starts to acknowledge in himself many more of Satan's features than he could imagine. Indeed, his eloquence is so developed that it may be

45. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 172.

46. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 155.

47. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 155.

48. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 123.

49. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 134.

50. BALDICK. *In Frankenstein's shadow: myth, monstrosity, and nineteenth-century writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

51. BLOOM. Introduction, p. 4.

compared to Satan's. Frankenstein himself recognizes this feature and warns Walton that the Creature is "eloquent and persuasive".<sup>52</sup> Again, Oates reiterates that the Creature "has the most compelling speeches in the novel and is far wiser and more magnanimous than his creator".<sup>53</sup> During his speech, the Creature gives many details of his struggle to survive. He develops a plausible argument, which softens Frankenstein's heart so that his creator accepts to make a female creature. The Creature considers himself more wretched than Satan for, even being the enemy of God and man, "Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him"<sup>54</sup>, while he is "solitary and abhorred".<sup>55</sup> He also compares the hut he finds to shelter himself "as exquisite and divine a retreat as Pandemonium appeared to the demons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire".<sup>56</sup> When the Creature arrives at the De Lacey's cottage, he observes and envies them; he admires that family and helps them in the field chores in order to be accepted in their presence. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan also observes Adam and Eve and admires their happy state.<sup>57</sup> However, Satan's intention is completely different from the Creature's; Satan just wants revenge. This is one difference, or even contradiction, between Satan's and the Creature's expectations. In the words of Martin Tropp, "the Monster still believes it can find a place in the world of man and nature"<sup>58</sup>, in contrast to Satan, who knows he has condemned himself to live in hell forever.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan goes to Earth to observe Adam and Eve. They remind him of his eternal horrendous fate, and then he grows a wish for revenge; he wants to destroy those happy creatures. Similarly, Frankenstein's Creature cannot stand to see his creator around his happy family while he is alone and unloved. He decides to make Frankenstein's life as horrible as his. David Soyka observes that "in both cases, the cast-out doesn't take his revenge directly upon the Creator, the cause of his predicament, but upon the innocent beings important to the Creator (Adam and Eve; Victor's close friend and relations)".<sup>59</sup> Their revenge also leads to different results; Adam and Eve do not die, as Satan probably expects. Every man who eats the forbidden fruit would die, but death does not come at a blow. The Son intercedes for Adam and Eve<sup>60</sup> and prevents them from dying an immediate death. On the other hand, Frankenstein does not have the same destiny; the Creature caused most of his relatives' death and his own eventually.

Yet once more, we need to be reminded that Mary Shelley incorporates in her work many of the books she has read.<sup>61</sup> Reading seems such an important habit for her that the Creature experiences the pleasure of acquiring knowledge from this practice. It becomes his source of research on human history, religious beliefs, and life in society. He admits the importance of books: "they produced in me an infinity of

52. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 250.

53. OATES. *Frankenstein's Fallen Angel*, p. 545.

54. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 156.

55. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 156.

56. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 132.

57. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 4, l. 356-65.

58. TROPP. *The Monster*, p. 19.

59. SOYKA. *Frankenstein and the Miltonic Creation of Evil*, p. 170.

60. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 3, l. 227-265.

61. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1984, p. 237) for details.

new images and feelings that sometimes raised me to ecstasy, but more frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection".<sup>62</sup> It helps him understand his condition; then, he concludes that he is in a world where he cannot fit anywhere. Thus, his books and the lessons he overhears in the De Lacey's cottage are the only contact the Creature has with education; therefore, they prove very important to his perception of the world.

