

Inuit Diasporas: *Frankenstein* and the Inuit in England

In 1818, when Mary Shelley published the first edition of *Frankenstein*, the *Isabella* and *Alexander* set forth from England on a journey of exploration to the North Pole, carrying a Greenlandic Inuit from Disko Island by the name of John Sackhouse. Sackhouse, who had previously stowed away on a whaler from Greenland to Scotland, would serve as the translator on this voyage, enabling communication with the Inuit people along the way.¹ While the *Isabella* and *Alexander* were searching for a Northwest Passage across northern America, the *Dorothea* and *Trent* headed 'across the north pole', hoping to meet the *Isabella* and *Alexander* at the Bering Strait.² At the time, it was believed that the North Pole was 'free of ice', making a meeting like this possible. Mary Shelley, an avid reader of the *Quarterly Review* between 1816 and 1820, followed speculations surrounding these journeys in preparation for writing *Frankenstein*.³ *Frankenstein*, in fact, could be said to capitalize on the suspense and widely popular appeal of these journeys. Perhaps not coincidentally, the release of her novel appeared to be timed to coincide with the advent of these infamous expeditions to the North. Besides being captivated by the expeditions themselves, the English public had long been fascinated by Greenlandic Inuits and Eskimos. I would argue that, in *Frankenstein*, the creature himself came to represent these inhabitants of the North, as

well as the threat of their arrival in England if increased communication were to occur. Just as John Sackhouse had once arrived as a stowaway on British shores, so *Frankenstein's* creature is a stranger who must be incorporated in – or rejected from – European culture.⁴ In the novel, the 'birth' of the creature in Europe could be said to represent cultural fears of the invasion of the 'primitive' in 'civilized' society, or the arrival of the colonized, in search of revenge, on the shores of the colonizer.

Since the late sixteenth century, 'Esquimaux Indians' from Greenland to Alaska had been captured by British explorers and carried back to England, where they were generally presented as novelties to the King or Queen. In 1576, Martin Frobisher captured a Greenlandic Inuit who was later described in London as 'such a wonder unto the whole city and to the rest of the realm that heard of it' (Oswalt, 27). In 1578, Eskimos captured off Baffin Island were given permission by the Queen to hunt swans on the Thames River. In 1605, an Inuit performed before the King and Queen of Denmark, racing their traditional kayaks against a Danish boat.⁵ By the late eighteenth century, discussions of these 'Esquimaux Indians' peppered the pages of books and journals ranging from the *Quarterly Review* to John Pinkerton's famous collection, *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in all Parts of the World*.

Central to discussions of these Arctic inhabitants was the issue of appearance; lengthy anthropological-style essays were written by explorers such as James Cook on what an 'Eskimo' *looks like* and what differentiates an Eskimo from other Indians or indigenous peoples. As contact with indigenous peoples from around the world increased, a physiognomic hierarchy (connected to an ethical hierarchy) began to be established in England between indigenous peoples from different parts of the world. Mary Shelley, as an avid reader of *The Quarterly Review*, would have been quite familiar with the almost obsessive discourse about inhabitants of the North.

What is missing from *Frankenstein*, then, is this very discourse about indigenous people in both the *Quarterly Review* and Pinkerton's *Collection*, both of which Mary Shelley read in preparation for writing *Frankenstein*. Warren Montag has commented on the strange 'absence of the proletariat' in *Frankenstein*, suggesting that the creature is an encapsulated representation of these missing masses in the text.⁶ I would suggest, instead, that a more glaring omission is that of the indigenous subjects of the Arctic, who were continually encountered by Arctic explorers. And, just as Mary Shelley overlooked these subjects, so have critics who have written on *Frankenstein* since its publication. In fact, critics largely overlooked Shelley's polar readings until recently, when Jessica Richard published "'A Paradise of My Own Creation": *Frankenstein* and the Improbable Romance of Polar Exploration'. Surprisingly, even Richard completely overlooks the indigenous people that are in these readings, in a sense recreating Shelley's erasure.⁷ Other critics have focused on Orientalist discourse in the novel, particularly about the Middle East and India. Joseph Lew writes that *Frankenstein* is 'highly conscious of the Orient and Orientalist discourse' and is particularly 'obsessed with the impact of

Oriental texts upon western minds' (256).⁸ One need only look at the list of books read in *Frankenstein* (*The Arabian Nights*, *Ruins of Empire*, *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*), or the subplot of Safie's family, to find Orientalism. Anne Mellor has also pointed out that the Godwin and Shelley families were intimately versed in the language of Empire. Mellor uses Shelley's description of the creature's 'yellow skin' to suggest that this coincides with current discourse about the Bengalis, but 'yellow' skin was also used to describe the Samis of the North. I will argue, in fact, that the creature's identity is much more clearly linked to discourses surrounding the 'problem' of indigeneity and European 'discovery', primarily in the Arctic and the Americas, than to the discourse of Orientalism. And yet, even Shelley sublimates her own engagement in this discourse about the Inuit and Eskimo by presenting us, instead, with a creature, an 'Arctic' sighting that begins this terrible and 'unnatural' tale. For this reason, it has been difficult for critics to make this connection between monstrosity and indigeneity, which I will suggest characterizes *Frankenstein*.

