

# “My Monstrous Progeny:” Reproducing the Other of Reproduction in *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

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*This article provides an interpretation, influenced by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, for two seminal works of British horror fiction from the nineteenth century: Frankenstein (1818) by Mary Shelley and The Island of Doctor Moreau (1896) by H. G. Wells. In the first part of the article, I discuss the importance of Frankenstein destroying the unfinished female companion of his monster. In the second part, I analyze how the proto-genetic insights that Moreau gained in his quest for the successful reproduction of uplifted beasts are used to inscribe his symbolic father function. In the conclusion, I analyze Frankenstein's and Moreau's own respective ways of reinscribing their experiments into the natural order of things and how they eventually displace the male creator into the symbolic position of the mother and thus overwrite the trope of mother nature as well. This is why Frankenstein's and Moreau's creations simultaneously transgress all limits and demonstrate (monstrare) the very limits that the binary logic of presence and absence inevitably enact.*

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According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seven theses on monsters in the social imagination and culture, the figure of the monster is a par excellence metaphor—also in the sense of the original Greek word “metapherein” which means “displacement.” Because, on the one hand, monsters articulate the anxieties and desires of a specific era while on the other hand, and not independently from the former, they reveal (also in the sense of the Latin word “monstrare”) themselves as something

different than themselves, or straight out the very other of themselves, and this is why they can never be unambiguously pinned down (Cohen 4). Furthermore, the monster always escapes complete identification and cannot be perceived as a whole. Slavoj Žižek discusses this aspect of monsters with regard to the movie *Alien* (1979): “The ‘alien,’ the eighth, supplementary passenger, is an object which, being nothing at all in itself, must none the less be added, annexed as an anamorphic surplus. It is the Real at its purest: a semblance, something which on a strictly symbolic level does not exist at all but at the same time the only thing in the whole film which actually exists ...” (Žižek 61). In addition to that, the alien can only be spotted in its parts, i.e., first the camera only shows the tail, then, in another scene, we see the tongue, etc. Cohen also notes, however, that monsters simultaneously present themselves *as* thresholds and *at* boundaries (Cohen 6–8), consequently, they confront us with the break-down of clear-cut categorization by transgressing the borders between culture and nature, purity and impurity, homogeneity and hybridity, etc.

Mary Shelley’s work is pioneering in this regard, since in the preface to *Frankenstein* (1818) she performs an act of separation and unification with the same sentence: “I bid my monstrous progeny go forth and prosper.” To this day, however, it remains ambiguous whether she meant her actual work of fiction, or the fictional monster that had been created by the title-character. It could be both since just as the novel was compiled from different genres, from horror fiction through epistolary snippets to poems by Wordsworth or Coleridge—and their respective narrative levels (i.e., captain Walton tells the story of Frankenstein whose narrative frames the monster’s own narrative)—, the monster was also engineered from different body-parts. Whatever the case may be, she succeeded in reformulating an eminent trope of Romanticism: the author as the birthparent of their work.

More than half a century later, Wells’s title-character in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) reiterates Shelley’s act of creating a new life-form by using a mixture of body-parts, still he fails to achieve his ultimate fantasy: creating breeds that can reproduce without any further intervention from his part. Contrary to Dr. Frankenstein, however, Dr. Moreau does not destroy the female specimen but gets annihilated by her in his quest for engineering the perfect mother who is supposed to bear offspring that are capable of sustaining themselves while having preserved the traits of their antecedents too.

Consequently, in both novels, the figure of the mother becomes a substantial yet latent trope which fuels the scientific project of both

Frankenstein and Moreau respectively. Whether the text thematizes breathing life into dead body-parts or the uplifting of animals, the latter which also creates a new division between the human and the non-human, the Romantic trope of mother nature ceaselessly serves as a background to the plot. Even more so because in both novels it is the male protagonist who wants to create a new lifeform in a way that is explicitly posed as unnatural. Therefore, in each of the novels, I scrutinize the act of substituting the male protagonist for the birthmother, an act which ultimately entangles the figures of woman and nature in the position of the big Other.

### The monstrous *it* with and without the monstrous *she*

By creating his monster, Frankenstein also constructs the figure of the woman as a figure of reproduction while displacing himself in the position of the mother. The title of my article alludes to this substitution and the monstrosity that is the end-product of such a displacement. I use the term "displacement" here in the Lacanian sense as developed by his analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter* (1844).<sup>1</sup> Due to the letter's immutable mobility—to use the phrase coined by Bruno Latour (see Latour 10–11)—Poe's narrative culminates in an automatic repetition of *vis-à-vis* binary conditions, such that the presence of a certain element already presupposes the absence of its counterpart, or the productivity of an element in a binary structure negates the productivity of the other element, etc.

