

The Frankenstein Prophecies:

The Monster's Tale

Eight Questions and Replies

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The Melting Polar Ice:

Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of the Dying of Nature?

He works continuously, feverishly, often without sleep for long periods of time, consumed as he is with his project to create life. For two years he shuts himself off from family and friends and most of all from Elizabeth Lavenza, his wife to be. Now almost in despair he feels he has failed, for the thing that he has labored so laboriously to infuse with the spark of life lies lifeless on the table.

Exhausted, he falls into sleep. But soon Victor Frankenstein is disturbed and awakened by the thing he has made. His dream has been realized.

In the fragile, wispy fabric of the dream, this moment weaves together Mary Shelley, Victor Frankenstein, the Monster and us. Just as Victor Frankenstein was born from Mary Shelley's waking dream, the Monster has been born from his maker's dream to create life, which we are still dreaming.

Has the thing itself been dreaming as he stirred into life, dreaming on the edge of that previously impassable boundary between death and life?

Might it have been as much his dream as it was the spark of electricity that awakened him into life?

What dream might the Monster have been dreaming?

Have we come to know his dream as our nightmare?

Conceived by Man, Not Born of Woman

This thing with no name, this thing that will never be named by his creator but only labeled as monster, devil, demon is an abomination of nature. No womb has housed and protected his fragile being. He will not suckle at a mother's breast nor ever be nourished by a mother's milk. No mother's arms will ever cradle him in his sorrows, nor will a mother's eyes ever grace him with a loving regard. Never will he hear a mother's voice whisper words of comfort. Never will he hear a mother's song to soothe his troubled heart.

Perhaps this motherless thing called monster by his creator and abandoned by him foresees in his dream that he is to be also without a mate.

Perhaps he fears a life of utter loneliness.

Is that the destiny for him of his unnatural birth, a thing born of his creator's Promethean Mind, whose very being is so out of touch with the natural order of things that he is condemned to wander forever alone and in exile, an outcast from the human community?

Is the nightmarish quality of such an existence what shocks him into life?

It is unbearable and now on his birthday does he already conceive his plan to appeal to his creator to make him a mate to assuage his loneliness?

Death in Moonlight

Even the first Adam had his Eve to assuage his loneliness, but the Monster has no feminine companion. In his loneliness he appeals several times to his maker to create a mate for him but Victor continuously refuses, horrified at the possibility of creating another monstrous thing. In time however, even Victor, who has been deaf all along to any of his appeals, is moved by the

Monster's sorrow. Acknowledging, at least for a moment, that he does have obligations to the thing he has made, Victor assents to his request. But Victor sets one condition and exacts from the Monster a binding promise:

“I consent to your demand, on your solemn oath to quit Europe forever, and every other place in the neighborhood of man, as soon as I shall deliver into your hands a female who will accompany you in your exile.’ (1)

Already alone and in exile, the Monster readily agrees to Victor's demand. In his brief and miserable existence is this the first time the Monster knows the human experience of hope? Perhaps there will be an Eve for him as there was for the first Adam.

His hope, however, is not to be fulfilled.

Sometime later Victor begins his journey to the wild highlands of northern Scotland where he intends to begin the work of making a mate for the Monster. And yet even as he travels toward the place where he will fulfill his promise, his soul is being gnawed by a sense of his own despair. Describing this moment in his story to Captain Walton, the image of the blasted tree trunk comes to mind. That event, which figured so prominently in his youthful imagination about one day emulating the powers of nature, now becomes an emblem of his misery:

“But I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul; and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit, what I shall soon cease to be—a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity, pitiable to others, and abhorrent to myself.”(2)

In this reflection is he describing only himself, or is he also describing the Monster he has created and abandoned?

In this brief moment do we catch a glimpse of the kinship between Victor Frankenstein and the Monster he made, the doubling between the creator god and his abandoned creation, each pitiable to others, and abhorrent to themselves?

In this momentary pause along his journey is there for Victor Frankenstein some dim recognition that the Monster is not other to himself, some dawning

but intolerable awareness that he has become the very thing he has made?

Perhaps, in this brief descent into his misery Victor Frankenstein is confronted for the first time with the question, 'Who is the Monster.'