The first description of the creature in *Frankenstein* comes from Walton, who claims that he saw something that looked like 'a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island' while his ship was trapped in the ice.⁹ The creature was heading north on a sledge, at the time, demonstrating his superior preparation and ability to navigate through the ice. His physical appearance is described in detail later in the novel: 'His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes ... his shriveled complexion and straight black lips' (Shelley, 58). This description is hauntingly similar to the way that explorers described the

inhabitants of Greenland in Pinkerton's *Collection*. In 1697, Thomas Allison saw Inuit men running away from him on two occasions; the second time, the men 'ran for it upon the snow' and Allison recounted that 'two of which our men could in no wise overtake, but the other they caught'.¹⁰ These men were described as 'broad and square built' with 'the head large in proportion to the body, a flat face, black and tolerably open eyes' and 'a large mouth, and thin lips'. 'Their hair', Allison continued, 'which is as black as jet, but extremely hard and strong, hangs from their shoulders and is very sleek: their complexion is of a yellow brown' (Pinkerton, i. 527). Danish missionary Knud Leems wrote that the Laplanders (now Sami) had a 'dark and swarthy complexion', 'hollow cheeks', and 'waterish eyes', noting that the problem of teary eyes was probably due to both the constant smoke inside their tents and the blowing snow outside (Pinkerton, i. 302). The Laplander, above all else, was constantly noted for his or her 'ugliness'. M. Regnard wrote, 'Generally speaking, it is certain, that all the Laplanders, male and female, are horribly ugly; and very much resemble monkeys' (Pinkerton, i. 193). M. Maupertius similarly wrote, 'It is impossible to exaggerate on their ugliness' (Pinkerton, i. 257). Similarly, the chief attribute of the Shelley's creature is his ugliness: 'a mummy endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch'.

If the Laplanders are described as ugly, however, they are also purported to have 'amazing strength' and dexterity. Leems described them as 'a hardy race, capable of fatigue and cold, beyond the belief of any man' (Pinkerton, i. 302). Besides endurance, the Laplanders were constantly noted for their speed. Regnard wrote, 'the Laplanders run with such remarkable swiftness, that no animal, even the fleetest, can escape them' (Pinkerton, i. 158). Leems wrote, 'They travel over the very highest mountains by the swiftest speed, and faster than thought' (Pinkerton, i. 380). John

Isaac Pontanus claimed that a Laplander 'walked so quickly that it was perfectly astonishing' and 'the sailors imagined there was a little witchcraft in the business' (Pinkerton, i. 126). Like the Laplanders, Shelley's creature also appears to have a superhuman strength, as well as the ability to endure 'incalculable fatigue, and cold, and hunger' (Shelley, 162). For instance, he is described as better adapted to life in the Arctic. The creature leads Victor to the Arctic, stating, 'Follow me; I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive' (171). He also provides survival lessons to Victor along the way, at one point leaving a 'dead hare' for Victor and thus keeping him alive for his journey. Victor finally arrives at the Arctic Ocean and stops to thank 'my guiding spirit for conducting me in safety to the place where I hoped, notwithstanding my adversary's gibe, to meet and grapple with him' (171). Ironically, his 'guiding spirit' in this case had also been the creature. The true act of heroism, therefore, is to overcome the creature in alien territory, despite the creature's help *and* superior adaptation to that place. This is also a common 'first contact' colonial narrative. A further difficulty, for the colonizer, becomes erasing sympathy for the colonized when he/she has been feeding or housing the invader. This is also Victor's struggle, as he is kept alive by the creature only in order to chase him down and kill him. Throughout the book, he vacillates between revulsion and sympathy – not only because the creature is dependent on him, perhaps, but also because he becomes dependent on the creature.

Farley Mowat, in *The Polar Passion*, claims that the 'the Eskimo story is integral to the other accounts since, without the physical assistance of the Eskimos, and without the object lessons in adaptation provided by them, European accomplishments in the Arctic would probably have been minuscule'.¹¹ Yet, for Europeans to admit to their dependence on

Arctic people's knowledge (or even presence) would preclude their heroic discourse of 'discovery' – therefore, explorer narratives about indigenous people were typically ambivalent, exaggerating the *danger* or *difference* of the Arctic inhabitant. In *I May Be Some Time: Ice in the English Imagination*, the Arctic historian Francis Spufford wrote: 'The European perception of polar travel as an activity *wholly* separate in mood and technique, aims and expertise from the Inuit experience of inhabiting the Arctic, also indicates that the spectacle of the Inuit, living their domestic lives in a place Europeans considered heroic for reaching, aroused a degree of tension'.¹² If the Inuit is necessary for survival in Arctic, he/she must also be erased from the narrative in order for it to remain 'heroic' – it is precisely the domesticity of the indigenous inhabitant that must be eliminated in order to preserve that polarization between the domestic 'tranquility' of the European home and the dangerous realm heroically confronted by the Arctic explorer. In a similar fashion, Shelley may be said to represent this quintessential ambivalence by suppressing the indigenous peoples of the Arctic in telling Walton's tale, until they emerge 'unnaturally' in monstrous proportions.

