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INNERVATE
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Volume 9: 2016-17 ISSN: 2041-6776

What is the effect of Satanic allusion in *Frankenstein*?

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Frankenstein by Mary Shelley is an imaginative rewrite of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. Shelley read Milton's epic poem between 1815 and 1816,[1] responding to it during a period in which rebellion against authority took many forms, one of which is within its literary symbolism. Ruben van Luijk identifies the Romantic re-presentation of Milton's Satan as a symbol of opposition to authority, by arguing that Satanic allusion is 'the embodiment of the revolutionary standing up against arbitrary and despotic power'.[2] In *Frankenstein*, Satanic allusions adhere to van Luijk's statement of their function in Romantic texts by influencing the characterisation of Victor and the Creature so that these characters represent Satan's, as well as their own, challenge to figures of religious authority. Furthermore, Shelley's allusions illuminate the ambiguity with which Milton represents Satan's opposition to God's power. Jonathon Shears disagrees with this proposal, stating that Miltonic allusion does not 'extend ambiguities *inherent* in [*Paradise Lost*]'.[3] In contrast, Lucy Newlyn argues that *Paradise Lost* is a 'model of an ambivalence which is amplified by the Romantic reader'.[4] An examination of the effect of Shelley's Satanic allusions, some of which are subtle and not explicitly intentional, substantiates Newlyn's viewpoint because the allusions are a register of ambivalent challenges to representations of religious authority. Even when Shelley assigns the Creature the benevolence and dutifulness of Milton's son, the Creature is a questionable figure of obedience to divinely ordained authority.

Shelley places *Frankenstein* in dialogue with the Romantic reading of Satan as a symbol of opposition to authority by clearly alluding to moments in *Paradise Lost* that represent the challenge of the individual to arbitrarily-established religious authority. The Creature reads '*Paradise Lost*'[5] and considers 'Satan as the fitter emblem of [his] condition' (p.105) and the poem as 'the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures', a situation with 'similarity […] to [his] own' (pp.104-105). Victor is likened to Milton's God as he is the Creature's 'natural lord and king' (p.77) which echoes God's status as 'the king of heaven' (II.229). The Creature frequently addresses Victor with imperatives, such as 'Do your duty towards me' (p.77) and 'This being you must create' (p.118), which, by virtue of their form as commands, challenge Victor's God-like authority that was arbitrarily established when he became the Creature's creator. Likewise, while the epigraph of *Frankenstein*, 'Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/To mould me man?' (p.1), is a quotation from Milton's Adam,[6] its emphasis on individualism in conflict with the will of religious authority relates not only to the Creature, but also to Satan, which links the two characters. Satan opposes the deputation of the Son, who represents arbitrarily-established religious authority as he becomes a 'Lord' by whom 'All knees in heaven' (V.608) must 'abide' (V.609), with, like Adam, a rhetorical question: 'Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend/The supple knee?' (V.787-788). Milton creates a dichotomy between the will of the angels and divinely ordained authority by grouping the angels in the collective second person plural pronoun, 'you', while immediately answering the question with 'Ye will not' (V.788); the stressed metrical beats emphasise the choice of the individual. Satan's questioning represents a strong challenge to religious authority because his discourse aligns the acceptance of the Son's authority with self-abasement, thus persuading the angels towards valuing individualism. Milton objectifies those who accept religious authority, by referring to them in synecdoche, as 'necks' and 'knee[s]', 'possessed' (V.790) and

[1] Lisa Vargo, 'Contextualising Sources', in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein,* ed. by Andrew Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Ebook, Cambridge Core, pp.26-40 (p.36).
[2] Ruben van Luijk, 'The Romantic Rehabilitation of Satan', in *Children of Lucifer: the Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Ebook, Oxford Scholarship Online, Chapter 4, p.77.
[3] Jonathon Shears, *The Romantic Legacy of Paradise Lost: Reading Against the Grain* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), p.6.
[4] Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost, and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.13.
[5] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: 1818 Text*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.104. All further quotations from this text are taken from this edition.

[6] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), X.743-744. All further quotations from this text are taken from this edition.

practising 'prostration vile' (V.782). By attributing the Satanic characteristic of individual opposition to religious authority to the Creature using explicit allusion, Shelley draws attention to its presence in *Paradise Lost*.