As if pulled by some unseen forces, Victor Frankenstein finally does arrive at the place where he will begin his second act of creation. But he is slow to begin his work. The manic fury that drove the first act of creation is absent, and for days at a time he abandons his laboratory and wanders the wild and windy hills of the Scottish landscape, as if trying to escape his troublesome task. Doubt is increasingly worming its way into his Promethean Mind eroding the dream he once had of becoming a new kind of god who would free life from the Spoiler, Death.

Here in his own words spoken to Walton is a description of his state of mind:

“...as I proceeded in my labour, it became every day more horrible and irksome to me. Sometimes I could not prevail on myself to enter my laboratory for several days; and at other times I toiled day and night to complete my work. It was indeed a filthy process in which I was engaged. During my first experiment, a kind of enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment...But now I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands.”(3)

Eventually as the work is near completion he is overwhelmed again with the horror of what he has done and is now about to do to fulfill his promise to the Monster. As the moon is rising he catches sight of the Monster bathed in moonlight standing outside the window. In moonlight the promised mate, Victor and the Monster are drawn together.

She lies on the table, a feminine counterpart to the Monster Victor had made.

But what do Victor and the Monster see in moonlight?

For the Monster her disfigured form so like his own is no obstacle to his quickening hope and perhaps even joy. But for Victor there is no joy, there is only despair. In the full light of the moon his dream becomes a nightmare. The feminine mate he would make for his Monster awakens Victor to the

monstrous shadows of his own mind. Until this moment those monstrous images were placed on his Monster, carved into his disfigured flesh. But now in moonlight, She mirrors Victor's own tortured and corrupted heart.(4) In moonlight She is a reminder of the perverse act he has committed against nature in conceiving life apart from woman. Life and death as only an ideal boundary that he could and would abolish by pouring a torrent of light onto the dark world of death is now mocked by her still and lifeless form.

But moonlight, so different than the solar light of Victor's Promethean Mind, which had excluded woman from the generative act of procreation, and which has guided his work, is too much for him to bear. This softer, darker light of the moon, which in so many of our myths and stories is linked to the feminine qualities of mind, is the other side of the solar light of Victor's mind. She is the shadow of the light of Victor's Promethean Mind. She is the nightmarish countenance of his wildly speculative dreams.

In terror Victor wonders what might happen if She were now to draw her first breath. If She were to come to life would the Monster keep his promise to quit the neighborhoods of mankind forever? Or, would they propagate and in producing offspring fill the world with a race of devils that would terrorize the heart of humanity and even imperil its existence?

Moonlight, lunar light, lunacy now bewitches Victor. The dead woman in moonlight drives him mad. As his Monster watches in horror and disbelief, Victor aborts her creation. Descending into a fury of malicious destruction, he rips her form to pieces to be thrown later into a deep, cold Scottish lake where She will sink into oblivion, into an unmarked grave where no rituals of mourning will ever be performed.

The Monster now knows that unlike any creature who has a mate, he forevermore will be alone. His wretched isolation is now complete and only one act remains for him when his one hope has been destroyed. As rage replaces his sorrow he vows that Victor will, like himself, never know happiness or peace. The torrent of light that Victor had dreamed of pouring into the dark corners of death will now with every morning sunrise shed light only on his maker's misery. Facing his creator, the Monster addresses him generically, as if it is not only the person of Victor who will pay for his crime, but all of humanity, who share the hubris of the Promethean Mind that would play at being a god who would erase death from life:

‘Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict.’ (5)

Pausing for only a breath, he promises that he will be with Victor on his wedding night.

The Wedding Night

He will be with his maker on his wedding night. This threat by the Monster to visit vengeance on his creator is a pivot where the tale of Victor and his Monster turns back upon itself. Now the Monster who was born of man and man alone becomes the agent of destruction. A blind and ruthless force of nature as it were, the Monster murders Elizabeth Lavenza, his maker’s mate to be, on their wedding night. It is an action that mirrors Victor’s crime against nature, when he dreamed of being a god who would exclude woman from the creative act of procreation. It is an act that reveals the price to be paid for Victor’s hubris. Elizabeth Lavenza, lying dead on her wedding bed, is the double of the Monster’s mate torn to pieces on Victor’s laboratory table. Elizabeth Lavenza is the shadow of the Monster’s aborted mate and together they display the discarded, excluded, exiled feminine as dead.

