

# Narrative Interest and the Body

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)

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## No Body, no Story...

The “human senses,” Frankenstein’s monster claims when he meets his maker on the summit of Montanvert to tell his story and negotiate for a female companion, “are insurmountable barriers to our union” (Shelley 119). In saying “our union,” the creature addresses himself to mankind in general; but of course, Victor acts as a stand-in for “man” (119) at that moment, and demonstrates the truth of what his creature is saying: Victor’s senses are truly “barriers” in that they literally enclose the creature’s tale, set at the centre of Shelley’s novel. They need to be dealt with before that tale can begin, and again before negotiations can be finalised.

The creature has come to talk: “I entreat you to hear me,” he says to Victor, who attacks him; and then, when Victor does not relent, the creature repeats: “Listen to my tale”; “Listen to me, Frankenstein”; “listen to me” (78). But Victor is unwilling to put up with having to look at the being he has created: “Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form,” he insists (79). The creature attempts to find a compromise, of sorts, as Victor reports: “‘Thus I relieve thee, my creator,’ he said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; ‘thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me, and grant me thy compassion’” (79). By virtue of this compromise, the creature is finally able to begin his story. After he has finished, however, a similar struggle occurs: debating the option of a female companion for the creature, Victor again finds that he cannot reconcile the creature’s

words with his appearance: “His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred” (121).<sup>1</sup>

Whether one is able or not to tell a story depends, it seems, on a successful negotiation of sense impressions and corporeal circumstances: seeing the monster interferes with hearing him; the body from which he speaks confounds the content that his words convey. The creature’s physicality needs to be actively shut out in order for his tale to make proper sense; the feelings of “horror and hatred” that the “filthy mass that moved and talked” provokes – a jumble of corporeal circumstances, it seems, that does not even properly justify the word ‘body’ – need to be shut out for the story to get through to Victor and restore to him the faculty of moral judgement: “I tried to stifle these sensations,” he says, “I thought, that as I could not sympathize with him, I had no right to withhold from him the small portion of happiness which was yet in my power to bestow” (121).

There is a profound contradiction implicit in Victor’s and the creature’s negotiations. While both of them struggle to take the corporeal

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1 It is almost as if those scenes anticipate a paradigm shift that is often linked to later developments such as psychoanalysis’ talking cure, which switches from looking at the body to listening to it speak: “The transference model of listening to the body’s talk recognizes both the involvement of the listener and the final otherness of others’ bodies and stories, both the capacities and the limits of knowing. It marks a partial subversion of the nineteenth-century model of the body held as an object of scrutiny in a detached and objective scientific gaze. [...] The content of the delicate vessels cannot fully be specified, only their narrative trajectory” (Brooks, *Body Work* 255–56). – See also Scott Juengel on “[Johann] Lavater’s physiognomics, the science of divining inscrutable spiritual qualities from the visible testimony of the body’s exterior” as “the governing epistemological model operating in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” a connection of which we find traces in Boris Karloff’s 1930s filmic incarnations of the monster. The ethics of (mis-)reading and interpretation, Juengel says, are interrogated in the story through this very paradigm and there is a “proto-cinematic” quality to both Shelley’s narrative techniques and Lavater’s physiognomics (254–5).

factor out of the equation by covering the other's eyes, or by suppressing their own visceral reactions, precisely this corporeal factor is the reason why the two have to get involved with each other. It is the reason why the creature comes to negotiate for a female companion in the first place – “I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects” (118). It is the crucial point when it comes to the modification of (im-)moral behaviour – “I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?”, the creature reasons. “You would not call it murder, if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. [...] Let [man] live with me in the interchange of kindness, and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude” (119). It is, in each and every instance, the reason for the creature to be shut off from the company he craves – a point that Shelley's novel, and many of its adaptations, drive home by contrasting how the creature is received by the blind old De Lacey with his reception by people with their eyesight intact. “I am blind, and cannot judge of your countenance,” the old man explains, “but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere” (109); but when Felix, Agatha, and Safie enter, the contrast could hardly be greater: “Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted; and Safie [...] rushed out of the cottage. Felix [...] dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently with a stick” (110). In the rejection they provoke, the creature's corporeal circumstances are the reason for him to turn “malicious” (119), murder William and frame Justine: supposing William, at first, too young “to have imbibed a horror of deformity” (117), the creature kills him upon finding out that the child is not only related to Victor but exhibits the same revulsion as everyone else. Justine, in turn, is precondemned as “one of those whose smiles are bestowed on all but me” (118). This corporeal factor also ends up being one of the major reasons that Victor cites for not finishing the female companion for the creature – a twisted and rather perverse argument, it is nonetheless what prompts Victor to destroy his half-finished work: “They might even hate each other,” he reasons, “the creature who already lived

loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She might also turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species” (138). And above all, this corporeal factor is the reason for Victor to abandon the creature upon finishing him (“The different accidents of life are not so changeable as human nature. [...] Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room” [39]).

The dependence, in other words, is radical. From the moment the first creature is finished – an event that comes to pass very early on, in the first quarter of the text – it is hard to think of any plot-driving incident that cannot, in one way or the other, be traced back to the creature’s appearance, or, more precisely: to the gap between what he *does* look like, and what he is *supposed* to look like. Peter Brooks has claimed this significance of the corporeal for modern narrative fiction in general. Acknowledging the pitfalls hiding beneath the term ‘body,’ Brooks nevertheless insists on its outstanding relevance, asking “why and how bodies [...] have been made key tokens in modern narratives[.]” Those narratives insist, Brooks says, “that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations” (*Body Work* xii).<sup>2</sup> And indeed, the monster’s physical appearance features as the “the focus of [the text’s]

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2 Brooks argues for an emphasis on modern narrative, specifically, with reference to the interdependent rise of privacy, the novel, and realism, a development which supports an interest in individuals and their concrete circumstances, including bodies, which are now properly ‘theirs’: “To know the body by way of a narrative that leads to its specific identity, to give the body specific markings that make it recognizable, and indeed make it a key narrative sign, are large preoccupations of modern narrative. If these preoccupations are most fully dramatized in the nineteenth-century novel, they need to be perceived first in the rise of the novel, along with the rise of the modern sense of individualism, in the eighteenth century. The work of social and cultural historians has more and more confirmed our commonsense view that the Enlightenment is the crucible of the modern sense of the individual, the individual’s rights, and the private space in which the individual stakes out a claim to introspection, protection, and secrecy, including private practices of sexuality and writing. [...] Within this

narrative logics,” it occupies the double role of being the story’s “object and motive” (*Body Work* xi).