There is a kind of conflation that occurs, throughout *Frankenstein*, between the creature and the dangerous 'elements' of the Arctic, as if equating the creature with nature also a way to sublimate his significance. For instance, at one point Walton explains that his goal is gaining dominion over the 'elemental foes of our race' – but what 'foes' signifies is ambiguous. Walton says to Victor, 'One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought; for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race' (35). 'Elemental' may be read in the sense of the natural world (e.g. ice floes or oceans) or it may mean 'fundamental' or 'basic'. Who, in this case,

would be a 'fundamental' foe of 'our race'? Given that Walton is engaging in a competitive struggle to uncover a potentially lucrative passage for trade with the Orient, these 'elemental foes' may be either colonial competitors or even the indigenous or colonized peoples of the British Empire. Also, 'race' takes on a double meaning here. Is it the human 'race' he is referring to, or the Anglo-Saxon race? In a time of colonial expansion, these 'elemental foes' may be precisely the indigenous Other over which 'dominion' must be asserted. Is it the creature, whom Victor also calls 'my foe', who is the true 'elemental foe' of this tale (173)? I would suggest that it is both – nature and the creature – for one becomes inseparable from the other by the end of the narrative. The creature, in this sense, *incorporates* the elements, representing the conflation of body and place, and the acts of heroism in the tale all become wrapped up in 'grappling' with this foe.

Still, the elements must be 'overcome', or in the case of the creature, eliminated. As Victor chases the creature to the North, this because his only goal as he pushes Walton forward. On 5 September, Walton becomes 'immured in ice' (177). Victor, in an artfully deceptive speech, tries to convince the men to keep going – even though he had previously condemned the voyage altogether. He says to the sailors: 'You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your names adored, as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honour, and the benefit of mankind. ... Return as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their backs on the foe' (178). Although Victor is partly lying to get the crew to keep going, he also appears to be moved by his own speech as he gains 'an eye so full of lofty design and heroism' (179). Could it be that Victor is recollecting, nostalgically, his own desire for fame? Victor also makes an association between his own scientific pursuits and Walton's quest for

knowledge, claiming, 'I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed' (181). Victor's experiment had created another living, speaking 'race', which interrupted his heroic narrative of scientific discovery and caused him instead to become caught up in the problem of the creature. But Walton, with his chance to destroy the creature, still has the chance to overcome Victor's failure by making a discovery in the North that is untainted by the problem of indigeneity. He still has a chance to 'not turn his back on the foe' and thus destroy the creature. Walton, in essence, inherits the possibility of discursively 'killing' the creature, or eliminating the indigenous subject from the European narrative of fame and accomplishment.

Yet Walton is not able to produce this noble sacrifice and ensure the creature's death. He laments, 'I had rather die than return shamefully, and my purpose unfulfilled. Yet I fear such will be my fate; the men, unsupported by ideas of glory and honour, can never willingly continue' (179). Walton, while engaged in a quest for a passage across the pole, also inherits Victor's responsibility to destroy the creature and he fails. By allowing indigeneity to survive at the end of her tale, Shelley exposes a foil to the enterprise of Empire, from which she may have also felt excluded as a woman. The creature, in this sense, is her barb to men's vanity. Like John Sackhouse, who jumped on a boat to Scotland, there remains the threat, at the end of the novel, that the creature will return to England ... and that the North can never be conquered. And if, indeed, the creature is 'monstrous' and not benign, then the 'problem' of indigeneity may again enter England, poaching swans along the Thames, or killing women in their beds.

The descriptions of the creature, in *Frankenstein*, vacillate between the colonial discourses of the noble savage, the 'civilized' savage, and the cannibal. This vacillation demonstrates the extent of explorer narratives

that Shelley was reading at the time, ranging from Cook's expeditions to Leem's missionary narratives to Daniel Defoe's portrayal of 'cannibals' in *Robinson Crusoe*. Shelley's readings on the West Indies, including tales of the native Caribs and Arawaks, were particularly extensive.¹³ Just as Shelley's reading transitorily jumped from place to place, so the creature appears quite homeless in the novel – seemingly equally comfortable in South America or the Arctic. (He is 'born' in Europe, wants to live in South America, but travels to the Arctic.) The creature's adaptability to different countries and languages may represent what was often described as the nomadic nature of indigenous subjects. Sir Hugh Willoughby, in 1556, described the inhabitants of Northern Russia in this fashion: 'They live in a manner a wild and savage life, roving still from one place of the country to another, without any property or house or land more to one than to another' (Pinkerton, i. 65). But the creature's lack of a homeland could also suggest that he is a *composite* of various global discourses about indigeneity. For instance, though the creature is first seen in Arctic, Walton first describes him as 'a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island', suggesting a South Pacific origin (33). What is most significant about the creature, however, is that, wherever he is, he does not belong *there*. The very fact that he has been sighted by a European reveals, in this text, that he needs to be *further away* – or dead.