Is the dead woman the price exacted by the god like hubris of the Promethean Mind? (6)

Who lies in that watery grave where Frankenstein rid himself of the Monster’s mate that he destroyed?

As her shadow image might Elizabeth Lavenza reflect something of her? If she does, then we can imagine that She who lies in that unmarked grave would be like Elizabeth.

But who is Elizabeth Lavenza?

We know her only through Victor’s eyes and perhaps the most specific sense we get of her is when Victor speaks of their youth to Captain Walton and draws this comparison:

“I delighted in investigating the facts of the actual world; she busied herself in following the aerial creations of the poets. The world was to me a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy, which she sought to people with imaginations of her own.”(7)

It seems a charming portrait, but it does depict her as naïve and even childlike, less a person in her own right and more a foil and even, as the wedding night shows, a sacrifice to Victor's life and work. So, Elizabeth never really lived just as the Monster's mate will never live. Both women are aborted, one quite physically and the other psychologically.

But, still, in the deep waters of her tomb does She have a name?

Victor's story is a re-telling of the Christian story of creation. He is a male creator god who engineers through the powers of science and technology a new resurrection. As such he not only repeats the exclusion of Woman from the act of creation, he repeats the Christian story within which Woman is the spoiler of creation. Just as Eve is at fault and is blamed for the fall from Paradise, the Monster's mate in moonlight spoils Victor's dream to be a new god. Death and Woman are identified in the spectator mind. Having omitted Woman in his first act of creation, Victor now destroys her presence in the second act. (8)

Perhaps, then, in the deep waters of her tomb the Monster's mate does have a name. Perhaps She is the new Eve, counterpart to the Monster as the new Adam.

Is that what Victor sees as he looks at her in moonlight?

In her disfigured form is She the image of the price to be paid for the dream of man and man alone to be the creator of life?

Abandoned and forgotten has She taken her story to the grave?

Neglected does her story nevertheless go on, haunting us from those watery depths?

From her watery tomb is She the face and form of revenge of the murdered feminine?

Frankenstein as Prophecy

Nature on the Rack

While it is questionable if Francis Bacon, sixteenth century visionary and prophet of the new sciences, actually said that the new sciences were to put nature on the rack to torture her secrets from her, the spirit of those words and that image have not been incompatible with the methods and development of science until more recent times. (9) Its probing, questioning mode designed to force nature to answer the questions put to her has framed the dialogue for aspects of nature that could be measured. Power and domination over nature were at the heart of this method. Insofar as Bacon's alleged words identified nature with the feminine, this exercise of power and domination would apply to the feminine. They, like nature, were to speak only in reply to what was asked of them. Nature and the feminine lost their own autonomous voices.

Was the spirit of Bacon's words and their horrific image a condition that made Victor's dream possible?

Is Victor's laboratory table a form of that 'rack'?

Have we become Nature's torturer?

Victor's dream begins in response to his mother's death. And his dream comes to its tragic ending with the murder of his beloved Elizabeth. But Death as the Spoiler he would banish from life returns. The new Eve, the aborted feminine, the dead woman in moonlight linger on today in their prophetic presence as the dying of nature.

The oceans of the world are becoming increasingly acidic and poisonous to many species of marine life, including the erosion of the Great Barrier Reef, the largest life form on Earth.

The rain forests of the Amazon, the lungs of the planet, are being sacrificed as resources for economic use and abuse.

Animal and plant species are disappearing in record numbers, as, for example, polar bears in the Arctic face an increasing rise in sea levels from the polar ice which is melting at even faster rates than predicted because of the insatiable appetites for fossil fuels that are the engine of the industrial world.

The facts are overwhelming and in their magnitude it often seems easier to

turn away, to slip into some form of denial that would believe things cannot be that bad. But in 2017 the world witnessed catastrophic global weather events that were too shocking to ignore.

For example, Hurricane Harvey, which devastated Houston, Galveston, Corpus Christ and Port Arthur, Texas, was described as a storm that would happen maybe once every thousand years. But within days, Hurricane Irma, which followed Harvey, left Puerto Rico's infrastructure in near total ruin, and in that same week, storms left one third of the nation of Bangladesh under water. A major factor in these storms is the increase in ocean temperature related to the atmospheric emissions released by fossil fuels.