In fact it is hard to imagine how the story of *Frankenstein* could possibly be told “without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations.” In another sense, though, this is not an uncontroversial claim. There is some ambiguity when it comes to reading the creature either as organic or as an achievement of technology. Mark Hansen claims that “*Frankenstein* embodies [...] a ‘machinic text’ – a text constructed from materials (most centrally language, but also materially concrete social institutions like the law, the family, and indeed technology itself) which are not set off against the real, but which form its very substance” (578–79). This description captures quite well the material rootings of the text, but it curiously neglects all organic or visceral dimensions. Hansen examines how *Frankenstein*, through the contingencies, that is, the element of ungoverned chance in plot, does justice to the radical exteriority of technology’s materiality, which Romantic models of creation fail to take account of. He insists on the radically inorganic nature of ‘modern technology’ as crucial factor for Shelley’s novel. This, however, relies on an overly sharp distinction between the organic and the technological.<sup>3</sup> Frankenstein’s creature and the relevance of his bodily appearance and functioning for the unfolding of his story suggest a vital energy that has to do with intimacy, unpredictability, growth and development. In which ways an energy of this kind also concerns or even comes from machines in the wider sense is up for debate – Hansen is certainly not working from a trivial understanding of ‘the machinic’ – but in any case, the role of the creature’s body for *Frankenstein* can

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private space, what often appears to be most problematic, interesting, anguishing is the body” (*Body Work* 26).

- 3 This distinction has certainly been revised in the years since Hansen made his claim. Zack Sitter points out that “[i]norganic matter is constantly *becoming organic* through the action of living creatures; one of the distinguishing features of organic life, in fact, is its ability, even its drive, to incorporate the inorganic into its substance” (657). See Sitter further for a tracing of the distinction between organic and inorganic through the (anti-)vitalist debates of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. I will return to the question of technology in more detail in Chapter Two.

hardly be connected to a predictable, cold, soulless, or banal mechanics. Of course, different adaptations have allowed the creature differing ranges of cognitive and emotional ability; and yet his capacity to affect and to generate such plot momentum as he does shows that even where the creature performs the role of mindless brute *inside* the story, such objectification is untenable when looking at the overall dynamics of the story, even more so when looking at the dynamics of the *Frankenstein* complex as a whole.

It is in this context quite telling that, as Elizabeth R. Napier points out, the creature “is never given an *objective*, cohesive description in the novel” (179 [my emphasis]). Napier argues that creation, for Shelley’s Victor, works as “a purgative operation, as an act that antibioticly rids the mind or body of an idea” and of which the question never seems to be whether it should be undertaken, but only how (172–73). This denigration of embodiment, Napier says, shows in the fact that “longing for a kind of ‘transparent’ creation, in which the art object, as Plato hoped, would reflect the ‘real’ idea [...] *Frankenstein* unluckily creates an object whose opacity, whose insistent physicality seems, frighteningly, to deny any possibility of semantic translation” (180). And as if to “confirm this ambivalent relationship to the literal, Shelley constructs *Frankenstein* as a tale with a high degree of narrativity, with a constant emphasis on audition rather than spectacle,” which is also why the description of the creature’s physique is ultimately uninventive in the novel and why on top of that, all physical impressions and descriptions are veiled by layers of narrative packaging (180–81). While I agree with Napier’s diagnosis that to confer proper object status on bodies is at best a difficult operation, maybe not an option at all in *Frankenstein*, I would draw a different conclusion from that, which is also somewhat opposed to Hansen’s claim of radical exteriority: it is not that the semantic overrides the physical in the case of *Frankenstein*’s creature, but that the creature’s physique is always already meaningful and that the creature’s body isn’t covered by narrative but rather generates it. There is certainly an “ambivalent relationship to the literal” in *Frankenstein*, in particular on the part of the protagonists. But representation can be said to fail in the face of the creature’s body only if we deny its productive entanglement with precisely this ‘messy’

lump of corporeality. Therefore, while the creature might be difficult to describe, this isn't proof that the body acts as opponent of meaning but rather indicates, quite simply, that meaning is more than description. This very idea is illustrated by the complex and rather fundamental role the creature's physicality plays for Shelley's novel.

## Difficult Material

Such bodily meaningfulness as Brooks focuses on is achieved quite often, he says, by the function of marked-ness (which helps to redeem, Brooks claims, a specifically modern form of alienation), a "marking or signing of the body" which makes this body into a "signifier, or the place on which messages are written." When in narrative literature "the body's story, through the trials of desire and over time, [...] is very much part of the story of a character," the result is "a narrative aesthetics of embodiment, where meaning and truth are made carnal" (*Body Work* 21). Such reciprocal conversions lead, along with the "semioticization of the body," to a "somatization of story: the implicit claim that the body is a key sign in narrative and a central nexus of narrative meanings" (*Body Work* 25). In producing the conflicts that fuel *Frankenstein's* narrative developments, the creature's body is obviously such a "nexus" from which the story proceeds, and to which it keeps returning again and again.

Victor's project is, of course, unusually ambitious: neither is he 'simply' after raising an individual body from the dead, nor 'simply' after creating a working automaton, but he is after creating a functioning autonomous being from bodies that have already completed one cycle of life. The resources Victor is working with are thus, in a sense, not only his materials, not simply the 'stuff' to carry the imprint of his ideas, these resources are, rather, his equals and his opponents, seeing how they must both subject to his ministrations and 'do as they are told,' but also generate their own impulse – when the time is right.