In the case of *Frankenstein*, productivity can be understood as fertility. My interpretation of Shelley's novel subsequently focuses on the interchangeability of parental roles and its consequences in fiction. I argue that Shelley's *Frankenstein* deconstructs and thus—as an indispensable precondition of every deconstructive act—*analyzes*, in this case, the Romantic trope of the author as a birthparent by displacing it into an experimental framework, quite literally; the monstrous woman is to be (re)produced in a laboratory which ultimately yields to the

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<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, Lacan formulated his own theory of displacement as misplacement when he drew attention to the fact that in Poe's short story the letter was hidden in plain sight by both the Queen who had originally received it and the minister who stole it from her (Lacan, *Seminar II* 186). On the other hand, according to Lacan, it is strictly the letter's course (i.e., being stolen and retrieved without ever revealing its content) which determines the place-value of each character in the story and the relations between them (Lacan, *Écrits* 24).

breakdown of reproduction in the novel, based on the double bind between the lack of reproduction and the eminently psychoanalytic concept of the reproduction of lack.

What makes Shelley's work fruitful for psychoanalytic interpretation is that, firstly, all major narrative levels are associated with male protagonists<sup>2</sup> and, secondly, that the female monster is never completed in the novel—contrary to those adaptations, most notably Kenneth Branagh's film (1994), which include the bride of the monster, who is often times none other than the bride of Frankenstein, Elizabeth. Therefore, I focus on why the lack of the woman plays a crucial role in how the monster mirrors its creator and *vice versa*.<sup>3</sup>

There are similarities between Frankenstein and the monster that may be regarded accidental, for instance, when the creature puts on his creator's lab-coat (Shelley 100). Or that the monster repeatedly becomes Frankenstein's sole passion and obsession; the first time, when Frankenstein is working on its creation and then when he is hunting it: "My revenge is of no moment to you; yet, while I allow it to be a vice, I confess that it is *the devouring and only passion* of my soul. My rage is unspeakable, when I reflect that the murderer, whom I have turned loose upon society, still exists." (189; emphasis mine)<sup>4</sup> Unlike Frankenstein's, the monster's passion is constantly shifting: at first, he desires his creator to take care of him, then he longs for a partner—which, as I will discuss it shortly, triggers apocalyptic visions in Frankenstein about the mother of a new breed—, and at the end the monster's passion is targeted at Frankenstein once again.

Furthermore, regarding the creator's being mirrored in/by his creation and the other way around, there are several reflecting and translucent surfaces in the novel that are associated with the monster one way or the other. There is the window of the laboratory (Shelley 159) through which the creature is contemplating Frankenstein's work on its female counterpart and the destruction of the unfinished body in

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<sup>2</sup> Shelley confesses in the preface that she aims to focus on masculine topics like friendship (e.g., Walton's deepest desire turns out to be having a friend when he comes across Frankenstein in the Arctic; Shelley 21), thus *avant la lettre* subverting the traditional analytic setting in which the male analyst tackles feminine subjects.

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of not deferring from the main subject of this article, I omit the queer discourse embodied in the relationship of Henry and Frankenstein, which is rather obvious from a psychoanalytic point of view in scenes, such as when the latter is rejuvenated by the former's visit yet still worried that he (Henry) will spot some traces of the newly created monster in his cabinet (Shelley 61–62).

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that when Walton finds the exhausted and almost inhuman-looking Frankenstein, he refers to him in his diary as "interesting creature" (Shelley 27).

the end. Another window also enframes a crucial plot event because Frankenstein sees the lifeless body of Elizabeth and the creature taunting him through it (186). And finally, there is the cabin window through which the monster leaves Walton's ship after the death of its creator (204). Connected to these simultaneously reflecting and see-through surfaces, we can find the most eminent case of mirror-relations between Frankenstein and his creation, which is how they mutually prevent each other from reproduction: Frankenstein destroys the body of the female monster, and the creature kills his bride.