Shelley's Satanic allusion does not always oppose religious authority. Although not an allusion that is clearly marked as intentional, the moment at which Victor destroys the female creature echoes Uriel's perception of Satan. Victor interprets the Creature's expression through an echo of Uriel's perspective of Satan as a figure of evil intent, which fortifies, rather than challenges, the authoritative interpretation of Satan as the agent of evil in Christian doctrine. While Victor 'look[s] on' (p.139) the Creature from a distance, just as Uriel's eye 'pursues [Satan]' (IV.125) from afar on mount Niphates, he interprets the Creature's 'countenance' as the 'utmost extent of malice and treachery' (p.139). The superlative 'utmost' suggests that the Creature's expression displays the highest degree of evil intent and deceitfulness, which echoes the considerable amount of 'Deep malice to conceal, couched with revenge' (IV.123) that Uriel attributes Satan. Shelley's reading of Uriel's perception of Satan adheres to the view of Satan in Christian doctrine, which Milton also examines. Neil Forsyth recognises that Milton alludes to the Biblical passage, 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer' (Isaiah 14:12),[7] which is used by representatives of the Christian Church to classify Satan as the doer of evil. Forsyth argues that Isaiah 14:12 is 'important for the identification of the devil as the agent of evil in history'.[8] Isaiah 14:12 is understood by religious authority to connect Satan with the inherent inclination to do evil. Milton associates his Satan with the Satan of Christian tradition by alluding to Isaiah 14:12. For instance, upon perceiving Satan, Beelzebub remarks, 'O how fallen' (I.84) and Milton implicitly alludes to Satan's prelapsarian name, Lucifer: 'Satan, so call him now, his former name/Is heard no more' (V.658-659). While reinforcing the authority of the interpretation of Satan in Christian tradition, Shelley's echo of Uriel's perception of Satan as the agent of evil provides Victor with a reason to destroy the female creature. Victor fears that completing construction of the being could cause 'a race of devils' (p.138) to threaten humankind's existence. Shelley's reference to the Satan of Christian tradition, the devil, indicates that Victor's concern originates in a fear of releasing an evil agent.

The reading that Victor and Uriel perceive the Creature and Satan respectively as the Satan of Christian tradition is strengthened by Shelley's echo of the theme of Satan's malicious countenance, as seen by Uriel, even though Shelley does not explicitly indicate that the theme is a Satanic allusion. As Victor judges the Creature based on his 'countenance' (p.139), Satan's 'visage' (IV.116) influences Uriel to interpret Satan as the embodiment of evil intention and deceitfulness. Milton's semantic field of dishonesty establishes Satan as deceptive; his expression 'betrayed/Him counterfeit' (IV.116-117), he is an 'Artificer of fraud' (IV.121) and 'practice[s] falsehood under saintly show' (IV.122). Moreover, Satan's 'gestures fierce' (IV.128) and 'mad demeanour' (IV.129) indicate evil. Similarly, the Creature's 'ghastly grin' (p.138), as seen by Victor, anticipates the Creature's malicious countenance after having murdered Elizabeth: 'A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer' (p.166). However, in contrast to the Satan of Christian tradition and Milton, here the Creature is not deceptive. Rather, Shelley suggests that the representation of the Creature in Victor's narrative is deceitful, because it is a misperception. Hence, Shelley challenges religious authority by questioning the reading of Satan in Christian doctrine. The Creature's 'ghastly grin' (p.138) also alludes to his 'grin' at his creation: 'His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks' (p.40). Shelley associates the Creature with innocence by demonstrating his inability to communicate, a behaviour shared by new-born babies. Victor dismisses the Creature's attempt to communicate as it is useless, being 'muttered' and 'inarticulate'. Shelley's self-allusion to Victor's misunderstanding of the Creature's intentions and innocence renders the perception of the Creature as the Satan of Christian tradition ambiguous. Reflecting upon Uriel's interpretation of Satan with Shelley's idea of misinterpretation in mind illuminates criticisms of Uriel's perspective. Milton terms Uriel's perception 'disfigured' (IV.127), in other words, distorted. Indeed, Satan is a figure of ambivalence, a flawed character of emotional complexity, rather than evil intent specifically. His mind is disorderly, as he experiences 'distempers' (IV.115), 'perturbation' (IV.120) but also 'outward calm' (IV.120). The reading of Satan as a misunderstood character, which is revealed through Shelley's echo of Uriel's misperception of Satan, challenges yet also affirms the authoritative interpretation of Satan as the agent of evil in Christian doctrine in both *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost.*