Naturally, such resources are hard to come by, and difficult to deal with. Severe effort goes into finding as well as into managing them: Victor speaks of "days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue," of

“so much time spent in painful labour” and with “toils” (Shelley 34).<sup>4</sup> In fact, the expressions “labour” and “toil” keep repeating themselves in those pages which Shelley dedicates to Victor’s animation experiment (33–40) as the text pays close attention to that experiment’s physical conditions.<sup>5</sup> The creation of the monster is depicted as being not least an encounter of flesh with flesh which by far does not exhaust itself in Victor manipulating dead tissue to fit what his imagination proposes, but which also includes Victor’s imagination being subject to the settings his resources dictate and, what is more, in which Victor’s own corporeal circumstances depend on the operations that the fleshy materials he is working on prompt him to perform.

For the materials Victor uses, pre-formed and inherently historical as they are, demand, on the one hand, conceptual work (“Although I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation,” Victor explains, “yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour”; and as “the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of gigantic stature” [35–36]). On the other hand, those materials demand physical exertion, too, as becomes evident from the notorious passage in which Victor lets us in on what goes on in his “workshop of filthy creation”, which it is worth quoting at length. Rather than presenting Victor as mastermind operating in lofty conceptual spheres only, the passage gives us an urgent sense of his body and the struggles it is involved in:

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- 4 The text is famously unflinching in its depiction of physical detail: “I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses. My attention was fixed upon every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheeks of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain” (34).
- 5 The allusions to childbirth are hard to miss and have been capitalised on by feminist criticism. I will address feminist criticism in more detail in Part Three.

My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realize. [...] [T]he moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance, that only made me feel with renewed acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughterhouse furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion. (36–37)

There's hunger (pale cheeks and an emaciated person), nausea (he turns with loathing, his eyes swim – as in someone whose stomach is heaving), strained eyesight (to the point where eyeballs start from sockets), a diaphragm that's tensing up (in unrelaxed breathlessness), and a number of expressions conveying an agitated physical state, a vibration of muscles and extremities: toil, frantic impulse, trembling limbs. There is thus considerable material opposition to be overcome before success can be achieved; we can tell how massive it is from the force (mental and physical) Victor needs to exert to precisely that end. It doesn't seem accurate, then, to claim, as for instance Jude Wright does, that for "Shelley's Victor the event is horrible, but it is a quiet horror: a trauma of the mind not of

the body” (257). Rather the opposite is the case. In the way it engages Victor wholly – body and soul, if you like – the creature’s body is vital even before it is alive.

For all that Victor keeps secret his actual methods, Shelley’s text nevertheless, and somewhat paradoxically, lingers on the passage from plan to product, zooming in on Victor’s efforts and the obstinacy of his materials. It is this labour and this historicity that ultimately make room for things to go awry: in spite of all the hard work Victor puts into his project, he is unable to ‘get it right’; and in spite of all the attention he pays to the peculiarities of the parts that he tries to bring together, he miscalculates. So while, in one sense, Victor is extraordinarily successful – producing a being that is not only capable of autonomous existence but will turn out to be immensely strong, tall, and physically resilient – in another, he fails miserably, and brings forth a creature whose physical deviance from the norm (and from Victor’s expectations) is so great no one will ever be able to overlook it. The first and most comprehensive description of the creature that the novel presents is all about deviances, contrasts, and things not being as they should:

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! 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, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (39)

“Beautiful! – Great God!”: the solid ground of sober planning (limbs set in proportion and selected according to quality standards) suddenly breaks away into an abyss of deviance where nothing is as expected; and the shock reverberates even in the syntactic arrangement of the passage, into which the exclamation inserts a gap, a terrible moment of waiting before the description rushes into the hell of watery eyes and open wounds. What *should* be and what *is* clash so forcefully that

individual aspects (hair, teeth, complexion, lips) cease mattering in themselves, and come to count only in their shrill dissonance (*all that “these luxuriances” do is form a horrid contrast*). This deviance, then, is what will form an “insurmountable barrier” between the creature and his maker, as well as between the creature and human beings in general. And this deviance congeals, as it were, in whatever marks and scars the creature bears – marks which thus contain an ‘undergrowth’ of history and labour that prevents their flattening out into easy readability. It remains evident that this ‘matter,’ assembled in the monster’s body, has been somewhere before, that something has been done to it, and that it has a life of its own. Frankenstein’s creature is, all in all, the opposite incarnate of the self-evidence that we so often attribute to the material world, including the body.

## Figures

Jean-François Lyotard’s account of figuration captures the involvements of the material world with human discursive habits, to the effect that we cannot assume the material world to be still and silent in itself and discourse to float freely above all material ties. Deconstructing the juxtaposition of the sensory paradigm to that of signification, Lyotard sets out, in his phenomenological account, from the assumption that “there is no absolutely Other, but there is the element dividing itself and turning over, becoming vis-à-vis and therefore perceptible; there is a ‘there is’ that is not originally a heard utterance, but the product of a driftwork that tears the element in two” (5). How speaking individuals relate, for the meaning they aim to convey, to the world that they talk *about* even while they are entangled *in* it is of central relevance for *Frankenstein*; even to the point that we can acknowledge, beyond the question of individual characters’ fates, a material agency driving the whole story forward.

This productive ambivalence is suitably indicated by the concept of the ‘figure’ or the ‘figural.’<sup>6</sup>

Designation, Lyotard says, that is, talking *about* or thinking *about* something, depends not only on the differences between signifiers that make language into what it is, but just as well on the distance that the designating instance *establishes* toward what is being designated, an act of meaningfulness (the ‘there is’ that is not an utterance) different from the structures of syntax and lexicon. Discourse is not the same as gesture (“when one simply combines word and gesture, when saying is dissolved in seeing,” then either “saying goes silent, or the seen must already be something like the said” [6]) but it is not entirely other to it, either. Rather the opposite is the case: the ‘flat’ difference between signifiers depends, in order to produce meaningful discourse, on the ‘thick’ difference between observer and observed – thick because spatial, depending on distance, “drift,” the very kind of thickness characterising the body of Frankenstein’s creature. This is how and where, according to Lyotard, we encounter the figure: we “can get to the figure by making clear that every discourse possesses its counterpart,” that there is a “gesticulatory expanse that makes depth or representation possible” (7–8).