Unlike the two protagonists who mirror each other and thus become each other's (small) other, women in the novel act as the (Big) Other that resists each act of integration and therefore can only be signified as absence (see Lacan, *Seminar I* 155; *Seminar XX* 81). From Frankenstein's mother, Catherine, through his bride, Elizabeth, to Walton's sister—the one who shares her monogram with Mary Shelley and to whom the captain's narrative is addressed in his letters—women in the novel are the figures of both home and disease. As for the former, despite the fact that the desire for returning home is frequently articulated in the male characters' discourse, the women are constantly left behind: take, for instance, Walton's expedition to the Arctic or Frankenstein's chase after the monster. And as for the latter, Frankenstein's mother died of scarlet fever, and Elizabeth appears in his dream as a substitute for his mother which he interprets as a murderous act, while in fact it was Elizabeth who tried to nurse her back to life (Huet 131). It is worth noting that Elizabeth was taken in by Frankenstein's family after the death of her father, which further emphasizes the incestuous undertones to Frankenstein's oedipal dream. A variation of this dream-scene resurfaces in Frankenstein's mind's eye while working on the female monster: his original goal was to "banish disease from the human frame" (Shelley 41), but then he realized that finishing the specimen would yield to her offspring spreading the plague in the world:

Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? (158)

This repeated dream-scene—which might even be considered a primal scene—not only subverses Frankenstein's role as a creator, going from the savior of humanity to the harbinger of death, but also iterates the

epidemiological theme: the mother's scarlet fever, which is interpreted as something brought along by the adopted child, returns here in the figure of the monstrous offspring who could only produce similarly monstrous progeny. And one such monstrous progeny prevents the other to do that since the creature kills Frankenstein's bride before the marriage is consummated.

A similar iteration of a primal scene is presented by a painting of Catherine being on her knees before her father's catafalque. The reenactment of that picture happens two times in the novel: firstly, when Frankenstein collapses before Henry's corpse (Shelley 167), and secondly when he finds the lifeless body of Elizabeth in their cabin (186). Therefore, the aura of death that is associated with the mother stems from the iteration of the mortifying origin; mortifying as in deathly but also understood in the sense of already determining all further possibilities of how things play out, which can be connected to Lacan's theory of the automatic repetition of binary logic linked to displacement (Lacan, *Écrits* 21). Hence Elizabeth's standing in for the mother in Frankenstein's dream is already based on Catherine's being near the corpse of her opposite-sex parent. And so, the creature's killing Elizabeth is yet another element in the chain of reoccurring and self-reproducing signifiers that dissolve any act of reproduction in the novel whatsoever.

Consequently, instead of giving life, women in *Frankenstein* embody the threat of annihilating life, which in return triggers another displacement; the father starts to occupy the place of the mother. For instance, it is quite telling that when Frankenstein is working on the monster, he remarks: "winter, spring and summer passed away during my labour." (Shelley 56) Not only does he use the word "labour" for his work in the laboratory, but traditionally the three-season timespan would give out nine months, the average duration of pregnancy. Frankenstein's first act of creation produced monstrosity; first of all, the monster has a body that seems constantly decaying, and the creature eventually flees to the North Pole which could be interpreted as a place where life is scarce (Halberstam 48). Subsequently, while the aura of death is associated with female figures in the text (e.g., the mother's death essentially triggered Frankenstein's obsessive immersion in his project of creating life; the death of his bride robbed him of being a father, etc.), the recurring theme of irreproducibility further emphasizes the irreplaceability of the mother when coupled with the iterations of primal scenes throughout the text. Putting it differently, the failure of the male standing in for the female—who is retroactively associated with death and

absence—also deconstructs, as I mentioned it earlier, the Romantic trope of the male author as the primal birthparent; the male character only acts out what has already been laid out before him by his own fantasies about the (potential and absent) mother. While the absence of Catherine prompts Frankenstein to create life, one of the results of inscribing himself into the empty symbolic place value of the mother is yet another inscription that dissolves the figure of the birthparent altogether: it is the traces of the creature's hands on Elizabeth's body (Shelley 186) that signify the climax of Frankenstein's alienation from his bride.

