



To what extent is Shelley's Creature in *Frankenstein* a direct reflection of Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost*?

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Shelley's *Frankenstein*¹ (1818) and Milton's *Paradise Lost*² (1667) are evolutions of birth myths, crucially lacking feminine influence. Throughout *Frankenstein*, Shelley's Creature compares himself to Milton's Adam and Satan from *Paradise Lost*: 'like Adam I was created', and 'I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition'³. However, delving into the psyche of the Creature it is clear that he shares more resemblance to Eve than any of Milton's other protagonists. Both Eve and the Creature share an affinity for nature, they are formed in almost exactly the same way and are innocent until corrupted. Though the characters of Eve and the Creature are of different sex, the issue of androgynous mutuality is at the core of their comparison. Eve adopts conventionally masculine traits whilst the Creature appears feminine in many characteristics.

However, due to their differing physicality, Eve and the Creature's reception by the world could not be more different: one seeks communion whilst the other craves independence. Shelley's reversal of the Eve-figure as male, subverts the myth of Eve into a grotesque parody or social and sexual prejudice. Both are subject to patriarchal hierarchies against which they revolt, despite apparently being mere adjuncts to their creators. Through this comparison, the inequality and sexism pervasive in society is ripe with nuance.

The Creature and Eve share a love of nature. Eve is the complete embodiment of the natural world, 'Mother of all things living'⁴ whilst nature is presented as the Creature's only solace, 'my chief delights were the sight of the flowers, the birds, and all the gay apparel of summer'⁵, vital to emotional wellbeing, his 'spirits were elevated by the enchanting appearance of nature'⁶. The Creature who lives in a wild and natural landscape, of 'deserted mountains and...glaciers are my refuge'⁷ also forages for food, 'went out in search of berries'⁸. Similar to Eve, who lives in a paradise of natural wonders and who 'prepar'd / For dinner savoury fruits, of...Berry or Grape'⁹. Aligning the Creature with nature appears provocatively ironic, as he is a synthetic, scientific creation. However, affiliating the Creature with Eve's natural realm sparks an initial sense of femininity within the Creature, one that gradually becomes increasingly evident.

Both Eve and the Creature are formed in similarly contrived ways. They are born as naked adults, physically made out of the parts of man, void from any feminine influence. Both formations seem grotesque and violent, Victor recalls, 'I collected bones from charnel-

¹ Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*. Ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

² Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

³ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 105

⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 277, line 160, Book XI

⁵ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 107

⁶ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 92

⁷ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 78

⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 80

⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 124, line 304-307, Book V

houses...the dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials'¹⁰. Likewise, God uses Adam's rib to form Eve:

'From thence a Rib, with cordial spirits warme,
And Life-blood streaming fresh; wide was the wound,

...

The Rib he formd and fashond with his hands;
Under his forming hands a Creature grew,
Manlike, but different sex'¹¹

Shelley's birth scene is intrinsically linked with death, whilst Milton's pertains an element of visceral brutality. As Moers notes, there is a 'motif of revulsion against newborn life'¹². This 'revulsion' both writers portray may stem from their personal, traumatic experiences with birth and subsequently death. Mary's mother died shortly after her birth, whilst Milton wife died in childbirth¹³. Shelley mimics Milton's use of 'Creature' and 'limb': 'the dull yellow eye of the creature open, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs'¹⁴, a direct comparison to Eve that draws attention to Milton's obscure description. The lack of female involvement in the respective births defies the laws of nature, condemning both Eve and the Creature to a life of imbalance. For Shelley, a female-less birth has gravity as her mother, Wollstonecraft, insisted on having only a midwife present for her birth, but due to minor complications had to consult a male doctor, who transmitted puerperal fever: 'an infection introduced by Dr Poignand's unsterile hands'¹⁵ which led to her agonising death. The idea of a solely male birth seems therefore inevitably linked to death and monstrosity.

However, a crucial diversifying point between Eve and the Creature is their respective receptions into the world and its hierarchy. A strikingly visual moment of comparison is when Eve and the Creature discover their own reflections in pools of water. They are physically very different: Eve is beautiful yet the Creature is 'hideous'¹⁶. What should be a spontaneous moment of self-recognition reveals the underlying prejudices faced by both the innocent Creature and Eve. Levels of outward attraction are relational rather than independent; to be seen as attractive requires the judgment of another. Therefore, Eve and the Creature are responding to the socially imposed opinions rather than genuine revelations of themselves. The Creature sees himself as a 'monster' while Eve sees herself as a 'fair creature', these qualifications of worthiness are collectively subjective and judgmental. Eve's discovery of her beauty is described:

'A shape within the watery gleam appeared
Bending to look on me, I started back,
It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had a voice thus warned me, What thoe seest,
What there thou seest fair creature is thyself'¹⁷

In parallel, the Creature experiences entirely different emotions:

¹⁰ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 36-7

¹¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 200, Book VIII, Lines 465-71

¹² Moers, Ellen, 'Female Gothic' in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*. Ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfmacher (Berkeley: University of California, 1982) Pg. 81

¹³ Orgel, Stephen and Jonathan Goldberg 'Introduction' in John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. xi

¹⁴ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 38-9

¹⁵ Sampson, Fiona, *In Search of Mary Shelley, The Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein*, (London: Profile Books, 2018) pg. 18-21

¹⁶ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 40

¹⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 98, lines 453-468, Book IV

'but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became full convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity.'¹⁸

Shelley's identical use of the phrase 'started back' appears as a direct call for comparison. Similarly, Eve's echoing and embracing her first description as 'creature' is in contrast with Shelley's transition to 'monster'. This moment can be seen to project Eve's supposed narcissism¹⁹, hinting at her inner corruption. Further condemning Eve, her appraisal as beautiful is twisted to reveal an inner monstrosity of personality: vanity. Shelley's parody of Eve's self-love replaced with the Creature's self-loathing underlines the inequality in society. A superficially-oriented patriarchy has imposed preconceptions of beauty on innocent creatures. As a woman, Eve is socially disadvantaged but is able to gain love through her beauty whereas the male Creature, who is mentally and physically extremely able, is deformed and therefore completely rejected by society. Baldick highlights the use of placing these preconceptions within the innocent Eve and Creature: 'the monster's initial naïveté is a useful device by which Mary Shelley can lift the veil of familiarity from our view of social institutions, exposing their inequalities afresh' as could also be argued of Milton with Eve. Shelley and Milton are stressing the corrupting influence of superficial inequality and injustice based on patriarchal authority and judgment.

Compounding this argument, the Creature and Eve not only reflect the views of the patriarchy but they are in fact supplementary embodiments of their male creators, Victor and Adam. They are described to be within and part of their creators emotionally and physically. As Adam states:

'the bond of nature draw me to my own,
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
Our state cannot be severed, we are one,
One flesh; to lose thee were to lose my self'²⁰

Adam is intrinsically linked to Eve in every way, 'we are one'. Similarly, Victor, describes his connection to the Creature, 'the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave'²¹, later remarking, 'the fiend that lurked in my heart'²². Both Adam and Victor refer to Eve and the Creature as their personal possessions; 'my own', 'mine'. As Ronald states: 'Adam wants another self, and so one is invented for him, her apparent autonomy and interiority serving as his possession'²³. There is a sense that Eve and the Creature are intrinsically bound to Adam and Victor not as individuals, but as supplementary to the patriarchy. However, Eve and the Creature serve a crucial purpose to the hierarchies they are bound to by allowing the patriarchal domination of the 'weaker'²⁴.

The Creature and Eve are ultimately at the command of patriarchy, theocracy and social hierarchy. Both Eve and the Creature appeal to their social superiors to perform their natural roles as paternal figures. However, they are subject to morally questionable and inadequate creators. Adam and Victor's mutual inability to accept fault and take responsibility for their creations, underscores the failings of the patriarchy. Eve questions Adam after her wrongful

¹⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 90

¹⁹ Levao, Ronald. "'Among Unequals What Society": Paradise Lost and the Forms of Intimacy.' *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61.1 (2000): 79-107, (pg. 90)

²⁰ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 233, lines 956-9, Book IX

²¹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 57

²² Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Pg. 72

²³ Levao, "'Among unequals what society": Paradise Lost and forms of intimacy' *Modern Language Quarterly*, pg. 88

²⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 217, line 383, Book IX

damnation: 'being as I am, why didst not thou the Head / Command me absolutely not to go'²⁵. This is a sentiment Burden acknowledges: 'Adam was meant to shape his wife's decisions, and when he relinquishes that authority, as he does in approving her freedom, he causes, so to speak, her fall and his own.'²⁶

Correspondingly, the Creature calls on the responsibility of Victor: 'I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, thou which thou owest me'²⁷. If Eve and the Creature are automatically placed at an extreme social disadvantage due to the inability of Adam and Victor to fulfill their roles, what expectation could there be for them to submit to their creators' complete autonomy?

