ALLEGORICAL RENDERINGS OF THE BIRTH TOPOS: MYTH, TECHNOLOGY, GENDER AND SELFHOOD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY POETIC PRODUCTION

Boyd J Petersen
ALLEGORICAL RENDERINGS OF THE BIRTH TOPOS:
MYTH, TECHNOLOGY, GENDER AND SELFHOOD
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
POETIC PRODUCTION

by

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of a dissertation submitted by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I am concerned with nineteenth-century creation narratives, texts from the 1800s that depict the creation of an artificial being. In particular, I will examine E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Ève future*. I consider each of these texts as an allegorical rendering of the birth topos in which poetic production is metaphorically compared to childbirth. Significantly, each of these texts portrays the creator as male. In each of these texts, I discover a foundation in the philosophy of early Romanticism and a critique of the very nature of the production of art in an increasingly technological era. In the body of this dissertation, I will look at six central issues: First, I will show how these texts all employ a poetics of confusion, a confusion that is central and necessary to their theme and purpose. Second, I will look at how these creation narratives reflect the changes then taking place in the nineteenth-century print culture and discourse networks, the epistemological transformations described by Friedrich Kittler. Third, I will argue that these texts critique the Romantic philosophical ideal of autoengenderment, the male subject creating himself in and through poetic production. Fourth, I will demonstrate that these are fragmented texts which participate in the Romantic theory of the fragment. Chapter 1 focuses on E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* and looks at how the central character, Nathanael, is positioned between two eras of print technology and discourse networks. Chapter 2 looks at how, in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley critiques the practice of Romantic autoengenderment, while at the same time Shelley is erased from her own text by the patriarchal system of print production. In Chapter 3, I examine Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Ève future* as a text that reflects the deep anxieties about the new technologies of representation, one of the first to reflect on both traditional forms like literature and
sculpture, but also emerging forms like photography, film, and the phonograph. Finally, I will consider the fifth and sixth issues in the conclusion where I examine the way the texts reject the contemporaneous rhetoric of the technological sublime and simultaneously reaffirm the boundaries established by philosophical discourse on the sublime.
I DEDICATE THIS DISSERTATION TO MY FAMILY
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INTRODUCTION

THE BIRTH TOPOS AND THE REEMERGENCE OF MYTH

Long before Helen Cixous called for l’écriture feminine, the metaphor of writing as a form of motherhood had been a central trope in poetic discourse. From Plato to the present, authors have used the birth topos to compare poetic production with childbirth. No one embraced the trope more completely than the Romantics. Coinciding with this development was the reemergence of mythmaking in Romantic poetics, poets creating and reworking myths in their own artistic production. It is only natural that the two concepts would merge and the birth topos would become allegorized in Romantic myth, that creation myths would be used to describe the production of poetry. The birth topos allegorized as a creation narrative is evident in each of the texts considered here: E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Der Sandmann, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s L’Ève future. One of the central contentions of this project is that each of these texts is rooted in the philosophical program of early German Romanticism and, at the same time, represent the process of creating literature in a new era of print technology. They also reflect the changes in the era’s “discourse networks,” a term media critic Friedrich Kittler uses to describe the educational and epistemological changes that shape the production of

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1 In addition to Terry Castle’s historical overview and Susan Stanford Friedman’s feminist analysis, many scholars have examined the birth topos. Alice Kuzniar explores the topos in texts by Novalis, Schlegel, and Karoline von Gunderrode; Elizabeth Sacks has looked at Shakespeare’s use of the trope; Marjorie Gelus has discussed the topos in Kleist’s Das Erdbeben in Chili; John H. Smith has discussed the trope in Kleist’s Marquese von O; and Susan Gubar has examined the trope in the work of Katherine Mansfield and in Karen Blixen’s “The Blank Page.” Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown, conversely, that the trope of the pen as a “metaphorical penis” (3) has resulted in an “anxiety of authorship” for aspiring female authors.
literary texts. Both *Der Sandmann* and *Frankenstein* portray Kittler’s discourse network of 1800, and Kitter himself has argued that *L’Ève future* is a pivotal text between the discourse networks of 1800 and 1900.

One of the central contentions of this project is that the philosophical foundation for these texts may be found within the program of German Romanticism. Since German Romanticism was both self-reflexive and self-critical, these texts should, accordingly, contain within themselves their own theory. Schlegel writes that, “a theory of the novel would itself be a novel” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 194). Likewise, for Novalis, “the separation of poet and thinker is only a semblance.” He continues, “There is no true difference between theory and praxis” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 234-35).