It is, however, the female creature's very existence that could support the more-than-object being of Frankenstein's monster in a binary logic; simply put, the monster could be referred to as a "he" rather than an "it," if its counterpart, the "she" were to be completed. Yet, what we see in the leftovers of the female creature is the lack of any possibility of binarity: "The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being." (Shelley 161) The corpse is shapeless, basically just pulp, a splatter of organs without clear-cut boundaries which might prompt us to think about how horror films—slashers especially—from *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980) through *House of Wax* (2005) to *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008) handle the female body: the woman can be taken apart but never put back together.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the pulp on the floor of the laboratory is just as disgusting and tacky as the completed male monster. In the context of Shelley's novel, nevertheless, the remains of the unfinished female monster are also the signifier of the lack of general binary coding which would make the separation of genders possible.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> And we might add, it is even harder to create the woman than the man, just think of the effortless tone of the song "I Can Make You a Man" from *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). Frank N. Furter's predecessor likewise made a male monster first because it was easier for him to work with bigger parts that are not so delicate (Shelley 54).

<sup>6</sup> Still, as it becomes clear from the adaptations, Shelley's novel already operates as a self-reproducing textual machine whose end-product is hybridity as far the narrative-levels and the different genres are concerned. For instance, Mojca Kregel argues that in the case of Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*, beside the protagonist's transsexuality—considering that Ry is "not one thing... [and n]ot one gender" (Kregel 86)—it is chiefly its transtextual relations with Shelley's work that makes it an innovative adaptation. Furthermore, not only do the latter evoke the patchwork metaphor of the original but also reinscribe it each time the narrative entangles fictional events and elements with their real-world counterparts and historical context (88, 93).



The (psycho)semiotic aporia (see Smid 407–413) in Shelley’s novel is thus plain to see: while *Frankenstein* tells a story about the failure of reproduction, it does so by the repetition of scenes, substitutions, etc. And while it promotes the transgression of boundaries and the suspension of clear-cut dichotomies, it still produces hybridity via displacement, the latter which has been made possible by binarity. After telling one of his famous anecdotes about two lavatory doors that are situated opposite each other, Lacan demonstrates that binarity is the foundation of any act of repetition. When talking about the possible connections between “hommes” and “dames” (“gents” and “ladies”), he remarks that they are simple manifestations of basic binary coding with 0s and 1s and do not differ to the slightest from day and night or from states “on” and “off.” They are not empirically conceivable pieces of experience in the first place: e.g., night is not simply the appearance (or presence) of darkness but also the absence of light (Lacan, *Écrits* 415–418; also see Smid 413–425 for a detailed analysis).<sup>7</sup>

In *Frankenstein*, however, it is an “it” that kills Elizabeth, not a “he,” and this disrupts the perfect mirror relation of Catherine’s killing her father, then Elizabeth killing the mother, which would foreshadow that she eventually gets killed by a “he” in return. This asymmetry constitutes yet another chain of iterative signifiers instead, but without a foundation for binary coding because the monstrous female is missing due to the father’s inability to completely stand in for the mother. Yet such an iterative chain of signifiers ultimately contradicts the plot’s culmination in the lack of reproduction. In this regard, monstrosity in Shelley’s does not necessarily appear as the Big Other, it can rather be situated as the materialization of the mirror-relation to the other. Hence binary coding itself becomes the Big Other in Shelley’s novel as it is supposed to enact clear differentiations, so that the monster could become the other of an other (i.e., the other of the female monster or the mother). Instead of that, however, the chain of signifiers accumulating around the lack of binary coding ultimately creates a structure that makes the monster approachable on the merits of Donna Haraway’s concept of the inappropriate/d other. According to Haraway, the displaced other reveals all other constructions of the other through the impossibility of its being integrated into a clear-cut binary structure. Therefore, the inappropriate/d other is not the reciprocity or inverse of something

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<sup>7</sup> Lacan also adds that such ambiguity of presence and absence, however, does not produce independent signifiers but substantiates the *vis-à-vis* relation of 0 and 1, the foundation of the symbolic order. This conceptualization would later culminate in his famous saying “that there’s no such thing as a sexual relation” (Lacan, *Encore* 126).



because it is in itself the mirroring of a missing border or axis along which any subversion could take place (Haraway 299). This is why the lack of the woman—whether it manifests in the destroyed female monster or the male protagonist's substitutions—as a lack of differentiation also makes it all but impossible to formalize any relationship between Frankenstein and the monster as master and servant, creator and creature, or parent and child.