Undoubtedly, the work that impresses him the most is *Paradise Lost*. The Creature reads the epic as true history and learns many things about his own self. Indeed, *Paradise Lost* represents his journey of self-knowledge in search of his own identity. It is a landmark of his "expulsion from his own paradise, much as the intellectual discoveries of any maturing child bring the realization that life is much more complicated than the exclusive purpose of satisfying basic individual needs".<sup>63</sup> As a result, the Creature is aware of his position in society; he knows he does not belong in it and wants desperately to have someone beside him. He understands the relationship between God and his creatures and starts comparing himself with the characters in the epic. *Paradise Lost* is the piece of work that looks the most similar to his life, which explains why he likes it better than the others. The Creature uses *Paradise Lost* to understand his origin and accept his awkward condition. At first, it is

hard for him to completely identify with Milton's characters, but he concludes that his existence can be compared to Adam and Satan's. Hence, he agrees with Adam that no one should be alone, and then he asks Frankenstein to make a mate for him, someone as ugly and rejected as he is. His similarity with Adam proves that he is not the monster many readers picture; the Creature may be horrendous, but he still has a heart. He is able to feel anger, fear, and hate; but he also experiences love and compassion. *Paradise Lost* teaches him that free will makes him able to choose what he wants to be. In a dialogue with Frankenstein, the Creature shows his wish to be good, have his own family, and leave people alone. Then the Creature becomes the one who might be the target reader of Milton's epic: a reader who identifies with the first couple, understands his fallen condition, and decides to pursue a paradise within. Stanley Fish claims that the main objective of *Paradise Lost* is to raise the reader's awareness of his/her position and responsibility, to recreate the Fall and teach him/her to understand and accept his/her condition.<sup>64</sup> *Paradise Lost* serves as *Bildung* (education, rite of passage), teaching its readers that they can find a paradise within even when they are fallen. The Creature learns from Adam and Eve's mistake and recognizes that he needs to change if he wants to find his own paradise. The power of Milton's words can reach even the most fearful creature.

62. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 153.

63. SOYKA. *Frankenstein and the Miltonic Creation of Evil*, p. 172.

64. FISH. *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 1.



Among all the books the Creature reads, *Paradise Lost* stands out for its greatness and the ability Milton has to make his reader be part of his story. It is unlikely to read *Paradise Lost* and not to identify with Adam and Eve or, in some cases, with Satan. These characters portray human feelings, worries, and expectations. Although the Creature has a different origin, he can understand all these points because he feels almost the same things, which explains why his reading of the epic becomes a crucial moment in the novel. Like its frame-structured plot, the themes are also arranged in a complex web. Again, we find proximities and contradictions in the parallels in structuring devices: the epic's beginning *in media res* and its many fast forwarding and back tracking action are re-written in the novel in relation to framing: *mise en abîme*, the Russian doll technique or the Chinese boxes. Lucy Newlyn claims that "Shelley's narrative is constructed along Miltonic lines, and is held together by a dense network of allusions, the meaning of which can emerge only from detailed familiarity with Milton's account of the Fall".<sup>65</sup> Though *Paradise Lost* permeates the whole novel, *Frankenstein* does not become a mere version of the epic. Mary Shelley is able to give her own meaning to the themes dealt with in *Paradise Lost*. Its outcome is far different from the epic as well.

Another prominent issue is the relation between the ideas of Paradise and Hell Within. In *Paradise Lost*, we clearly see

the difference between them, but in *Frankenstein* we do not have an example of Paradise Within. Both creator and creature acquire a Hell within themselves, and both accept that there is no paradise for them. After man's first disobedience, Adam and Eve are driven out of Eden; but not everything is lost. Raphael promises them that a new paradise could be conquered, a paradise within where humans can find much more happiness than they would find in a geographical paradise. Mary Shelley's characters, in search of a paradise, encounter a hell within themselves, as both Frankenstein and the Creature attest. When the Creature is in the De Lacey's cottage and hopes to be accepted by this family, "his thoughts rambled in the fields of Paradise".<sup>66</sup> It is a reference to Milton's paradise, and it is the only time the Creature experiences good feelings, such as happiness, hope, and peace. His happy condition does not last much longer, though. His plan fails and he is rejected again; all his hopes of being part of a family disappear. Then, he starts moving from a paradise to a hell within.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan declares that "the mind is its own place, and itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven".<sup>67</sup> It emphasizes the idea that living in a paradise, or a hell, depends on each one's frame of mind; it is a matter of choice. After the Creature chooses to hunt down Frankenstein, he puts himself on the same level of Satan. He leaves behind all the possibilities of being good and becomes

65. NEWLYN. *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, p. 42.

66. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 157.

67. MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, c. 1, l. 254-255.

more uncontrollable after each murder he commits. Burton R. Pollin<sup>68</sup> states, in other words, that the Creature's hellish condition is intensified through loneliness, which seems his greatest fear. After Frankenstein's death, the Creature does not see any reason to continue living and condemns himself to experience a hellish ending; he says: "I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames".<sup>69</sup> Even his final moment of life alludes to Satan and his eternal lost condition. As for Frankenstein, he experiences few moments of happiness with his family. He starts leading a secluded life when he endeavors to create a new being. He goes to cemeteries and slaughterhouses for his raw materials. He lives in dark and isolated places far from any sight of civilization. All these elements mark his departure from paradise and his entrance into hell. After Frankenstein's work is finally done, he finds within himself all the darkness and loneliness he was once surrounded with. Despite his attempt to live "normally" again, Frankenstein finds himself in a terrible situation. He cannot tell anyone about his deed; he feels alone, helpless, and tormented by his own fears. He feels "cursed by some devil, and carried about with me my eternal hell".<sup>70</sup> The Creature is to blame for murdering Frankenstein's dear friends and family, but Victor is also to blame for letting these murders happen. His unstable condition arises as a consequence of his refusing to take any responsibility for his acts.

So long as approximations and contradictions are concerned, let us not forget that whilst influence studies would stress the processes of borrowing, imitation, and/or reception with a view to proposing an asymmetrical (in relation to power), chronic (in relation to frequent recurrence or vexing, troubling, weakening repetitions in time), and/or cringing cultural reception (a placement outside a national border, for example), countersigning a text is related to being hospitable towards a given text as Other, to host this given text in the interior of the countersigned text without interpretation, but as a means to an end: highlight *inadequation*. Whilst intertextual studies is, by and large, the shaping of a given text's meaning by another text, say, by borrowing or transforming a prior text, countersigning a text, by way of what we have been discussing in relation to Shelley and Milton, is not related to meaning first and foremost, but to the logic of iteration, to an endless dissemination of meanings, to a fragmentary, incomplete, *inadequate* reading as folding, reading *qua* micro-units of "yeses", reading *cum* ears wide open to perlocutionary acts. In sum, our reading has, hopefully, pinpointed *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein* in terms of a conversation, in relation to a scene where (unspeakable) things happen, in the guise of singularity, peculiarity, and responsibility.

A remarkable work, *Paradise Lost* can thus be said to serve Mary Shelley's novel as a signature to/against/alongside

68. POLLIN. *Philosophical and Literary Sources of Frankenstein*, p. 104.

69. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 267.

70. SHELLEY. *Frankenstein*, p. 243.

which she will reply, respond responsibly, and “composibilize”: to think together in terms of a textual response. Despite all the allusions to the epic, *Frankenstein* does not become a Romantic version of *Paradise Lost*. The themes in the epic take on particular drifts in the novel, and the relation between the characters in the epic and the novel is not linear, let alone the fact that Mary Shelley’s characters put on different Miltonic personae throughout the novel. Looking back to Derrida, he maintains that:

Reading must give itself up to the uniqueness [of the work], take it on board, keep it in mind, take account of it. But for that, for this rendering, you have to sign in your turn, write something else which responds or corresponds in an equally singular, which is to say, irreducible, irreplaceable, “new” way: neither imitation, nor reproduction, nor metalanguage.<sup>71</sup>

We have been bold enough to suggest that Derrida’s “rendering” may be spelled out as an alternative way to understand and assess adaptation as countersignature. We have, thus, analyzed the novel considering the epic because it gives the reader a new perspective on the way of Milton’s single signature in *Paradise Lost* and this same reader has accompanied us as we read the return trips, counter paths, wanderings, proximities, and contradictions Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* took in order to respond or to countersign

Milton’s signature text. In sum, we conclude that *Paradise Lost* lives on in *Frankenstein* and that the novel, in response, provides the epic with a textual afterlife.

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71. DERRIDA. *Acts of Literature*, p. 69-70.

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