And so the creature is always chased into the woods or the wilderness, perpetually on the fringes of European civilization, whether in the Arctic or Europe. He survives on 'berries, nuts, and roots', and the very superiority of his ability to survive makes him appear dangerous and suspect. By pursuing Victor in his travels, 'hiding' and 'loitering' and 'following', the creature plays into the European fears that these 'savage' inhabitants may someday be found peering into the very windows of the

warm, English household. Victor's response to the creature's presence ultimately reveals the fear that the indigenous people of the world are lurking everywhere, in every dark cave and forest and desert heath. They are to be found in the wilderness, wherever that may be and if they are capable of watching from the woods, they are also capable of desiring and invading British life. Indeed, if England's colonial attitude involved a sense of inherent superiority, it would only seem natural that the colonized would one day desire this superior lifestyle and would resort to violence to get it. Throughout *Frankenstein*, therefore, the reader is given the feeling that there must be no contact – or even exchanges of looks – between the creature and the 'civilized' world. Because looking, in this text, is often lustful.

The fact that the creature's dream is a mate brings this threat of 'lust' to the forefront of the novel. Regarding this issue, Victor's narrative about the creature alternates between what David Spurr, in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, has called 'debasement' and the 'idealization', which was typical of explorer narratives of the time. When the creature asks Victor to create a mate for him, he offers to move to the 'vast wilds of South America', where he will survive on 'acorns and berries' (125–6). The image the creature gives is of a sort of noble savage of the new world. 'We shall make our bed of dried leaves', the creature claims, 'the sun will shine on us as on man, and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful and human, and you must feel that you could deny it only in the wantonness of power and cruelty' (126). This description reads much like Heman Melville's later idealization of the natives of the Marquesas Islands in *Typee* (1846), who lived life 'in an atmosphere of perpetual summer, and nurtured by the simple fruits of the earth, enjoying a perfect freedom from care and anxiety'.¹⁴

Spurr claims that this recurrent idealization of the native in colonial literature is based in a

repressed desire for the natural freedom and ease of indigenous cultures. He explains further that some of the more common tropes or desires are 'a free and natural sexuality ... a society living in ease and abundance, and in complete harmony with its natural surroundings' (127). Similarly, discourses about the Sami published in John Pinkerton's volumes argued that the Sami were peaceful and harmless. In 'A New Account of Samoedia', the author argues that the Sami 'vegetate in tranquillity, amusing themselves after their manner, stretched on reindeer skins spread around the fire'. 'The sweets of idleness supply the place of the passions', the author concludes: 'This love of idleness is one of the principal features by which the uninformed man, left to nature alone, is recognized' (Pinkerton, i. 528). At another point, he argues, 'From all that has been said, it will be seen that they know no other wants than those of simple nature; namely food, the enjoyment of woman, and rest' (Pinkerton, i. 533). The creature's speech seems to provide a justification for why the 'savages' of the new world should be allowed to live: they are peaceful, will keep to themselves, and enjoy a free and innocent kind of sexuality.

This sentiment was often accompanied by an almost paternal attitude towards the colonized, which is a feeling shared by Victor in the novel. In the British Parliament, it was often claimed that England had been given the 'trusteeship of the weaker races', which is what Victor initially feels about the creature. Spurr claims that sense of trusteeship stems from the British beliefs in 'a natural aristocracy' and 'the racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxons' (114). But the British sense of moral responsibility towards those who were considered less civilized was always trumped by a responsibility to the civilized. And so Victor similarly decides, when contemplating the creature's presence in England among his friends and family, that the 'duties towards the beings of my own species

had greater claims to my attention' (180). Even if the natives are friendly, they are still considered inferior. The *Quarterly Review* was taking up this argument in 1814, as Von Buch suggested, 'A free and happy man in a civilized state is a much more respectable and distinguished being than a free and happy Samoyede'.¹⁵ If, indeed, the indigenous subjects of America were seen as harmless, even childlike, in their 'simple' desires for sunlight and food, this image evoked a sense of Europe's responsibility to 'protect' them as an inferior race. However, the moral of *Frankenstein* appears to be that this image is merely a ruse, or disguise, of 'savages' who are ultimately not to be trusted and must be killed. If the colonized subject has the potential to be the 'innocent' or 'edenic' ideal of British society, he or she also has the potential to have the qualities of the 'savage'—dishonesty, suspicion, superstition, lack of self-discipline' (Spurr, 76). Spurr ties this production of the 'savage' to an ancient Hebrew discourse of the 'accursed races', such as the offspring of Cain, Ham, and Ishmael, who could be characterized by having these marks: 'the homeless life of the hunter, linguistic confusion, and physical aberration in both color and size' (77). Aside from 'linguistic confusion' (the creature masters language with ease) this fits the representation of the creature in *Frankenstein*.