### **Repetition, reproduction, and the law of the father**

Wells's scientific romance<sup>8</sup> employs a title-character that arguably has much in common with Shelley's. Just like Frankenstein, Moreau also tries to intervene in the natural order but struggles with the implementation of his engineering work (i.e., redesigning animals to uplift them to the higher level of man) as natural. Furthermore, he uses the same technique as Frankenstein when creating his beasts: putting together body-parts of different creatures. Moreau—who is neither morally good, nor bad, just an experimenting surgeon forced into exile because of his project's incompatibility with Victorian values (Wells 57)—associates everything with chance (56) which at first glance seems to defy the existence of an overdetermining symbolic structure, like the one we identified in *Frankenstein*. And it most certainly goes against those patterns that Darwin postulated in evolutionary processes. Having been the student of Huxley who was a devoted follower of Darwin, Wells provides a peculiar version of evolution, one which takes Darwinian ideas to the limit, and then he demonstrates the whole process in its most extreme form: Moreau manages to unbind the restrictions of natural life exactly because he supposes total randomness in the development of the species (Gledening 581).

Moreau zooms in on the breeds he is working on and accelerates their natural development which makes the whole evolutionary process

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<sup>8</sup> Wells came up with this label for a genre that he soon abandoned after *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Michael Draper treats Wells's scientific romance as an idiosyncratic phrase that mainly refers to the structure of the narrative: "[a]ll the early scientific romances have an appropriately 'scientific' structure, with theories formulated and discarded as the evidence is pieced together, until the real truth appears." (Draper 43) Prendick's encounters with the puma notably follow such a pattern; chapter VIII is entitled "The crying of the puma," and after Prendick learns about Moreau's operations, chapter X then bears the title "The crying of the man" which is the reformulation of the previous one.

visible from a bird's-eye view. But he is no less hybrid than his creations are, either, since he presents himself as an omnipotent law-making entity, on the one hand, and a bioengineer who can bring the species' progress to completion, on the other. Furthermore, not only does he not suppose any type of qualitative difference between man and his ancestors (Haynes 34) but also regards his own practice of forcing random body-parts to cooperate with one another—in order to give out a new breed—as an improved version of evolution. It is no surprise then that in this rather chaotic setting, which is nonetheless the result of his technological intervention, Moreau has to introduce an institutionalized order with his laws, thus (seemingly) bending the natural order to his will. Unlike Frankenstein's creation, however, Moreau's are not monstrous because they were left alone but because his laws are internalized in a way that is reminiscent of what Lacan calls the symbolic father (Lacan, *Seminar V* 132). The monsters' uplifted nature is recognized on the basis of prohibitions, i.e., the paternal instance that regulates their every move—sometimes quite literally. When the shipwrecked Prendick first sees the creatures in motion, he remarks that they unmistakably bear “the mark of the beast” (Wells 84) which—besides its Biblical undertones—not only evokes the signs left by the monster on Elizabeth's body from Shelley's novel, and illuminates the fact that Prendick perceives these monsters in the context of the Gothic, accordingly, but also confirms the inscription of Moreau's laws into the most elementary behavioral forms of his creatures.

Consequently, Moreau's beasts are also monstrous because they are the figures of repetition: they are brought to life by the deconstruction of the conceptualization of nature and naturalness and then reinscribed into the natural order via the superiority of man who is capable of rewriting the laws of nature as well as introducing symbolic laws to regulate the behavior of those he created. It is no wonder then that Moreau's symbolic laws aimed at suspending each act of biological resistance that might still linger in his beasts as their animalistic heritage. Additionally, Moreau's laws also unveil the violence inherent to anthropomorphism, that is the extent of bestiality in man that the animal is nevertheless incapable of achieving. This type of bestiality is unbound in man whenever he comes face to face with the animal (Derrida, *The Animal* 26, 32). Such violent urges are exposed as fueling Moreau's project of uplifting animals—even if the surgeon is depicted in the narrative as an extramoral character whose experiments are deemed distasteful—which has a far-reaching consequence in the fictional horizon of the novel. It is not only chance that deviates or deters the natural development of the

species but also Moreau's violence which is rendered in the narrative as the very same violence inherent to nature. Just like his laws are posed as simple repetitions of natural instincts that prove to be formative in the behavior of a living being, his intervention is reinscribed as the foundation for an alternative, nonetheless advanced form of evolution which ultimately reevaluates the Romantic idea that man should try to minimize harm done to animals since they are just as sensitive and sentient as he is (Baker 15). Moreau's apology for his attitude culminates in his belief that mankind already underwent and endured such a hardening process that made it superior to animals in the end. His unscrupulous operations are thus suggested as stemming from the remorselessness of nature itself (Wells 122).