Seeing and speaking, while clearly distinct, can therefore hardly provide the relief from one another that the creature seeks in imploring his creator to *only* listen to him. For the figure is both the sensory at the heart of discourse, and provides discourse with its surroundings: it is “over there, like what it designates in a horizon: sight on the edge of discourse”; but one can also “get in the figure without leaving language behind because the figure is embedded in it. One only has to allow oneself

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6 Lyotard says, in more detail, that his investigation “takes the side of the eye, of its siting; shadow is its prey. The half-light that, after Plato, the word threw like a gray pall over the sensory, that it consistently thematized as a lesser being, whose side has been very rarely really taken, taken in truth, since it was understood that its side is that of falsity, skepticism, the rhetorician, the painter, the *condottiere*, the libertine, the materialist – this half-light is precisely what interests this book” (5).

to slip into the well of discourse to find the eye lodged at its core, an eye of discourse in the sense that at the center of the cyclone lies an eye of calm. The figure is both without and within" (Lyotard 7). Curiously without and within is also the creature's body to the story of *Frankenstein*: always perceived as an impediment to the creature's meaning-making activity by its intradiegetic listeners, it is the condition for the creature's extradiegetic audience's attention. In its dependence on what is, apparently, the most horrible of bodies, *Frankenstein* thus confirms that "[d]iscourse is always thick. It does not merely signify, but expresses. And if it expresses, it is because it too has something trembling trapped within it, enough movement and power to overthrow the tables of signification with a quake that produces the meaning" (9). If "the symbol's transcendence is the figure, that is, a spatial manifestation that linguistic space cannot incorporate without being shaken" (7), that means the figure, conversely, has a peculiar form of transcendence, too, a curiously incorporated transcendence – rather like Frankenstein's creature, as what is maybe the most corporeal of imaginary beings. Speech (in *Frankenstein* and, following Lyotard, elsewhere) evolves in constant emancipation from, and thus also dependence on, corporeal existence; and corporeal existence in turn gains its significance precisely from its capacity to explode speech.

Admittedly, 'overthrowing the tables of signification' seems a bit much to ask of a work of fiction so deeply entrenched in popular culture, and so prone to be represented in formally conventional, linear narratives as the story of *Frankenstein*. However, its inconspicuousness as cultural artefact notwithstanding, there is much transgressive potential to the curious mobility (a "mobility constitutive of depth," as Lyotard puts it [54]) of Frankenstein's creature. The creature is, of course, transgressive in the sense that he tends to upset a number of common binary distinctions (human-animal, natural-cultural or biological-technological, male-female, and so forth). But he is also transgressive in a more profound sense, seeing how he tends to occupy his texts' margins as well as their centres. This is even formally true in the case of Shelley's novel, where the creature's own account is nested at the centre of two layers of narrative, but also resurfaces, if still in quotation, on the top layer at

the end of the novel. Always ready to leave his concrete textual manifestation in a given adaptation behind and appear in another one, the creature nevertheless manifests itself only in and through those texts, even while he resists the dissolution of corporeality in linguistic structures. The creature's transgression, then, concerns multiple junctures: that of the double and somewhat contradictory role he fulfils for his fellow protagonists (where he provokes repulsion) and his audiences (where he produces narrative interest), respectively; but also the juncture between centre and margin of a given text as well as the juncture between several texts. The creature's body has an existence that is as bound to its site of origin and given shape as it is able to exceed it. Both the creature's own utterances (whenever he presents a first-person narrative) as well as the language that describes him are made of signs that are unmistakably of the body (as Brooks puts it, "a mark of the body" rather than only a "mark on the body" [*Body Work* 220]). The creature is both other and essential to the texts he appears in and thus reveals these texts to be practices, metastable at best, rather than mere containers or carriers of disembodied messages. The question of hierarchy – does the monster create the text, or the text create the monster? is the creature's body in the story, or is it of the story? – becomes moot if "[c]reation" is assumed to hold "sway over both nature and art" (Lyotard 231).

## Speak and Be

What the story thus both proceeds from and aims at is a thickness of flesh and a thickness of existence which always puts the monster one step closer to his opponents and audiences than the frameworks of signification seem to allow, or those opponents find bearable. Just as his skin doesn't cover the recesses of his body, the creature in general is prevented from translating his own being into a surface to hide his depth, such as for instance the beautiful De Lacey's have, who do not only exhibit "perfect forms" (Shelley 90) but also "gentle manners" (87), who, in other words, seem to conform in thought, deed, and appearance to an ideal that the creature, although still a 'savage' at that point, is 'natu-

rally' acquainted with – and, what is more, that is outwardly readable, and straightforwardly attributable to inner qualities. Just as the “work” – whether ‘work’ in the sense of ‘apparatus that Victor has put together’ or ‘work’ in the sense of ‘workings, mechanisms’ is open to interpretation – of “muscles and arteries beneath” is visible through his skin, so the creature as a whole is a walking struggle, and uneasy alliance, of physicality with signification, and matter with form. In this historical and labour-intense thickness, extraordinary in every sense of the word (unusual, as for instance the contrast to the De Laceys emphasises, and also unintended, as Victor’s reaction to his own success makes clear), the creature is literally a “body that matters,” or a being that forbids such simplifications of materiality as serve the purpose of excluding matter from the complexities of meaning. The monster’s corporeal constitution attests to the differentiated and differentiating potential of physical resources – a potential the role of which has vacillated throughout the history of Western philosophy. As Judith Butler helpfully elaborates:

In both the Latin and the Greek, matter (*materia* and *hyle*) is neither a simple, brute positivity or referent nor a blank surface or slate awaiting an external signification, but is always in some sense temporalized. [...] Insofar as matter appears in these cases to be invested with a certain capacity to originate and to compose that for which it also supplies the principle of intelligibility, then matter is clearly defined by a certain power of creation and rationality that is for the most part divested from the more modern empirical deployments of the term. [...] In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where ‘to matter’ means at once ‘to materialize’ and ‘to mean.’ (*Bodies that Matter* 7)<sup>7</sup>

In that sense, the irony of the creature’s constitution is that it *does* consist in a “brute positivity” – an overwhelming, all-too-present corporeal-

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7 Lest she appear a proper Aristotelian, Butler qualifies: “Obviously, no feminist would encourage a simple return to Aristotle’s natural teleologies in order to rethink the ‘materiality’ of bodies. I want to consider, however, [...] a possible contemporary redeployment of Aristotelian terminology” (*Bodies* 7).

ity – but simultaneously refuses the simplicity associated with such positivity. Through his discordant appearance, the monster exhibits an insistent spatiality, a form of ‘matter’ in which it is hard to locate any such thing as a ‘silent nature’ (of the Platonic kind: a “receiving principle,” a *physis* to accommodate form or shape [Butler, *Bodies* 14]). He is signification instead of ‘merely’ articulating it. His narrative voice is unusual in that this voice does not permit us to forget about the conditions of its possibility. In that sense, nothing speaks through the monster, but the monster speaks himself, articulates his own (mode of) existence as fictional character. There is altogether more agentiality involved than seems to speak from Brooks’s description of how “[s]igning or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story” (*Body Work* 3).<sup>8</sup>

This seems counterintuitive, given how the creature’s tale is ‘packaged’ in so many narrative layers in Shelley’s text, but that is precisely where *Frankenstein’s* radical dependence, as a story, on the bodies that it depicts comes in: buried under several others as the creature’s voice may be, the corporeal conditions from which it is not separable still assert their sovereignty in driving the story mercilessly towards its desolate ending. Walton, who is the last to see the creature alive shortly before it vanishes in “darkness and distance” (Shelley 191), mimics Victor’s reaction during the negotiations on Montanvert: “Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness,” Walton tells us (or rather, his sister Margaret), “I shut my eyes involuntarily”; at the same time, however, he is acutely aware of the creature’s “powers of eloquence and persuasion” (187–88). One needs to be properly blind, as the old De Lacey, it seems, to stand a chance of separating the creature’s words from the creature’s body; of being able to

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8 Brooks sees in the confrontations of the visual and the verbal in *Frankenstein*, among other things, a confrontation of genres, of Enlightenment writing with the Gothic novel (*Body Work* 309, note 3). I would, however, contradict the dichotomy of the symbolic and the material that is implicit in casting the relation between the visual and the verbal as a simple confrontation.

perceive only one of the two. As a rule, the creature's body inhabits his discourse so stubbornly – or, to put it the other way round, the creature's discourse clings to his body so forcefully, that whoever encounters him is forced to confront the entirety of his being, including his existential contingencies: the “work of muscles and arteries beneath,” the fact that this being (as all others are, only less visibly so) is not simply a given, but depends on the ongoing establishment of coherences between what is disparate, distinct, or discoordinated. Possibly, the creature is more, not less natural than his fellow beings, in that he lacks a skin to cover his conditionality.<sup>9</sup> Even his readers are automatically confronted with the double relevance of the creature – he is dependent on the text which he brings forth himself, not only as speaker, but also as principal narrative interest. On all accounts – to formulate a preliminary summary – the creature is always and inevitably both extremely textual, and extremely corporeal: textual *in its corporeality*, and corporeal *in its textuality*. This, ultimately, puts the creature, and with it, the *Frankenstein* story, at odds with ideology not only in a specific sense, but also in principle: the creature pushes against various norms and conventions (of ‘proper’ bodily form and so on), but additionally, in his meaning-making potential, he also pushes against our reliance on truth as entirely objective, which subjects can master through confirmation or recognition but have not ‘spoiled’ through any actual involvement in its production.

For Brooks, what matters most in modern literature's dependence on the marked body are the possibilities of recuperation and recognition. For him and for many of the texts he investigates, the body's impact is conditioned on its absence, and to mark this body enables us to retrieve and identify it in the “countless moments in modern literature when recognition takes place through markings made on the body itself” because “[s]igning the body indicates its recovery for the realm of the semiotic” and its “recreation as a narrative signifier” (*Body Work* 21–22).<sup>10</sup> The point about *Frankenstein's* creature is not only that his marked-ness

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9 Brooks calls the monster “postnatural and precultural” (*Body Work* 217).

10 Brooks cites as an example preceding, but emblematic for the paradigm to fully develop in modern literature a moment in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus, though

– not only the actual traces we assume that he bears on his skin, but also, in a more general sense, his conspicuousness – is so excessive, so overly present that authentication is unnecessary. In a sense, the creature is a puzzle without mystery, an enigma that isn't really all that engimatic: we never really know how, precisely, he is brought into being (technically speaking), but there is never any doubt as to his identity when he appears, and he is always more present than his fellow beings would like him to be – nobody ever goes looking for Frankenstein's creature (in contrast to, for example, for the equally iconic figure of Count Dracula). More than that, the point about Frankenstein's creature is also that when he speaks, what is really speaking – generating not only words, but (literary) meaningfulness – is the space of his deviance, the difference between himself and his fellow beings, the gap between his actual appearance and what he should, ideally, look like. It is not in itself the physical appearance of the creature that cannot be ignored by whoever listens to him, but rather the fact that this appearance differs so widely from what is “beautiful” or even bearable.

Brooks does not quite go far enough when he claims that “the Monster offers an inversion of the many scenarios [...] in which the human body is marked or signed in order to bring it into the field of signification, so that it can be a narrative signifier.” According to him, what is at stake in *Frankenstein* is “the capacity of language to create a body, one that in turn calls into question the language we use to classify and control bodies” (*Body Work* 220). What we see, Brooks implies, is a drama of separation between body and sign: circumstances require that the two be reconciled, yet by nature those two orders are mutually repellent. (In Brooks's psychoanalytic terminology: the creature's “definition as monster leads him to an overvaluation of language, as that which could take him out of that specular position. Yet he is required, by the logic of desire, to attempt to make language produce another body, to return to the imaginary, the specular, and the drama of sexual difference” [*Body Work*

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he is in disguise, is recognised by an old nurse from the scar on his thigh – “recognition comes [...] through a mark on the body itself” (*Body Work* 2–3).