Accordingly, the theory of Romantic creation narratives should be found in Romantic creation narratives. Each text should be read as a self-reflexive critique of its own project. Likewise, if these texts thematize the act of creating literature, they should also reveal the new material concerns authors faced during this period. Analyzing these Romantic creation narratives reveals a participation in the emerging genre of the fantastic, an allegorization of the emerging print culture and of Kittler’s discourse networks, and a reflection of the philosophical program outlined by early Romanticism of autoengenderment (or, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have called it, the Romantic “subject-work”). Symptomatic of this foundation in early Romanticism, each text employs a poetics of confusion and reveals a fascination with the fragment. The central romantic topoi of confusion and fragmentation are evident in each text. The narratives focus on a central theme of confusion as they work to confuse readers, while, at the same time, fragmented bodies in the narratives mirror the fragmented nature of the texts. In sum, the metaphor of the text as a child is transformed into a narrative about the creation of a creature, and that creature shares important characteristics with the text itself. This literary creature and the text itself reflect a philosophical basis in German Romanticism, an evolving discourse network, and the changing print culture of the period.
Before focusing specifically on *Der Sandmann*, *Frankenstein*, and *L’Ève future*, I first explore the theoretical underpinnings of this project. In this introductory chapter, I will first examine the literary history of the birth topos and its central and unique position in Romanticism. Second, I will look at nineteenth-century mythmaking—the origins of the nineteenth-century poetic turn to myth and the literary heritage available to nineteenth-century mythmakers. Third, since this new mythmaking essentially created fantastic narratives, I will explore the implications and characteristics of the emerging genre of the fantastic. Fourth, I will provide an overview of the “fantastic” changes within the print culture during the period and discuss Kittler’s notion of discourse networks. Fifth, I will return to the philosophic underpinnings of these texts in German Romanticism, and will discuss the importance of confusion, allegory, and irony to nineteenth-century poetic production. Sixth, I will show how that poetic production included a notion of autoengenderment, the male subject writing himself as a woman child bearer who, in turn, produces his own self. Finally, I will discuss how the fragment emerged in both theoretical discourse and as a genre of literary production.

**The Birth Topos**

Terry Castle has traced the history of the birth topos back to Plato, where in the *Symposium* Socrates quotes the female prophet Diotima as saying that some people are “pregnant in body” while others, the poets, are “pregnant in soul.” Their literary “offspring” are superior to human offspring in that they are immortal, which, in turn, transfers immortality to the poet (qtd. in Castle 194-95). Castle demonstrates that throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, poets were “at ease with the metaphor” and employed it with a “comfortable acceptance” (196). She goes on to show that during the late-seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, a greater ambivalence developed toward the trope. Beginning with Dryden, the trope was “rejected as a metaphor for the poet’s own creativity” (197) and was instead transformed into a negative image applied
to other poets’ inferior work. To satirize and ridicule the excesses of bad poets their poems were compared to miscarriages and abnormal births. Typical is Swift’s rejection of Charles Carthy’s Horace translation in his poem “To Carthy”:

Thy labours, Carthy, long conceal’d from light,
Piled in a garret, charm’d the author’s sight,
But forced from their retirement into day,
The tender embryos half unknown decay;

This “monster birth,” as Swift calls it, “perish’d on its natal Day.”

Romantic poets, on the other hand, emphasizing the “synthetic imagination, the spontaneous ‘natural’ generation of poetry, [and] individual artistic self-expression” reversed this trend, employing the topos with “conspicuous and celebrational [. . .] import” (Castle 203). The Romantic vision of a “spontaneous” genesis of poetry led Percy Shelley to write, “a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother’s womb” (714). In Cousin Bette, Balzac uses the trope effusively:

Such are the pleasures of invention in the imagination. [. . .] But to produce, to bring to birth, to bring up the infant work with labor, to put it to bed full-fed with milk, to take it up again every morning with inexhaustible maternal love, to lick it clean, to dress it a hundred times in lovely garments that it tears up again and again; never to be discouraged by the convulsions of this mad life, and to make of it a living masterpiece that speaks to all eyes in sculpture, or to all minds in literature, to all memories in painting, to all ears in music—that is the task of execution. [. . .] This creative habit, the indefatigable maternal love that makes a mother (that natural masterpiece that Raphael so well understood)—in short, this intellectual maternal faculty that is so difficult to acquire, may easily be lost. (209)

Balzac’s extravagant imagery reflects the zeal with which Romantic poets used the topos.

Feminist critics disagree about whether the trope is liberating or repressive. Susan Stanford Friedman has noted that while the birth topos is celebrated by French feminists

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2 Castle postulates that the shift occurred due to the Enlightenment’s emphasis on reason: “artistic activity should not be linked, even metaphorically, to physiological process” (201). Friedman notes a parallel shift in attitudes toward the body during the eighteenth century which “intertwined disgust for woman and the human body she represented” (65).
and gynocritics who promote the concept of *l'écriture feminine*, others find the trope essentialist and biologically deterministic. Friedman herself finds the (mis)appropriation of the topos in Romanticism problematic. She concedes that “the Romantic period’s embrace of intuition, emotion, and organicism—all qualities associated with the feminine—transformed the birth metaphor into something positive” (65). However, she also sees it as being “perceived through an androcentric lens as a mindless, unconscious, uncontrolled act of the body” ultimately reaffirming “creativity as the province of men and procreativity as the primary destiny of women” (65), while women have employed it in ways that “tend to be deeply personal statements about how they try to resolve their conflict with cultural prescription” (66).