In the chapter entitled "Doctor Moreau explains everything," the title-character summarizes his views on being human by emphasizing the act of enduring pain. His philosophy of pain resonates heavily with Nietzsche's fragment on the topic, in which he states that the simultaneity of being open to and standing against (enduring) pain is the elementary condition for the highest level of happiness (Nietzsche 641). Moreau twists this idea by taking all emotions out of the picture when arguing that man differs from the animal due to the fact that the more sensible he gets, the better chance he has in achieving the state of complete sensationlessness. Sensitivity as understood by Moreau has at least two distinctive meanings. Firstly, it is being sensitive to stimuli which is demonstrated by the doctor when he stabs himself in the leg:

'No doubt you have seen that before. It does not hurt a pin-prick. But what does it show? The capacity for pain is not needed in the muscle, and it is not placed there; it is but little needed in the skin, and only here and there over the thigh is a spot capable of feeling pain. Pain is simply our intrinsic medical adviser to warn us and stimulate us.' (Wells 121)

Secondly, sensitivity is understood as a natural instinct to avoid pain and so it should be eradicated since it prevents following Moreau's laws to the letter.

Moreau postulates his own laws as both complimentary to and iterative of the patterns and rules that govern evolutionary processes but on a symbolic level for the sake of substituting sensibility for sensitivity. This also means that he regards the former as something that needs to be added externally through the act of technological intervention which initiates law-making as an act of doubling up on his bioengineering work. And since the latter is already posed as mirroring the natural process of evolutionary development, Moreau's symbolic

conditioning of his creatures seems additive only if his work of dissecting and reconstructing their bodies is retroactively recognized as natural. This presupposes a primordial substitution that is acted out by Moreau as the symbolic father that regulates the behavior of his beasts both on the biological and social level, and it evokes the Lacanian theme of the paternal instance: “the names of the father.” The names of the father is a metaphor in the Lacanian sense that has to be affirmed by the subject as an original exchange which happens outside signification (Lacan, *Seminar V* 158) but is nevertheless implemented as an origin despite being a product of symbolic intervention.

This structure, based on the dialectics of founding the inside of the structure from the outside, also guarantees that Moreau stands above his own laws: he can eat meat and hunt animals as much as he likes. Furthermore, the names of the father as the signifier that stands for an original act of exchange—simultaneously presupposing and producing binarity (see Lacan, *Écrits* 464)—includes its own subversion. Therefore, resisting Moreau’s laws yields to the beast being regarded as an animal by others, but this recognition already happens within the symbolic order that is initiated as the norm and thus makes every act of breaking the law culminating in deviation and degradation (i.e., the beast being regarded as a feral animal). This symbolically and technologically produced feral state is, however, the displacement of hybridity as a result of Moreau’s bioengineering work, the latter which is understood both as an act of producing hybrid bodies and entangling Moreau’s own idiosyncratic evolutionary process with that of nature’s. This double-bind between overwriting nature and introducing the logic of the binary in order to create hybridity eventually unveils the reinitiation of borders that are also produced by the binary logic of the inscription of Moreau’s symbolic father function. This logic of the symbolic order presents Moreau’s beasts as both dangerous and fragile (see Yoon 146).

The completion of the doctor’s project, however, is obstructed by the fact that the beasts he engineered are incapable of producing surviving offspring. As Moreau’s right-hand man, Montgomery remarks, there is no indication that they actually carry inherited signs of their humanness (Wells 134), so their engineered being cannot be transferred and reproduced naturally, even if—or despite that—they bear the mark of the beast as the institutionalized inscription of Moreau’s “names of the father.” In this regard, Moreau’s creatures are degenerates in the sense that they lost their original traits and were cut off from their lineage (see Cartron 156). It is even more possible to regard

them as such since by uplifting them to the level between animal and man in the chain of beings, Moreau also managed to terminate their evolutionary process and freeze them in a state of stasis. It is a state that is not only dislocated from the hereditary succession of ancestors but also from the chain of descendants, which yields to the erasure of the altered animals from life itself, if the ability to reproduce is associated with life and the living. Moreau's act of uplifting, however, is constantly reaffirmed by the reproduction of the original signifier (the names of the father). And despite that it postulates itself as preliminary to each and every act of substitution, modification, and initiation, this original signification of the paternal function that controls symbolic exchange is still the end-product of Moreau's biological and institutional intervention. And this is why self-reproduction in Moreau's system only reproduces what already exists, while the latter essentially has to be the product of reproduction. This double-bind is very similar to the structure in which Derrida pointed out the aporia of the irreproducibility of self-reproducing life (Derrida, *Life* 96–97).