The British populace was caught up in this debate over the 'savagery' versus 'innocence' of the colonized at the time, as evidenced by the *Quarterly Review*. In 1814, an article suggested that public opinion was swinging toward the notion of 'savagery' as a dangerous threat: 'the virtues and comforts of the savage state have now ceased to be the theme of modern philosophers'.¹⁶ Summarizing the reports of travelers about the indigenous people of Northern coasts, the *Quarterly Review* wrote, 'They are an active, intelligent, and courageous race of men; their size, shape, and physical powers far exceeding those to the northward or

southward. ... They agree too in representing them to be, what most savages are, cunning, treacherous and cruel' ('A Voyage', 300). Although indigenous people were seen as stronger than Europeans, they were also treacherous. But, on top of this, they were repeatedly said to live miserable lives, rather than idyllic ones. According to Spurr 'misery and abnegation' are often signs of moral degeneracy in colonial discourse, so that 'the physical suffering of indigenous peoples can be associated with their moral and intellectual degradation' (78). Maupertuis described the Sami thus: 'a race of men who live like beasts in the forests. ... The rigour of the climate, and the barrenness of the land, have destined it for the retreat of a few miserable wretches who know no other' (Pinkerton, i. 255). Indigenous people of the North were described as living in a kind of misery that creates moral degeneracy – thus justifying their slaughter. Similarly, in *Frankenstein*, while the vision of South American pleasures causes Victor to want to supply a mate for the creature, the physical image of the creature's suffering face ultimately causes Victor to destroy this very mate. Could it be, then, that the dilemma in *Frankenstein* is less about whether or not to *create* creatures than whether or not to *destroy* them?

The beatific image of a 'new race' in the new world is counterposed continually with its opposite: a 'race' of killers. Victor asks, 'Shall I, in cool blood, set loose upon the earth a demon, whose delight is in death and wretchedness?' (142). And ultimately he makes the decision to destroy the creature because of the superior claims of his own race. What is interesting about Victor's decision to destroy the creature's mate is that the face of the creature himself ultimately provokes this action, as if Victor can read the true intentions in the very physiognomy of the creature, whose words may be conciliatory but whose face speaks of crime. Weighing the arguments for and against

the life of the creature in his mind, Victor happens to look out the window and sees the creature. Shelley describes this scene:

I trembled, and my heart failed within me; when, on looking up, I saw by the light of the moon, the demon at the casement. A ghastly grin wrinkled his lips as he gazed on me, where I sat fulfilling the task which he had allotted to me. Yes, he had followed me in my travels; he had loitered in forests, hid himself in caves, or taken refuge in wide and desert heaths; and he now came to mark my progress. (141)

It is both a fear of the creature's mobility and of the sinister grin on his face that leads Victor to destroy his mate. If looking is equated with lusting, in this novel, then the creature's look is enough to warrant his death and that of his mate. Victor determines to destroy the creature's mate, as well as the creature, for fear that a 'race of devils would be propagated upon the earth' (140). Victor, even in the end, defends his decision to destroy the creature. 'I feel myself justified in desiring the death of my adversary', he says to Walton (180). Victor's decision is ultimately based upon racial politics because of the believed superiority of his 'own species', it is not worth even taking the chance that the childlike savages may be friendly. The creature proves, in this moment, that he will always be hovering and watching outside, lusting for more. It is the creature's *look* that ultimately leads Victor to conclude: 'During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable' (180).

The moment of "first contact" in the novel was when the creature first opened his eyes. Now, in seeing the monster's gaze, Victor may be reminded of that moment, which he does not want to recreate with the mate. So, instead, he begins the journey to destroy the creature. On the one hand, the creature may be said to successfully *lead* Victor out of Europe; but

conversely, it may be contested that Victor actually *chases* the creature out of Europe. The creature remains *incredible* in Europe, so much so that Victor refuses again and again to reveal his secret for fear that the 'astounding horror' of his tale would be looked on as 'madness' (74). While Victor is in Europe, the creature may reside only in his own mind, as a form of insubstantial madness – the Eskimo does not *belong* in England. In fact, there is what Spurr calls a kind of 'interiorization of savagery' (77) that takes place for Victor and the creature in Europe. Victor and the creature become one, and the creature threatens to destroy Victor's sanity. Spurr writes, 'The interiorization of savagery does not simply replace a concept of the savage as *out there*, but rather takes place simultaneously with a process of symbolic elaboration that objectified savagery, wildness, and animality in other human beings' (77). But as they reach the North, the creature becomes a substantial adversary that Victor can grapple with – he is credible in his 'native' element. Victor explains this transformation to Walton: 'Were we among the tamer scenes of nature, I might fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps your ridicule; but many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions, which would provoke laughter of those unacquainted with the ever-varied powers of nature' (37). Only in the wilderness can these dreams emerge as the objectified image of the 'savage'. In Europe, the creature has no meaning, except as the dark unconscious (the 'madness') of Victor.