Naturally, both Eve and the Creature rebel against their creators and the inadequate patriarchy. Shelley's mother, 'Wollstonecraft, admits that rebels are monsters, but she resolutely insists that these monsters are social products...of oppression and misrule...driven to rebellion', and will naturally and 'eventually turn against their oppressor in parricidal fashion'²⁸ a sentiment highly applicable to both Eve and the Creature. Rhetoric is one of the ways that the Creature and Eve rebel and their eloquence is astounding. Despite initially being given less narratorial agency or voice, they prove themselves to be revolutionary poets. Eve is able to utilise and usurp the voice of male authority in her wielding and understanding of logical empiricism and impassioned reasoning. As McColley acknowledges even: 'Eve's work in paradise is a metaphor for the creation of poetry, and through her gardening, song and prayers she speaks for Milton'²⁹. Additionally, Wittreich observes 'the poetry of Eve's final speech, a sonnet' which was 'in the Renaissance, gender-oriented' as masculine shows 'Eve's appropriation of male discourse'³⁰.

Similarly, the Creature does not conform to his outward deformity and is able to reason with both Victor and Walton, who remark on: 'his powers of eloquence and persuasion'³¹. As Baldick states: 'the decision to give the monster an articulate voice is Mary Shelley's most important subversion of the category of the monstrosity'³². As with Eve's account of the fall, the Creature's dialogue is poetically superior to that of other characters.

Through the equal mental abilities of Eve and the Creature, they are able to usurp narrative focus from the predominantly patriarchal voices, as they refuse to be muted. Eve reflects much of Milton's own revolutionary tendencies, as he wrote eloquent controversial texts such as 'The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates' in 1649 which 'argued against the divine right of Kings' and 'the right of people to remove a tyrannical monarch'³³. Similarly, Shelley uses her powers of rhetoric to rebel, being the child of two revolutionary writers, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, she stamps a name for herself in her own right, making 'the Gothic novel into what today we call science fiction...she herself was a mother'³⁴ of this genre, the Creature acting as an emblem for this new trope.

²⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 238, lines 1152-3, Book IX

²⁶ Revard, Stella, 'Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in *Paradise Lost*' *PMLA*, 88.1 (1973) 69-78. (pg. 69)

²⁷ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pg. 77

²⁸ Sterrenburg, Lee, 'Politics and the Psyche in *Frankenstein*' in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, ed. Levine and Knoepfmacher, Pg. 162

²⁹ McColley, Diane, 'Eve and the Arts of Eden', in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) in 'Abstracts', ed. Margaret Cheney, *Milton Quarterly*, 24:4, (1990) 150-152 (pg. 151)

³⁰ Wittreich, Joseph, *Feminist Milton*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) Pg. 103

³¹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pg. 188

³² Baldick, Chris, *The Monster Speaks, In Frankenstein's Shadow, Myth Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-century Writing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) pg. 45, Chapter 3

³³ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Pg. xi (introduction)

³⁴ Moers, 'Female Gothic', *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, Pg. 162

However, rebellion takes not only the form of words, but also the very physical make-up of Eve and the Creature. Their androgynous behaviour marks a distinct rejection of the suffocating social stereotypes. The Creature, who has an extremely masculine physicality, displays feminine sensibility in his desires and hopes. Shelley's Creature craves affection, domestic bliss and love, identifying that initially his 'heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy'³⁵. This echoes Eve's earlier notions when seeing her reflection 'it returned as soon with answering looks/ Of sympathy and love'³⁶. Here the Creature completely embodies and mirrors Eve's femininity.

Thus, the Creature is not only a rebel, but a feminine rebel, as Sterrenburg notes, 'the critics who see Mary Shelley's monster as a furtively female character have a historical precedent on their side. The most extravagant and demonic pictures of mass insurrectionary violence in both Wollstonecraft and Burke concern female rebels'³⁷. Furthermore, Baldick acknowledges, Shelley's 'mother's memory taught her to question the category of 'monstrous' and empathize with moral outcasts'³⁸. Shelley is questioning the patriarchy and the unjust social constructs surrounding gender.

However, when reading of masculine heroes the Creature wishes, 'perhaps, if my first introduction to humanity had been made by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter, I should have been imbued with different sensations'³⁹. Tragically, the Creature, struggling against the preordained patriarchal structure of masculinity, falters and becomes violently 'monstrous' due to the ease with which he can wield his brute force. Shelley indicates that the Creature is born innocent with feminine sensibilities of 'love and sympathy' yet masculine violence is a corrupting force. As noted by Sterrenburg, 'the monster's rhetorical style tells us that his identity as a rebel was learned not innate'⁴⁰. The Creature is driven to rebellion due to the insufficient patriarchy suppressing, confusing and corrupting inner individuality and gender fluidity.