Consequently, if Moreau wants to condition his creatures on a biological level, his idea of progression necessarily involves regression too. The animals which are subjected to Moreau's operations do not become human but end up as beasts that are supposed to be transgressive the same way as those wild animals that do not respect borders or state-limits (see Derrida, *The Beast* 4). Yet what actually makes them monstrous is how delimited they came to be due to Moreau's biological and symbolic interventions and the entanglement of the two in their various iterations. Putting it differently, the beasts simultaneously transgress the natural order due to their degenerative and degenerated state, while this state's boundaries are further reinforced by the symbolic father's iterative self-reproduction via his laws. Therefore, even though the randomness that originally produced the beasts would not necessarily yield to iteration, it is the overdetermined repetitiveness of chance (see Lacan, *Seminar II* 192–194) that ultimately makes them conditionable on the biological level *après coup*. In this symbolic structure, the woman as the uplifted and domesticated version of mother nature can be introduced only as a signifier from the outside and after the self-effacing self-reproduction of Moreau's symbolic father-function—which is based on the iteration of substituting overdetermined symbolic randomness for hereditary and evolutionary processes—has already been inscribed. But Moreau's laws, which are produced by the entanglement of the symbolic and the biological, cannot withstand the recreation of the mother that he originally substituted with himself: he

is killed while pursuing the female puma (Wells 148) on whose head and brain he worked so hard (126).<sup>9</sup>

While Moreau himself was identifying more and more with a demystified version of nature, he gained the imaginary function of the father too. If the bath in Moreau's laboratory (the House of Pain)—which can be interpreted as a christening pool in which animals are transfigured—is approached with respect to the paronomasia of Moreau's name to the water of death (Mor-eau), it starts to evoke a feminine trope: the ancient sea that gives life. According to Julia Kristeva's argument, despite the Oedipus-complex always being associated with the law of the father, its determining metaphors (fluidity, castration, etc.) all point to the no less important role of the mother (Kristeva, "L'abjet" 23–24). She argues that the mother's lack, absence, or her presence as abject—in this case: the monstrous, uncontrollable, and symbolic-order-defying naturalness, although the female puma-beast would also have to be regarded as unnatural in Moreau's symbolic system—is thus always preliminary to the presence of the symbolic father. I have already discussed a similar dynamic regarding Frankenstein's oedipal dream in which the real and the imaginary mother take center stage and trigger his symbolic father function. Lacan also argues that the names of the father essentially includes the imaginary father's position that might as well be filled by the mother (Lacan, *Seminar IV* 207, 214) and then retroactively overwritten in the symbolic by the father. Respectively, Moreau's work as the imaginary father reiterates the work of natural selection when it presents itself as a substitute for the imaginary mother: the sea that gives life to some species and drowns others, once again evoking the atmosphere of death associated with the monstrous mother. This why it is only logical that the female puma eventually annuls Moreau's laws which were aimed at overwriting the trope of mother nature.

After the death of their maker, the beasts' speech becomes fractured, but it never reverts to the simple imitation of the sounds of nature, and they themselves do not become animals like the ones showcased in zoos (Wells 178). The regression that takes place after Moreau is deceased contradicts the laws of the symbolic system he established beforehand, because it neither yields to the ultimate enactment of his laws, nor is governed by the retroactively predetermined randomness stemming from them. The regression which Prendick identifies in the beasts does

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<sup>9</sup> This might also be an allusion to the discourse network of German Romanticism in which the woman is latently transfigured as an animal uplifted by difference, displacement, and repetition—from Herder's sheep to Hoffmann's Serpentina (see Kittler 40–42, 87).

not point back to the origin that is the names of the father as the first signifier which enacts a primordial substitution as the foundation for each and every subsequent act of exchange. And although the lack it produces is the lack of the symbolic father function that makes the lack of the mother as nature evident, it does not rehabilitate natural reproduction either.

### **Penetrating and dissecting mother nature**

All in all, either the monster should be integrated into the symbolic order—which also means its submission to the symbolic father, be it an exiled surgeon or societal norms—, so that it can be taken care of. (Yet the monster cannot be part of nature *vis-à-vis* society due to its inappropriate/d otherness.) Or the monster should be appropriated as natural, but since it is incapable of reproduction, it always remains an unnatural or lifeless, nevertheless segregated part of nature. This type of segregation, however, fits the overall Romantic idea of nature as a delimited entity that needs to be domesticated and ruled (see Morton 194–195).