The creature continually vacillates, in *Frankenstein*, between being *out there* and *in there*: in England, in the house, and even *strangely* in Victor's mind. With his superior adaptability and homelessness, he can be anywhere, including the imagination. He threatens to take over Victor's sanity and destroy even that. Spurr claims the discovery and colonization of indigenous cultures led to a concurrent and 'progressive despatialization of

the concept of wildness' (77) – taking over the European's imagination. 'Wildness' and 'savagery', which were once seen as belonging to uncivilized cultures, became descriptors for a kind of 'primitivism' that could take over even the colonizer's mind. Primitive impulses were suddenly always lurking *within*, even as primitives were being eliminated abroad. In *Frankenstein*, the creature represents this despatialization of savagery, even to the point of becoming read as Victor's double. In this sense, once he has created (or encountered) the monster, Victor can never really kill him ... but only push him out to the far reaches of the world in an attempt to erase or undo that moment of first contact that had proven so deadly for everyone.

Frankenstein's creature reveals the conflicted desires to destroy, rely upon, idealize, and 'grapple with' the indigenous subject. He inspires Walton/Victor to push forward to map the 'terra incognita' of the North precisely because he is comfortable there, and thus goads them on with what Victor calls an 'adversary's gibe'. And yet, ultimately, the creature must be eliminated for the map of the world to grow. For if, on the one hand, *Frankenstein* is about the destruction of the creature, on the other hand, it is about the expansion – and tragic consequences – of rationality, science, and the masculine gaze into previously unmapped places. If creatures reside there, then the glory is potentially greater in overcoming them; but they must die to prove the victory of discovery. Walton's journey to the Northern Passage is not in search of indigenous peoples, but in search of an Eden without them. He writes, hopeful of his prospects, 'What might not be expected in a country of eternal light?' (26). This seems precisely the oft-repeated dilemma in *Frankenstein*, that while searching for the 'light' of intellectual illumination, creatures are found instead.

Victor cannot bring his story forward until he has reached the 'wild' regions of the

Arcticæ but for Shelley, writing from England as a woman, it becomes doubly hard to tell the tale. Shelley explains that the question 'so frequently asked' of her is, "'How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?'" It is true that I am very averse to bringing myself forward in print' (19). The question, here, is not only whether her thoughts are dangerous, but whether it is *appropriate* for a woman to expose these thoughts to the public. But what is even more baffling is that, unlike Victor, Shelley appears to nurture this wild fantasyæher own monsteræin the writing of her tale. She concludes her introduction to the book, 'And now ... I bid my hideous progeny to go forth and prosper' (23). Unlike Victor, who has decided to destroy the creature so that he cannot propagate and 'prosper', Shelley suggests that she would have the creature thrive, as her own hybrid child.

Shelley makes a link between exploration and imagination in the 1831 Preface, which states, 'In all matters of discovery and invention, even of those that appertain to the imagination, we are continually reminded of the story of Columbus and his egg' (22). This motif of the creature/savage, I propose, permeates the novelæso that even Mary Shelley gets caught up in the dangerous drive of exploration. The moral offered by Percy (disguised as Mary) parallels Victor's oft-repeated moral. Shelley had previously written, in the 1818 Preface, 'My chief concern ... has been limited to avoiding the enervating effects of novels of the present day, and to the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection' (25). This statement seems to parallel Victor's advice: 'Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow' (55). Victor later reiterates

this lesson to Walton: 'Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries' (181). Victor's perpetual betrayal of his own moral stance is evident from even his next statement: 'Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed' (181). Yet if the moral in both cases appears to be the veneration of 'domestic affections', we have already seen how Victor again and again betrays his own advice in pursuing and attempting to destroy the creature with a morality that supersedes that of 'domestic affection'. He even calls his actions 'blameless' after thinking on them for awhile, and encourages the ship to sail North with all the rhetorical vigor of the truly 'heroic' colonial adventure.