The ambiguity with which Milton challenges religious authority reflects a tension surrounding the oppression of unorthodox religious thought. Milton's Satan is not a figure that accuses representations of established authority of suppressing unorthodox religious ideas. Rather, despite that

[7] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), Isaiah 12:14, p.337.
[8] Neil Forsyth, 'Satan', in *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost*, ed. by Louis Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Ebook, Cambridge Core, pp.17-28 (p.20).

Milton does not clearly indicate the echo, Satan's behaviour echoes that of William Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, which illuminates an acknowledgement that religious authority might limit personal psychological freedom. Grant McColley uses the structural correspondence between *Paradise Lost* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, that Satan and Macbeth are present when 'the King personally announces investiture of his son', to demonstrate that both characters '[conceal] displeasure provoked by the announcement'.[9] By concealing their disagreement, Satan and Macbeth suppress emotion; hence, they limit their emotional experiences. Although it is the deputation of God's son, a representation of the establishment of orthodox religious authority, that influences each character to suppress disagreement with orthodoxy, Satan continues this suppression singlehandedly. Satan imposes upon himself a restrained psychological freedom that echoes that of Lady Macbeth. In Satan's soliloquy, Milton echoes Lady Macbeth's attempt to prevent emotional experience, which demonstrates that individuals are partly accountable for limiting their psychological liberty. By virtue of their commanding form, the imperatives of Lady Macbeth's invocation demonstrate a deliberate effort to control her emotions; indeed, she wishes to remove emotion from her experience in order to cope with the psychological upheaval that follows regicide: '[Spirits] fill me […] top-full/Of direst cruelty'[10] and 'Stop up th'access and passage to remorse' (I.V.44). Satan's attempt to remove his emotional experience after having rebelled against God's authority echoes Lady Macbeth's invocation: 'So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,/Farewell remorse' (IV.108-109). The trochaic metre of each 'farewell' creates a regular fading tone which mirrors Satan's efforts to gradually prevent emotional experience. Ultimately, Satan and Lady Macbeth are unsuccessful in controlling their emotions, instead suppressing them. Lady Macbeth eventually experiences remorse and laments of her sin, 'will these hands ne'er be clean?' (V.I.41). The permanence of 'ne'er' suggests that Lady Macbeth has imposed upon herself an indefinite and limiting psychological experience of suppressed remorse. Likewise, Satan seems to resign to unfeeling cruelty by asserting that, 'all good to me is lost;/Evil be thou my good' (IV.109-110). Later, he responds with 'ire, envy and despair' (IV.115) towards his self-exclusion from heaven. By attempting to suppress his emotions, Satan limits his psychological experience to one of anger, jealousy and remorse. Milton's echo of the negative consequences of Lady Macbeth's self-imposed suppression of emotion demonstrates that individuals, more so than religious authority, cause psychological oppression.