Frankenstein chases and hunts nature, just like he chases and hunts his unnatural creation in the end. He wants to violently reveal all of nature's secrets, including degradation as a natural process. He often uses the word "penetrate" which suggests that he intends to create something that is a part of nature, but he smashes the female monster into pieces, achieving actual hybridity with an unfinished and abandoned experiment. The pulpiness as the end-product of that (prematurely) terminated experiment refers back to Frankenstein's fantasies about the mother, subsequently linking mother nature to natural motherly functions, which triggers his desire to overcome both by eradicating diseases and creating a new form of life counter to the natural restrictions of life. Moreau likewise claims to carry out the demystification of nature whenever he dissects a body and makes parts of different species cooperate and evolve together. While recreating an accelerated form of evolution that is nevertheless supposed to be authentic, he renders it the most unnatural when he fails to program self-reproduction in the process. He succeeds in programming the self-effacement of the iteration of his original substitution instead, while also masking the aimlessness of a progression determined by his symbolic father function. This eventually reveals both the lack of the mother and the repetition of a chain of self-reproducing signifiers.



In both Frankenstein's and Moreau's case, hybridity serves to suspend the reproducibility associated with the mother and efface an original symbolic exchange that nevertheless happens retroactively when the father is inscribed as the primal birthparent and as the founding signifier of binarity with respect to the lack of the mother. Kristeva's account on the symbolic submission of the child to the instance of the father which always presupposes the desire *of* and *for* the mother (Kristeva, *Powers* 53–55) also holds true for going against mother nature and the desire for rewriting or rehabilitating it in an improved form that is then reenacted as the newly natural. Subsequently, the lack of the mother is revealed in Frankenstein's and Moreau's symbolic structure because natural reproduction is a process so evidently associated with the female and mother nature that the product of an original substitution between paternal and maternal functions in creating life is doomed to be unproductive. Consequently, the substitution of the father for the mother as the original act of symbolic exchange *and* inscribing natural life as reproducibility turn out to be one and the same: two sides of a double determination that stems from a mortifying origin. And it becomes impossible to determine which of the two came first since associating reproducibility with mother nature fits perfectly into the logic of the symbolic father function.

Therefore, when the unbound possibilities of nature are unveiled, and the creator of a new lifeform is confronted with hybridity, it has the same consequence as when one realizes that nature indeed has boundaries (see Estók 77). This is why Frankenstein's and Moreau's creations simultaneously transgress all limits and demonstrate (monstrare) the very limits that the binary logic of presence and absence inevitably enact. And those creations also bear the names of the father the same way as the monstrous progeny, the books themselves bear the name of the title-characters: the father's desire as the desire of the child for the mother is a repetition that culminates in monstrosity.

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## »Moj pošastni potomec«: reproduciranje Drugega reprodukcije v *Frankensteinu* in *Skrivnostnem otoku dr. Moreauja*

Ključne besede: angleška književnost / znanstvenofantastični roman / Shelley, Mary: *Frankenstein* / Wells, H. G.: *Skrivnostni otok dr. Moreauja* / lacanovska psihoanaliza / teorija pošasti / reprodukcija / figura matere

Članek pod vplivom lacanovske psihoanalitične teorije razlaga dve temeljni deli britanske grozljivke iz devetnajstega stoletja: *Frankenstein* (1818) Mary Shelley in *Skrivnostni otok dr. Moreauja* (1896) H. G. Wellsa. V prvem delu članka razpravljam o pomenu Frankensteina, ki uniči nedokončano žensko spremljevalko svoje pošasti. V drugem delu analiziram, kako so protogenetska spoznanja, ki jih je Moreau pridobil v svojem prizadevanju za uspešno razmnoževanje povzdignjenih zveri, uporabljena za vpis njegove simbolne funkcije očeta. V zaključku analiziram Frankensteinove in Moreaujeve lastne načine ponovnega vpisa njunih poskusov v naravni red stvari in kako sčasoma izpodrineta moškega ustvarjalca v simbolni položaj matere in tako preprišeta tudi trop matere narave. Zato Frankensteinove in Moreaujeve stvaritve hkrati prestopijo vse meje in pokažejo (monstrare) prav tiste meje, ki jih binarna logika prisotnosti in odsotnosti neizogibno uzakonja.

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