211]). What if, however, the drama is one of involvement, not of repulsion? The tension that captures narrative interest, I would argue, results not principally from the fact that the sign and the body don't get along, that the two are of fundamentally different orders and life, as it were, forces them to live together. (This view is also what Lytoard opposes in his analysis of the figure.) Rather, what we find in *Frankenstein* is an indication that one arises out of the other, that the sign and the body feed off each other and it is circumstance that, rather than forcing together what doesn't fit, asks us to keep apart what is connected – though never, certainly, harmoniously. It isn't so much that language is a 'way out' of matter – however much the creature might himself adhere to that belief. The creature speaks from the margins of the textual, being entrenched too deeply in physicality to allow us to equate him, fictionality notwithstanding, to 'mere letters on the page' – seeing how none of the protagonists are able to listen to the creature while ignoring his looks; seeing how there would be no story to tell if it weren't for that part of the creature which is 'not language.' He also speaks, however, from the margins of the corporeal, presented and presenting himself as a 'man of letters' – reading Goethe, Plutarch, and Milton, and capable of great rhetorical finesse – and/or an icon of literary history. Matter, or the body, serve as more than enigma that keeps the story going. They are at the same time a source of actual productivity, of narrative meaning. The creature's existence (as the outcast he is inside the story, and as fictional character we read about) is anchored in matter *and* language. It therefore speaks the entanglement of the body with the sign rather than the drama of their separation.

Try as he might, the monster's use of signs, his eloquence, does not and cannot move 'him' – as transcendental subject, if you like – away from his body, and that is not (or not only) because the logic of desire, desire for a female companion, ties him to corporeality, as Brooks claims (*Body Work* 211). It is almost as if the creature's body makes meaning in spite of itself. Signification need not recuperate corporeality here but rather cannot efface it and, what is more, even proceeds from it – not simply in the fashion of a "material support," as Brooks claims for the letter in relation to the message (*Body Work* 20–21), but in a truly gener-

ative relation. Brooks might be assessing correctly a broadly contemporary sentiment in saying that “we tend to think of the physical body as precultural and prelinguistic,” notwithstanding the fact that we assume – some of us, at least – that “bodily parts, sensations, and perceptions” are “the first building blocks in the construction of a symbolic order, including speech, play, and the whole system of human language”; so that our ultimate impression is that “symbolic structures and discursive systems” move us “away from the body, as any use of signs must necessarily do” (*Body Work* 7–8). This sentiment is certainly not unreasonable – Brooks compellingly argues that “[w]hatever it once was, the body is now problematic; and our sense that it was once less so may be a reflection of how much it now is” (5) – but there is no imperative here: signs do not “necessarily” move us away from the body. They may just as well perform a profound interdependence where not only is one the support of the other, but where the dynamic of one is hard to think without the energy of the other.<sup>11</sup> If the creature’s body weren’t in itself, besides appalling,

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11 Here is Brooks’s argument in more detail, which is informative because it showcases precisely the understanding of signification which Lyotard’s account, for instance, opposes: “One tradition of contemporary thought would have it that the body is a social and linguistic construct, the creation of specific discursive practices, very much including those that construct the female body as distinct from the male. If the sociocultural body clearly is a construct, an ideological product, nonetheless we tend to think of the physical body as precultural and prelinguistic: sensations of pleasure and especially of pain, for instance, are generally held to be experiences outside language; and the body’s end, in death, is not simply a discursive construct. [...] Bodily parts, sensations, and perceptions (including the notorious recognition of the anatomical distinction between the sexes) are the first building blocks in the construction of a symbolic order, including speech, play, and the whole system of human language, within which the child finds a libidinally invested place. In this sense, the most highly elaborated symbolic structures and discursive systems no doubt ultimately derive from bodily sensations. Yet these structures and systems move us away from the body, as any use of signs must necessarily do. Representation of the body in signs endeavors to make the body present, but always within the context of its absence, since use of the linguistic sign implies the absence of the thing for which it stands. The body appears alien to the very constructs derived from it” (*Body Work* 7–8). Note that nothing in the scenario Brooks describes ac-

also mobile, differential, out-of-sync, other not just to language but also to itself – what would *Frankenstein* even be talking about? “The novel insistently thematises issues of language and rhetoric because the symbolic order of language appears to offer the Monster his only escape from the order of visual, specular, and imaginary relations [...] it promises escape from a condition of ‘to-be-looked-at-ness,’” Brooks argues (218). Where both he and the creature seem to go wrong, though, is in the assumption that such to-be-looked-at-ness is to be located entirely outside signification (Brooks argues that a monster, by ‘definition,’ “exceeds the very basis of classification, language itself: it is an excess of signification, a strange byproduct or leftover of the process of making meaning” [*Body Work* 218]).<sup>12</sup>

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tually forces him to conclude that the “use of signs” must “move us away from the body” – rather the opposite.