Walton and Victor had both arrived at their heroic ambition in solitude, by reading books. Walton had 'read with ardour' the history of voyages to the 'North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole' (29). This reading, however, is unguided, and results in his lack of a balanced education. He states, 'It is a still greater evil to me that I am self-educated: for the first fourteen years of my life I ran wild on a common, and read nothing but our uncle Thomas's book of voyages' (29). Similarly, Victor's desire to create the creature began with picking up a book outside his home, this time in an inn in Switzerland, where he happened upon Cornelius Agrippa. Walton's book-learning had been resisted by his father, who, on his dying bed, demanded that Walton not be allowed to enter a 'seafaring life' (27). The resistance of Victor's father is also pronounced and, like Walton, seems to lead him precisely into this area of forbidden knowledge. Victor's father says of Agrippa, 'Do not waste your time on this; it is sad trash' (44) ... after which Victor remarks, 'I continued to read with the greatest avidity' (44). Like Walton, Victor is initially 'self-taught' and 'left to struggle with a child's

blindness' – though he later learns to adapt to life in a University (45). It could be argued that his early teachings led to his fantastic pursuits.

Victor's attraction to books is related to his desire for divination: 'The world to me was a secret which I desired to divine' (42). He explains the connection and attraction to knowledge with his statement, 'But here were books, and here were men who had penetrated deeper and knew more' (45). Reading is what takes Victor out of his limited and provincial experience, just as writing performs this act for Mary Shelley. 'Chanceæor rather the evil influence', Victor says, 'asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father's door' (49). And yet, as he leaves home, this 'evil influence' becomes pleasurable for him, though he is at first reluctant: 'But as I proceeded, my spirits and hopes rose. I ardently desired the acquisition of knowledge. I had often, when at home, thought it hard to remain during my youth cooped up in one place, and had longed to enter the world ...' (49).

Mary Shelley, in writing *Frankenstein*, ambivalently enters the intertextual realm of exploration. In this realm, explorers (directly charged by royalty) could create a name for themselves simply by defining and encountering the Other. Like the character of Walton, the captains of the 1818 expeditions were charged with finding a passage across the northern seas and witnessing the 'intensity of force of the magnetic needle'.¹⁷ *Frankenstein* could be said to be Mary Shelley's contribution to the quest, albeit in a fabulous form, and the *Quarterly Review*, along with other journals, did not ignore her input. Facetiously discussing Walton's voyage as if it were real, a critic wrote in *British Critic*: 'This gentleman, it seems, has had his imagination fired by an anticipation of the last number of the *Quarterly Review*, and is gone out to the North Pole, in quest of lost Greenland, magnetism, and the parliamentary reward'.¹⁸ Parliament, at the time, had offered a

reward of '20,000l'. for the discovery of a Northwest Passage. Walton, in *Frankenstein*, tells his sister: 'You cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole ... or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet' (26). The *Quarterly Review* also discussed the theoretical success of Walton's journey, as a test of its own theories about the Pole: 'As our Review had not yet enlightened mankind upon the real state of the North Pole, he [Walton] directs his course thither as a sure place of solitude and security; but Frankenstein, who probably has read Mr. Daines Barrington ... on the subject, was not discouraged, and follows him with redoubled vigour, the creature flying on a sledge drawn by dogs'.¹⁹ Daines Barrington, a British naturalist and scholar, had recently collected records of northern explorers who claimed to 'find the sea to the northward quite open', suggesting, 'the northerly winds bring clearer and warmer weather than any other'.²⁰ Walton similarly claims at the beginning of the novel that the north 'ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There ... the sun is forever visible, its broad disc just skirting the horizon and diffusing a perpetual splendor. ... There frost and snow are banished' (53). Walton suggests, 'I will put some trust in preceding navigators' in believing that this zone exists. He plans to *traverse* the North Pole, enter the Bering Strait in the Pacific, and then travel around America, like the *Dorothea* and *Trent*. By directly engaging in this discourse of 'preceding navigators', Walton sets himself up as a test case for contemporary theories of the Pole, as well as the existence of a Northeast passage across Russia.²¹

If Shelley, as a woman, is excluded from the realm of empire, she can at least stay home and fantasize about it, even after the weather 'suddenly became serene' and Lord Byron and Percy dropped their own respective 'ghosts' to leave 'on a journey among the Alps' (25). She

becomes directly involved in the discourse of exploration, even gaining a voice – though as a presumed 'gentleman' – within the *Quarterly Review*. Vicariously, through her character Walton, Shelley can enter into 'scientific' and anthropological discussions surrounding the North Pole and its inhabitants. The novel, in this sense, is entirely wrapped up in, intertextually, with both literary and nonliterary discourses surrounding imperialism, including the prolific discourses on indigenous peoples by the Arctic explorers. If Percy and Byron lost 'all memory of their ghostly visions' in the 'magnificent scenes' of the Alps, Mary Shelley may remember not only the 'magnificent scenes' of the 'glorious' expeditions to the North, but what to her may have seemed frightening or horrific images of the people who already lived there and threatened to kill the men that went forth to find glory. Ironically, she may have even ambivalently wished this death, as her pen nurtured the eloquent destroyer at once an eclectic hybrid of colonial discourse and a 'friend'. But if indigenous people reappear in Shelley's tale, it is only in monstrous proportions, forever remaining the first to reach the North Pole as a foil to the masculine enterprise of Empire. The 'Eskimos' in England – including Sami and Inuit – were once a 'wonder unto the whole city' when the Queen allowed them to hunt swans on the Thames. Mary Shelley, with *Frankenstein*, could be said to continue this history of wondering, even as she contemplates the horrific possibility of Eskimos wanting to kill more than swans in her comfortable English home. ■

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NOTES _____

1. Wendell H. Oswalt, *Eskimos and Explorers* (Lincoln, 1999), 65–6.

2. See 'Narrative of a Voyage to Hudson's Bay, containing some Account of the Northeastern Coast of

America, and of the Tribes inhabiting that Remote Region', *The Quarterly Review*, 18 (October 1817), 220.