Similarly, Eve rebels by utilising her gender fluidity. Eve, the epitome of feminine physicality, is able to embody the masculine mentality of independence, empirical logic and reason. As one critic noted, 'Milton's God...envisions woman on a continuum in the background as heaven, a planet, earth itself, or a foreign land and in the foreground as asexual, presexual, nearly androgynous Eve'⁴¹. The androgyny of Eve can be seen in her questioning the paradoxical elements to Milton's epic as seen in three crucial moments:

How are we happie, still in fear of harm?⁴²

Eve calmly and intellectually challenges the entire foundation of Paradise; questioning the falsified sentiment of safety whilst in constant danger. This is a fundamental issue within the epic. Secondly, Eve eats the fruit because she sees logical reason in what the Serpent tells her:

'How dies the Serpent? hee hath eat'n and lives,
And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discernes,
Irrational till then.'⁴³

³⁵ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pg. 188

³⁶ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, lines 465-6, Book IV

³⁷ Sterrenburg, 'Politics and the Psyche in *Frankenstein*' in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, Pg. 163

³⁸ Baldick, *The Monster Speaks, In Frankenstein's Shadow*, pg. 38, Chapter 3

³⁹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pg. 104

⁴⁰ Sterrenburg, Lee 'Politics and the Psyche in *Frankenstein*' in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, Pg. 161

⁴¹ Corum, Richard, 'In White Ink: Paradise Lost and Milton's Ideas of Women' in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Walker in 'Abstracts', ed. Cheney, *Milton Quarterly*, p. 150

⁴² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 215, line 326, Book IX

⁴³ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 228, lines 764-7, Book IX

As Fish states: 'Satan proceeds to initiate Eve into the mysteries of empirical science' and 'not to believe anything which does not tally with evidence'⁴⁴. Eve rejects her initial ideals of blind faith and instead implements reason and rationality. Thirdly, Eve takes up another point of conflict: how could she have pre-empted the trickery of Satan when she is not versed in the concept of lying or evil?

'Fraud in the Serpent, speaking as he spake;
No ground of enmitie between us known,
Why hee should mean me ill, or seek to harme.
Was I to have never parted from thy side?
As good have grown there still a liveless Rib.'⁴⁵

Eve is able to use stereotypically 'masculine' intellect to make informed decisions despite patriarchal censorship of her knowledge. As Woods notes: 'Milton gives [Eve]...the power of reason, but they exist in a male dominated world that reflects Milton's own society...[she] attains the fullest, yet still limited, agency'⁴⁶. Eve effortlessly debates and questions the major conflicts within the epic and consequently the Bible, however is still restricted by the social structure. Similar to the Creature, Eve's mingling of 'feminine' and 'masculine' qualities result in her fall, as she chooses to disobey God. Challenging the patriarchy through masculine intellect, Eve is met with punishment, 'her sin is not in wanting to be free, but in presuming that she is, in not knowing her place in the natural hierarchy'⁴⁷.

Ultimately, there seems to be little allowance for a merging of the two gender spheres into the androgynous or fluid as both the Creature and Eve experience turmoil. It is the fluidity of both Eve and the Creature that appear to be 'corrupted' or monstrous. Milton and Shelley police gender norms by displaying the consequences of gender transgression. Yet, through alluding to the possibility of blurred gender boundaries, the reader is able to see the opportunity of a more equal society, if these peripheries were in fact accessible. Regarding both Eve and the Creature as female rebels against the patriarchy, it is plausible to understand how they have both received negative connotations and depictions. Eve and the Creature are often deemed literary terrorists, due to their subversive natures. However, they are products of their oppressive environments, calling out for a revolution in gender equality.

The Creature and Eve act as revolutionary characters highlighting the inescapable discrimination faced by those deemed 'inferior'. Eve states a sentiment that unites them both: 'for inferior who is free?'⁴⁸. The stifling social structures of Eve and the Creature set them on the path to becoming notorious literary icons, as they ultimately rebel against fated narratives. It is readily apparent that the inequality and misconduct of traditional male power structures ultimately destroys paradisiacal social spheres. Both texts highlight the devastating effects of the masculine obsession with the patriarchy. The literary outcasts, Eve and the Creature continue to be relevant today, inspiring many facets of our popular culture for their subversive nature. Both figures are transgressive in their moral deviances, however they are revolutionary in their fight for equality and justice, "among unequals what society / can sort, what harmony or true delight?"⁴⁹.

⁴⁴ Fish, Stanley, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, 2nd Edn, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998) pg. 249-250

⁴⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, P. 238, lines 1150-54, Book IX

⁴⁶ Woods, Susanne 'How Free are Milton's Women', in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Walker, in 'Abstracts', ed. Cheney, *Milton Quarterly*, pg. 152

⁴⁷ Orgel, Stephen and Jonathan Goldberg 'Introduction' in John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. xxiii

⁴⁸ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 230, lines 223-5, Book IX

⁴⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pg. 96, Lines 383, Book VII

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