- 12 To say that language is not an escape from the body because it is not its opposite does not, however, entail that it would be, conversely, the natural and immediate expression of a being all transparent to itself. Both views, in fact, imply a simplification of bodies and of matter. Though what speaks from Brooks’s analysis might just be a deconstructivist inclination – a turn from the unitary subject to whom the world is self-evident and thus truthfully and rationally describable – such inclination does not necessitate the relegation of matter into an absolute beyond. In fact, such relegation can itself turn into a form of reliance, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out: “If I have not very often used the word ‘matter,’ it is not, as you know, because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation. It is that [...] this concept has been too often reinvested with ‘logocentric’ values, values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial plenitude, content, referent etc. Realism or sensualism – ‘empiricism’ – are modifications of logocentrism. [...] I will not say that the concept of matter is in and of itself either metaphysical or nonmetaphysical. This depends upon the work to which it yields, and you know that I have unceasingly insisted, as concerns the nonideal exteriority of writing, the gram, the trace, the text, etc., upon the necessity of never separating it from work [...] It seems to me that the materialist insistence can function as a means of having the necessary generalisation of the concept of text, its extension with no simple exterior limit [...] not wind up [...] as the definition of a new self-interiority, a new ‘idealism,’ if you will, of the text. In effect, we must avoid having the indispensable critique of a certain naive relationship to the signified or the

## Truth, Judgment, Fiction

When the creature is confronted directly with his own corporeal deviance, his own monstrosity, he encounters this monstrosity not so much as verified (and verifiable) reality, a truth of knowledge and judgement, but as a truth which is a matter of revelation, of the undeniability of effect, rather than of confirmation. Truth as a matter of judgement becomes fraught, Lyotard points out, once one admits the figural into signification: “If I show that in any discourse, in its underground, lies a form in which an energy is caught and according to which the energy acts upon its surface,” – an understanding of discourse which *Frankenstein* clearly confirms – “if I can show that this discourse is not only signification and rationality but also expression and affect, do I not destroy the very possibility of truth?” (10). Only, he goes on to argue, if we define truth “in terms of the internal consistency of a system, or of operativeness upon an object of reference” (12). If we admit “words’ capacity to *utter* the pre-eminence of the figure” (13), however, truth is not what is tested and confirmed, but what reveals itself: “truth never appears where it is expected” – rather like the creature’s monstrous physicality, as, incidentally, Lyotard’s choice of words suggests, as well:

Truth is discordant [...] its impossible *topos* cannot be determined through the coordinates of the geography of knowledge. Instead it makes itself felt on the surface of discourse through effects, and this presence of meaning is called expression. However, not all expression is truth. [...] Nonetheless one must fight to allow the effects of truth

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referent, to sense or meaning, remain fixed in a suspension, that is, a pure and simple suppression, of meaning or reference [because] [t]he outside can [otherwise] always become again an ‘object’ in the polarity subject/object, or the reassuring reality of what is outside the text” (*Positions* 64–67). In this spirit, too, can we argue that if it is the body that is speaking in *Frankenstein*, it is the body in its originary deviance – its presence, but not its self-evidence.

to come to the surface, to unleash its *monsters of meaning* in the midst of discourse, within the very rule of signification. (12 [my emphasis])<sup>13</sup>

It might thus ultimately be the creature's independence from judgments of truth – and thus his very fictionality – that lend him revolutionary potential and existential force. His extraordinary powers of *appearance*, his blatant figurality, reflected in the fact that this figurality cannot be overlooked, not even by the kindest of beings (the De Laceys, that is), make him a “monster of meaning” more than a figment of the imagination. Beyond Shelley's novel, too, the creature is rarely, both to his fellow protagonists and to his audiences, what needs to be looked for; he is mostly that which presents itself more often, and more closely than anyone would really like it to (we never have to go dig for a *Frankenstein* movie, there are always more of them around than we can count). Much to the regret of the creature, as he learns when he meets the cottagers, being “master of their language” in no way guarantees that the “deformity of [his] figure” will be “overlook[ed]” (Shelley 90).

“Overlook the deformity of my figure”: curiously, the creature seems to hope that the cottagers will see but not see, that they will un-see his physical appearance after they have understood that there is something wrong with it – deformity is, at least according to the way in which the creature uses the term here, perceivable only in the visual paradigm, where the creature hopes, paradoxically, that this deformity will not be seen. The figural, however – that through which the gaze cannot easily move – has a curious relation to truth, and truth will out, or rather, the real will out. The creature has a striking encounter with this kind of realness when he encounters his mirror image in a pool and contrasts it to the cottagers' “perfect forms”: “At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror,” the monster says, “and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and

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13 In the same vein, Latour quotes Spinoza: “It is about the work [of art] rather than about geometry that we should say *verum index sui*: what is true verifies itself” (*Inquiry* 245).

mortification” (Shelley 90). In Lacanian terms, we could read this experience as a perverted mirror stage: where for non-monsters, the “jubilant [if premature] assumption” (76) of imaginary bodily unity prepares the entry into the symbolic order, the creature is thrown back from his imaginary engagement with the spectacle of the cottagers’ beauty into a real that not so much ignores systematic, external confirmation but rather pre-empts it as it confirms itself: “*I was in reality* the monster that *I am*,” the creature says. Unlike Lacan’s infant whose identity is projected forward and outward onto an alien form, the creature is thrown back tautologically unto himself. Reference to a judging instance beyond the immediate self is not so much evaded as it is infelicitous to begin with.

The monster’s ‘truth,’ then, is his physical, bodily, spatial circumstance: an entirely different kind of truth than we commonly expect our judgements of truth values to yield; a kind of truth that is not at all opposed to fiction but that is a kind of ‘figural truth’ in the sense that it directs us “toward what is fabricated, consistent, real” (as Latour puts it [*Inquiry* 238]). It is this peculiarity in which Julia Kristeva sees the *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the fundamental anti-ideological potential of literature and fiction. *Frankenstein*, interestingly, confirms but also generalises Kristeva’s point. Truth values, Kristeva points out, don’t occur naturally. They depend on the construction of a position of judgement, a position from which to look at something and *call it* true or false: the “realm of signification” is “always that of a proposition or judgement, in other words, a realm of *positions*. This positionality [...] is structured as a break in the signifying process, establishing the *identification* of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality. We shall call this break, which produces the positing of signification, a *thetic* phase” (*Revolution* 43).<sup>14</sup> What this thetic break requires is to cleanse meaning-making from all corporeality, including the underlying somatic layers of meaning which Kristeva calls “the semiotic” (as opposed to “the symbolic”), consisting of organic connections and kinetic rhythms. Far

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14 This is not unsimilar to what Lyotard has to say on the figural, but Kristeva’s analysis has the added value of being specifically directed towards literature, language, and fiction.