Fossil Fuels

The term fossil is part of the phrase fossil fuels that is so embedded in our global vocabulary that it rolls off the tongue without much thought. But as with all words there is or can be an image of its meaning, and in the context of Mary Shelley's story the image of a fossil plays a key role in Victor Frankenstein's dream.

A fossil is a piece of dead matter, the remains of decayed material of something that was once alive. It is a trace of an organism of some past geological age buried in nature. But whatever it is that is dead and buried, the word fossil refers specifically to what is to be or can be dug up. It is dead matter that is transformed into some use.

Its use is as fuel and in its many forms coal is the fossil that most fuels our energy economy. Our collective, global appetites for increasing amounts of energy are fueled by the dead. We dig deeply into nature to dig up the dead, decaying remains of what once was alive.

So does Victor Frankenstein! In churchyard cemeteries he digs up the dead remains of human beings to fuel his dream of creating life. The dead are of use to his work in transforming death into life.

Port Arthur, Texas

Port Arthur is the largest petro-chemical plant in the western hemisphere. It is a city whose refineries were created to change the fossil fuels ripped from the earth and the oceans into a saleable commodity. As such, it is a place

where the climate crises of nature and our collective ravenous appetite for energy, coupled with the profit motive and greed of our capitalist, corporate culture, clash. **(10)**

Is Port Arthur, Texas, a place where Frankenstein's dream has become a fossil, where he and his work show themselves to be a way of life that is not only outdated, but also dangerous to nature and to us?

Are these monstrous storms the monster made the hubris of the Promethean Mind playing god as it tortures nature's secrets from her?

Are these rains and flooding waters the Monster's mate rising up from her watery grave?

Are these storms the fury of the feminine that would no longer be silenced?

Is this the new normal that arises from nature on the rack, a new normal that is nerve racking?

When will it be enough for a sea change to happen, for another image other than the rack to rise up from the roiling waters?

Earthrise -1968

On December 24, 1968, the Apollo 8 mission was in lunar orbit when astronaut Bill Anders took a photograph of Earth rising above the moon's surface into the black deep of space. It is an image that changed everything because for the first time in human history we were able to see the lonely beauty of our planet as home. From the distance of the moon the planet became an intimate home. Three years earlier the Russian cosmonaut, Alexei Leonov, who was the first human to walk in space, described the Earth as "Our home that must be defended like a holy relic."**(11)**

The irony of this image is that the technology that made it possible is also the technology that has racked nature. The crises of technology's Promethean dream are a danger and an opportunity. The opportunity of this image is that its frail beauty awakens a sense of the sacred, numinous dimension of nature so eclipsed in the materialism that has regarded nature as an inanimate resource for our use.

Such moments might seem like miracles, but they are open to each of us when and if we pause to be a witness to the extraordinary in the ordinary, the miracle in the mundane. Such moments are possible when and if we make a place for Elizabeth Lavenza, Victor's bride to be, whose imagination he only tolerated as a frivolous, feminine quality to fill the vacancy of nature

An Epiphany of Wonder

Sitting in the garden of our house in Fanjeaux, a very small village in the Aude region of France, where I have come to write this book, I am thinking how this landscape and its light remind me of the paintings that were done by the French Impressionists, I am spellbound by the way in which nature displays itself in its stillness and quiet repose, as if it is still wondering if it should awaken on this morning, as if this quotidian event of the rising sun that we take for granted is each morning a kind of miracle.

Am I a figure in a painting dreaming I am sitting in a garden in Fanjeaux, France?

Am I a person sitting in a garden in Fanjeaux, France dreaming I am a figure in a painting?

The boundaries between mind and nature are blurred as the 'I' that I am seems to dissolve, as happened once before in the fields of Antarctic Ice, and once before that in a hide in the bush of South Africa as the sun rose and the animals appeared at the water hole formed as if from the mist.

Before the word, before the thought, before the idea there is the gesture of a pointing finger in response to the opulence of the world's display. Children do it all the time and we, if we attend to the moment, understand that the pointing finger sketches out a path toward and into wonder.

In this place and in this moment thinking is dreaming!