Shelley adopts the Satanic characteristic of an ambivalent challenge to religious authority. She alludes to Satan's self-inflicted psychological oppression when the Creature justifies his murder of Elizabeth and Henry, to the effect that reason, as opposed to established religious ideas, explains the immorality and irrationality of the Creature's actions. Like Satan and Lady Macbeth, the Creature suppresses his emotions as he believes that they are controllable, which results in sudden outbursts of violence. The idea that reason accounts for behaviour is a convention of the Godwinian novel that Shelley engages with. According to Robert Uphaus, the Godwinian novel demonstrates how external events influence 'a specified moral or rational solution'[11] on the part of characters, which suggests that reason explains all of the Creature's behaviour. If reason, rather than inherent qualities, explains actions, then Shelley challenges religious authority by rejecting the established notion that 'human beings [are] born with innate qualities'.[12] Shelley suggests that, to the Creature, human psychology is changeable. He states that, 'Evil thenceforth became my good' (p.188); the rapid change from good to evil implies that he treats human nature as flexible. Shelley clearly alludes to Satan's resignation, 'Evil be thou my good' (IV.110), which maintains the Miltonic theme of attempting to remove experience of human emotion. This attempt is evident in Shelley's language which associates human nature with malleability. Before murdering Elizabeth, the Creature 'cast off all feeling' and 'adapt[ed]' his nature 'to an element which [he] had willingly chosen', his 'demoniacal design' (p.188). However, soon after, the Creature experiences 'anguish', 'despair' and 'insatiable passion' (p.188). The Creature's speech echoes the structural inconsistency of Satan's resignation to evil and prevention of feelings, during which he experiences 'ire, envy and despair' (IV.115). Both characters are oppressed by their own minds, becoming caught up in a cycle of emotional suppression and release. This lack of emotional control explains the Creature's immoral and irrational actions towards humankind and further suggests

[9] Grant McColley, '*Macbeth* and *Paradise Lost', The Shakespeare Association Bulletin,* 13:3 (1938), 146-150 (p.148).

[10] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen Drama, 1984), I.V.42. All further quotations from this text are taken from this edition.

[11] Robert W. Uphaus, *The Impossible Observer: Reason and the Reader in Eighteenth-Century Prose* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p.136.

[12] Graham Allen, 'Language, Form and Style', in *Shelley's Frankenstein* (London: Continuum, 2008), Ebook, ProQuest Ebook Central, pp.16-34 (p.26).

that Shelley reads Satan as a flawed character of inner complexity. The Creature reacts immediately to external circumstances with emotions that are difficult to control, as they have been suppressed, rather than with rationality. During Henry's murder, 'A frightful selfishness hurried [him] on' (p.188). The verb 'hurried' implies a strong impulse, thus an action not properly considered. He immediately reacts with vengeance towards William before murdering him: 'Frankenstein! you belong then to my enemy […] you shall be my first victim' (p.117). While applying reason in order to explain the Creature's violence overrules the established religious idea that humans are born with innate qualities, reason cannot always explain the Creature's actions. Shelley implies that he has an inherent inclination towards violence. The Creature gazes at William's corpse 'with exultation and hellish triumph' (p.117) and regards himself 'the slave […] of an impulse, which [he] detested but could not disobey' (p.188). The ambivalence of the 'impulse' suggests that it is a behaviour that occurs unconsciously, hence it is innate. Shelley's Satanic allusion at once adheres to religious authority, by showing that human characteristics are inherent, but also examines how psychological circumstances influence behaviour, which perpetuates the ambiguity with which Milton holds humankind accountable for psychological disturbance.