from being a kind of featureless sludge, the semiotic has structure and organisation, but it doesn't lend itself to the disembodiment that propositionality strives for or claims for itself (though never actually achieves: signifying systems, Kristeva says, ultimately depend on semiotic and symbolic alike).<sup>15</sup>

Problems arise, Kristeva says, when we begin to equate thetic significance with meaning in general, and to regard this kind of position as subjecthood *per se* – when we start to think that this is the only way to make meaning, that is, and that only this kind of stance identifies ‘the subject’ (when we, as Kristeva puts it, reify the subject “as a transcendental ego,” functioning “solely within the systems of science and monotheistic religion” [*Revolution* 59]). Ideology relies heavily on rendering the thetic moment absolute: on the immobilisation of vital processes on behalf of unequivocal judgement and pre-determined values. Fiction counters this, according to Kristeva, because it presents a meaningful use of signs without, however, producing truth values, at least none of the propositional kind. “Mimetic verisimilitude [...] preserves meaning and, with it, a certain object,” she says. “But neither true nor false, the very status of this verisimilar object throws into question the absoluteness of the break that establishes truth.” Mimesis and poetic language thus reveal that thetic positions are neither natural nor unavoidable. In this way, they “prevent the thetic from becoming theological; in other

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15 In Kristeva's words: the semiotic is “a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects, and the protagonists of family structure. But we shall distinguish this functioning from symbolic operations that depend on language as a sign system—whether the language [*langue*] is vocalized or gestural (as with deaf-mutes). The kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* precedes the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject. The genesis of the *functions* organizing the semiotic process can be accurately elucidated only within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up within the subject this other scene of pre-symbolic functions” (*Revolution* 27).

words, they prevent the imposition of the thetic from hiding the semi-otic process that produces it" (*Revolution* 58). This, then, is the "revolution in poetic language" as such, beyond any particular points of critique that we can distil from specific works: that "mimesis and poetic language do more than engage in an intraideological debate; they question the very *principle* of the ideological" (*Revolution* 61 [my emphasis]).

Indeed, *Frankenstein* presents a story that makes it particularly hard to ignore the semiotic and the corporeal; not only, as this chapter has aimed to demonstrate, because it thematises the body (and its place in language, too), but because it reveals the degree to which fiction is entangled with the corporeal, such that the body is not only the object that the story steers toward, but also its motor, its source of energy to begin with. In that sense, *Frankenstein* strengthens Kristeva's point regarding a general anti-ideological potential of fiction. "If there exists a 'discourse' which is not a mere depository of thin linguistic layers, an archive of structures, or the testimony of a withdrawn body, [...] it is 'literature,'" in general, and, I would add, *Frankenstein*, in particular (*Revolution* 16). However, *Frankenstein* also undermines a further restriction that Kristeva introduces; which is the restriction of the properly revolutionary to the properly poetic text and therefore to the more avantgarde and experimental brands of literature. Kristeva derives this restriction from the capacity of the poetic text to not only produce *objects* that are "verisimilar" and hence deactivate thetic true/false-judgment, but to additionally thoroughly deconstruct the speaking *subject*:

[M]odern poetic language goes further than any classical mimesis – whether theatrical or novelistic – because it attacks not only denotation (the positing of the object) but meaning (the positing of the enunciating subject) as well. In thus eroding the verisimilitude that inevitably underlaid classical mimesis and, more importantly, the very position of enunciation (i.e., the positing of the subject as absent from the signifier), poetic language puts the subject in process/ontial. (*Revolution* 58)

Only the transgression of grammaticality, in other words, fully deactivates the concept of a pre-existing, stable subject which would only avail

itself of (rather than being constituted by) a linguistic set of rules to register propositions and their truth values.

I am, however, not sure that we have said quite enough about fiction if we limit ourselves, essentially, to pointing out its lack of extralinguistic reference (its lack of true or false propositions, that is, which is substituted by verisimilar objects, to put it in Kristeva's jargon). There is good reason to assume that "classical mimesis" – 'normal stories,' as it were – draws the thetic subject into question, too, and that is precisely because, not unlike the avantgarde poetic text, it makes any claims to God-like enunciatory positions appear questionable. It may seem to contain conventional acts of signification ("Mimesis does not actually call into question the unicity of the thetic; indeed it could not, since mimetic discourse takes on the structure of language and, through narrative sentences, posits a signified and signifying object," Kristeva claims [*Revolution* 58]). Those, however, have their own way of putting the subject "in process." Almost as when in an impressionist painting, what appears as your average (if fantastically beautiful) water lily from afar on closer look disintegrates into a chaos of brushstrokes, the speakers of narrative fiction, if we try to grasp them firmly, often enough have a disturbing tendency to crumble into inconsistency, unreliability, and inscrutability. Who is it that's speaking? And how? The very fact that this is a standard question to ask of narrative fiction shows how different it is from thetic signification: for this is precisely what we *don't* ask of the thetic. (It is, in some sense, the very definition of the thetic to discourage that kind of question; and it is precisely that kind of question over which monster and maker haggle in their confrontation on the glacier of Montanvert.)

To be sure, most versions of *Frankenstein* employ conventional narrative structures, that is, they not only leave grammar intact but also, more often than not, narrative conventions (narrating events in chronological order, for instance). It is not unusual, however, that *Frankenstein* stories bring about systematic dispersals of the "enunciating subject" which manage to question that subject through its sensuous entanglements without, however, rendering it ineffective as speaker, thus producing meaningful discourse, but without "hiding the semiotic process that produces it." The more drastic examples of such displacements, as Chap-

ter Two will discuss, thus foreground the only seemingly trivial quality that stories have of being-told. Classical mimesis or not, meaning, for narrative fiction, can never quite be said to be generated 'elsewhere,' without the actual involvement of that speaking subject which supposedly only needs to grasp a world which presents itself, ready for description. Hence a thetic sense of what it means to speak (to judge objectively) is deactivated quite without the help of the transgressive syntax of experimental poetic texts.