So, as I give my arm and hand over to the world, I follow the arc of the finger toward the vast field of undulating hills that roll on toward the Black Mountains. The hills are terraced and dotted with patches of brown earth, oasis of green trees, nearby hilltop villages and the constant play of light and shadows as the sun wanders, almost shamelessly, stretching and spreading itself out upon the land. The Black Mountains appears as a great high wave that has been building up as the hills roll toward it and at its apogee is just

about to break upon the land. A play of tides! An erotic dance to the music of creation!

I can hear the music in the braying of a donkey that now and then sounds in the distance. Is it a cry of melancholy that this beauty of the natural world awakens? Do we share in some unknown way a bond of kinship as creatures that belong together to the earth? Is it in this great surround of nature that somehow his donkey world and mine come together?

The air as it glides through the trees tempts my nose with smells of summer fruit and caresses my skin with a touch as cool as blue water. The aroma of lavender rides the wind and I can hear the buzzing of bees as they go about their work that is a major mainstay of our food supply. The sensual flesh of my body vibrates in this erotic coupling with the sensuous flesh of the world. In this moment all the world is holy and I suspect that our first responsive reply to the world is always a kind of prayer.

Time moves slowly and the relative silence becomes a doorway into the timeless sacred. A hint of eternity is cradled in the silence.

The Melting Polar Ice

As Victor Frankenstein nears the end of telling his story to Captain Walton, the Monster that he created waits in the darkness of the cold Arctic night. After all the deaths that have happened in the wake of Victor's Promethean dream, only one thing remains for the Monster. As the Monster admits his own guilt for all that has happened, he seeks from Victor what his maker has never acknowledged, some small spark of awareness of his own guilt for all that has happened. In their final encounter the Monster seeks a kind of blessing from his maker, some small sign of redemption, some few words from Frankenstein that would finally release him from his torment.

Looking upon his maker, he acknowledges that Victor Frankenstein is also his victim and he cries out:

“... in his murder my crimes are consummated ; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close! Oh, Frankenstein! generous and self devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me?”(12)

But his maker is already dead and so there is no pardon bestowed upon him. For the last time he is now utterly abandoned and in the agony of this final loneliness, and in the presence of Captain Walton, who has been present throughout this final act, the Monster speaks these words that would seem to seal his fate:

“I shall quit your vessel on the ice raft that brought me hither, and shall seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch, who would create such another as I have been. I shall die.” **(13)**

And so the story of Victor Frankenstein and his Monster winds back upon itself toward its end. The light of the Promethean Mind that created him is now to be extinguished in the frozen reaches of the Arctic night in the flames of the Monster’s self destruction.

“I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace...Farewell.”**(14)**

With these words the Monster departs. Captain Walton, who is the last witness of the Monster’s presence, records the scene:

“He sprung from the cabin window, as he said this, upon the ice raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance.” **(15)**

Mary Shelley’s story ends here, but is it finished?

Has the light faded away?

Does the Monster’s spirit sleep in peace?

Is he now gone forever into darkness?

Is the Monster dead?

Is the fire still burning?

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on!” (16)

Victor Frankenstein’s Prometheus Project is the stuff on which our collective dreams are made on, an economy so addicted to unlimited growth, whose global appetite is so ravenous and insatiable, consuming the resources of nature at a rate that seems monstrous, that it is now at odds with the finite limits of nature (17)

In 2009, after I returned from a journey to the Antarctic, I made a DVD *Antarctica: Inner Journeys in the Outer World*. (18) I was drawn to that place through a dream that I had had thirty years earlier, a dream, which I had forgotten but which had not forgotten me. Drawn to that marginal landscape I met the Monster at the end of the world. In that place, my dream found its source in Mary Shelley’s dream, Victor Frankenstein’s dream and the Monster’s dream as he crossed the threshold from death into life.

The Antarctic, a place of the heart as much as a location on a map, is a place where the awful beauty of the Monster shows its face. In that landscape of stillness and silence, of solitude and serenity, the intimate bond between mind and nature awakens the imagination, and from the depths of life a sorrow arises over the ways in which that bond is continuously and ever more ruthlessly being frayed. In that place its icy forms are like crystal cathedrals that house an ancient kind of prayer.

Antarctica: Inner Journeys in the Outer World and *The Frankenstein Prophecies* are homecomings, brief respites from the sense of not being so comfortably at home in the Promethean world.