Subtle Satanic allusion in *Frankenstein* can be seen to completely undermine religious authority. Paul Lewis identifies that the Gothic novel, a form with which Shelley engages, manipulates its own 'stock-sensationalism'.[13] Lewis draws attention to the self-consciousness of the Gothic novel, which Shelley employs by implicitly undermining suggestions of metaphysical presence, including that of symbols of religious authority. Shelley suggests that Victor is controlled by a Satanic spirit, 'animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm' (p.33) when he constructs the Creature, which, albeit not explicitly marked as intentional, is a subtle allusion to the state of the rebel angels when they create gunpowder in Book VI under Satan's authority. Those who invent weapons of war are 'Inspired with devilish machination' (VI.503-504). Figuratively, 'inspire' means 'to animate' by 'some mental or spiritual influence',[14] which implies that the rebels are manipulated by a higher spiritual authority, a Satanic spirit. Thematic and formal devices support this interpretation as the spirit is 'devilish' and the regular iambic beat of 'inspired with devilish machination' complements the repetitive and mechanical behaviour that would result from being controlled by a higher, metaphysical authority. The rebels' behaviour is automated, as 'they', a plurality, all carry out the same actions: 'up they turned' the soil (VI.509), 'nitrous foam/They found, they mingled' (VI.512-513) and 'Concocted and adusted they reduced/To blackest grain' (VI.514-515). The rebels are occupied by a Satanic spirit, 'O'erwearied *through the faint Satanic host*' (emphasis mine) (VI.392). Shelley illuminates the Miltonic theme of possession by a Satanic spirit, by writing that Victor is 'animated' (p.33) by a metaphysical power. Upon deciding to create the Creature, Victor feels 'as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy' (p.213); the simile alluding to the mythological conception of Satan, the stealer of souls. Indeed, Victor loses 'all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit' (p.36). His mind contains 'one thought, one conception, one purpose' (p.213); the monotonous tone generated by the repetition of 'one' echoes the rhythmically-evoked mechanical action of Milton's rebels, which complements the reading that both Victor and the rebels are enacting the will of divine authority, thereby sustaining the presence of figurative religious authority in both texts. However, Victor is manipulated by an 'almost supernatural' (p.33) power, so Shelley implicitly undermines metaphysical presence, as well as authority, thereby undercutting the conventional sensationalism of the Gothic novel. Victor is not necessarily possessed by a Satanic spirit, but has an inherent force of unchecked creativity, which causes a rapture-like state. The idea to create life is metaphorically associated with an unstoppable force that lies dormant in Victor's nature: 'a mountain river' (p.22). The river becomes a 'torrent' that 'swept away all [Victor's] hopes and joys' (p.22), a metaphorical representation of Victor becoming carried away by his creativity, as if in a self-inflicted trance. His creativity is 'from […] almost forgotten sources' (p.22), from innate, rather than devilish, origins. Shelley's subtle allusion draws attention to the reading of *Paradise Lost* that the rebels are possessed by a metaphysical authority, a Satanic spirit, but also undermines this figurative religious authority by holding Victor's unrestrained creativity accountable for bringing destructive inventions into existence.

Although Shelley does not directly indicate that it is a Miltonic allusion, the Creature subtly echoes the lofty characteristics of Milton's Son that are typical of the epic form of *Paradise Lost*; the Creature is not based upon Satan alone. The Creature's death is represented as noble, a 'sacrifice' (p.190), a surrender of fidelity to a deity. A sense of certainty to the Creature's death is emphasised, as

[13] Paul Lewis, 'Victor Frankenstein and Owen Warland: The Artist as Satan and as God', *Studies in Short Fiction,* 14:3 (1977), 279-282 (p.279).
[14] 'inspire, v.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/96990?redirectedFrom=inspire> [Accessed 29/09/2017].

it 'must be done' and his 'own' sacrifice is needed to 'consummate the *series* of [his] being' (emphasis mine) (p.190). Shelley echoes the fate of Milton's Son, who offers to sacrifice himself to repent for the sins of humankind, an elevated gesture appropriate for the epic form of *Paradise Lost*: 'me for him, life for life/I offer' (III.235). The Son is a figure of benevolence and obedience to God, 'In whom the fulness [*sic*] dwells of love divine' (III.225), so the Creature, who 'was benevolent and good' (p.78), shares these characteristics of Milton's Son. As both figures offer themselves as a sacrifice, they can be seen to ultimately submit to religious authority. Shelley also distances the Creature from the Son's benevolence and obedience, by demonstrating the Creature's immorality. He commits murder and 'vice has degraded [him] beneath the meanest animal' (p.189), which challenges divinely ordained codes of moral behaviour associated with epic themes. Even when Shelley departs from constructing the Creature using Satanic allusion, the Creature retains the Satanic characteristic of an ambiguous challenge to religious authority.

In conclusion, intention notwithstanding, Shelley's Satanic allusions are a register of adherence, but also challenges, to representations of religious authority. This argument supports Newlyn's theory that *Paradise Lost* is a model of ambiguity that is amplified by the Romantic reader. Victor perceives the Creature's expression through an echo of Uriel's perspective of Satan which both strengthens and contests the authoritative interpretation of Satan as the agent of evil in Christian doctrine in *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein.* Shelley's allusions to Satan's individual challenge to arbitrarily-established religious authority, together with her perpetuation of the theme that humankind, more so than a metaphysical spirit, might be accountable for oppression and destruction, sustains the ambivalence with which Milton opposes religious authority. Moreover, despite the Creature adopting the benevolence and obedience of Milton's Son, his immorality demonstrates a challenge to religious moral codes, which maintains the Satanic trait of ambiguously opposing religious authority.

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