3. Jeanne Moskal documents Mary Shelley's reading of travel writing while writing *Frankenstein*. See *Travel Writing*, vol. 8 of *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, gen. eds Nora Crook and Pamela Clemit (8 vols, London, 1996). Mary Shelley notes the specific days that she reads the *Quarterly Review* in her own journals, as well as other readings of 'old voyages'. See *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (2 vols, Oxford, 1987). For a complete breakdown of Mary Shelley's readings, by date or author, see the online edition of *Frankenstein* by Stuart Curran, University of Pennsylvania, at <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/Projects/knarf/MShelley/bydates.html>>

4. The term 'Eskimo' – from the colonial 'Esquimaux' – is still used to self-identify in parts of Alaska and Siberia because 'Inuit' refers only to the Inupiat of northern Alaska, the Inuit of Canada, and the Kalaallit of Greenland. 'Inuit' is not a word in the Yupik languages of Alaska and Siberia. I use this term, therefore, only to refer to Arctic indigenous peoples from the Canadian Arctic, Greenland, the Bering Strait, and the coastal regions of Chukotka in Russia. This is not to say the term 'Eskimo', like most colonial designations, is without problems.

5. See Oswalt, 32, 42.

6. Warren Montag, "'The Workshop of Filthy Creation": A Marxist Reading of *Frankenstein*', in *Frankenstein: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Johanna Smith (Boston, 1992).

7. Jessica Richard, "'A Paradise of My own Creation": Frankenstein and the Improbable Romance of Polar Exploration', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 25.4 (December, 2003).

8. Joseph Lew, 'The Deceptive Other: Mary Shelley's Critique of Orientalism in *Frankenstein*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 30 (1991), 255–83. See also, Elizabeth A. Bohls' *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716–1818* (London, 1995), 230–45, as well as Anne Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York, 1989). Mellor points out the Godwin family's connection in India. Bohls provides a list of Shelley's Orientalist readings prior to writing *Frankenstein*. In contrast to these authors, Gayatri Spivak suggests that *Frankenstein*, while having

'plenty of incidental imperialist sentiment', ultimately 'does not deploy the axiomatics of imperialism'. See Gayatri Spivak in 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr (Chicago, 1986), 273.

9. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts*, 33.

10. John Pinkerton, *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World* (17 vols, London, 1808–14), i. 515.

11. Farley Mowat, *The Polar Passion; the Quest for the North Pole, with Selections from Arctic Journals* (Boston, 1968), 13.

12. Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (New York, 1997), 189.

13. Besides *Robinson Crusoe*, which depicts the Carib character of Friday, Shelley read J. Nieuhoff's travel narrative about Brazil (in Pinkerton, v. 14), George Anson's *A Voyage Around the World, in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV* (London, 1748), William Robertson's *The History of America* (London, 1777), and vols 1 and 2 of Bryan Edwards' *A History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London 1794). Again, see Feldman and Scott-Kilvert for a complete list of her readings.

14. Quoted in David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, N.C., 1993), 104.

15. A.F. Skioldebrand, 'A Picturesque Journey to the North Cape', *The Quarterly Review*, 11 (April, 1814), 110.

16. 'A Voyage round the World in the Years 1803, 4, 5, and 6, performed by order of his Imperial Majesty, Alexander the First, Emperor of Russia, in the Ship Neva', *The Quarterly Review*, 11 (July, 1814), 110.

17. 'Narrative of a Voyage to Hudson's Bay, containing some Account of the Northeastern Coast of America, and of the Tribes inhabiting that Remote Region', *The Quarterly Review*, 18 (October, 1817), 222.

18. 'Review of *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*', *The British Critic*, 9 (April, 1818), 432.

19. 'Review of *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*', *The Quarterly Review*, 18 (January, 1818), 380.

20. 'A Memoir on the Geography of the North-Eastern part of Asia, and on the Question whether Asia and America are contiguous, or are separated by the Sea', *The Quarterly Review*, 18 (May, 1818), 454.

21. In 1980, A.D. Harvey pointed out that Walton was trying to reach 'the Pacific *via* the North Pole', not the North Pole itself. See A.D. Harvey, 'Frankenstein and Caleb Williams', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 29 (1980), 27.