Romantics’ use of the birth topos can appear quite sexist at times. For example, it is easy to be critical of the rigid classification of the sexes found in Johann Wilhelm Ritter’s use of the topos in his “Natural Philosophy of Femininity”:

> Art appears to be man’s way of giving birth; the phenomenon of separation from coitus, from the intimate union of love. Woman gives birth to human beings; man gives birth to the work of art. Yearning will never represent a work of art, but only the tranquility of pregnancy. Man emerges from love pregnant with the work of art; woman emerges from love pregnant with child. Humanity and art are two sexes. It is in art alone that human beings exist, in human beings alone that art exists. As a giver of birth, woman is the artist; as an artist, man is the giver of birth. (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 396)

For Ritter, women may create children, but only men can be artists.³

On the other hand, Alice Kuzniar has argued that for other early German Romantics the topos reflects “not only a theory of writing and inspiration as elemental, intuitive and authentic” but also demonstrates “a certain belief in the transferability and flux of gender characteristics.” Despite the period’s scientific understanding of gender which increasingly emphasized male-female difference, Jena Romantics hypothesized

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³ In another use of the birth topos, Schlegel writes, “Just as a child is actually a thing that wants to become a person, so too is a poem nothing more than a thing of nature that wants to become a work of art” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse 314).
that, “complementarity of gender binaries could be housed in one individual” (Kuzniar 83). Schleiermacher’s expressed desire to be a woman, as well as Novalis’s statement that men are to some extent women and women men, both point, according to Kuzniar, toward a less stable gender order. Like Friedman, Kuzniar notes that men and women employed the topos in very different ways. One unique example Kuzniar cites is from the poetry of the childless female poet Günderrode, where the topos reflects not life but death: “the body does not so much give birth by creating and composing as it itself is written and fatally etched upon. Her giving birth is nonprocreative” (83).

In texts like E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Der Sandmann, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, and Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s L’Ève future, the birth topos is allegorized and mythologized: employing a mythic structure, the narratives describe creative processes in which a creature is brought to life, and that process is analogous to the production of poetry. It follows that a central theme of these texts is the act of poetic production. As the birth topos was transformed from a metaphor to a narrative, that narrative would often take the form of a creation myth. The Romantic attraction to the birth topos would be linked with another Romantic fascination: mythmaking.

**Nineteenth-Century Mythmaking**

Creative myth-making was a central part of the Romantic project. As M.H. Abrams has pointed out, “many of the most distinctive and recurrent elements in both the thought and literature of the age had their origin in theological concepts, images and plot patterns” (65). Reworking the Judeo-Christian and Greek myths became a preoccupation with the Romantics, and all of these mythic retellings came to share a common pattern. Romantics put a new twist on these ancient myths, revitalizing them for a new era.

The post-Enlightenment world presented a religious crisis. The Enlightenment had called into question many of the central tenets of religion. The centrality of God’s
place in human history and biblical authority were undermined as science was increasingly able to explain the functions of the cosmos—from the human body to the solar system—in mechanistic terms. In many cases, empirical evidence directly clashed with the religious doctrines. (For example, the fossil record of dinosaurs did not conform to the record of primeval creation found in Genesis.) Since the split that we see today between the sciences and the humanities did not exist—Wordsworth read Erasmus Darwin and Darwin wrote poetry—contemporaneous science and its theological and ethical ramifications were explored in and through literature. Thus, Romantic poets were fully aware of the new clash between science and religion, and most felt no strong connection with organized religion. Shelley was expelled from Oxford for co-writing a treatise on *The Necessity of Atheism*. Despite a certain admiration for the beauties of Catholic ritual, Lord Byron despised institutional religion. After being reared by a staunch Presbyterian mother, Keats “never had a kind word to say for the Christian Church,” which he found to be authoritarian, conspiratorial, exploitive, and guilty of suppressing “natural passion and right reason through the propagation of superstition and the dogmatic forcing of individual conscience” (Evert 12). Not all Romantic poets shared this antipathy for religious tradition. A professing Christian, Coleridge tried to salvage some of the Christian creed within a secular metaphysical system (Abrams 67). Likewise, Wordsworth’s youthful radicalism turned to middle-aged political and religious conservatism. The Romantic period was marked, however, by a crisis, a wound from which traditional Western religion would never fully recover. As Earl Wasserman observed, during the nineteenth century “almost all accredited systems of ordering experience had broken down.” Therefore, poets had to “work out the functional relations of [their] experiences”; they quite literally had “to make [their] poetic world before [they] could make [their] poems” (228).

Despite this growing antipathy toward organized religion, the philosophical response to the Enlightenment specifically called for a new myth which could inspire
poetry to heal the wounds left by what was perceived to be an over-reliance on reason. The early German Romantics, particularly Friedrich Schlegel and August Wilhelm Schlegel, both accomplished classical philologists and translators, recognized and played with the etymological roots of the theoretical words they employed. Romantics saw “theory” (coming from the Greek for “to see as the gods”) as a spiritual way of seeing. They emphasized that “poesie” comes from the Greek root “to make” or “to create.” Thus, they came to define poetry as a “religio” (the word’s etymological meaning of “a binding together” into a community), believing that people who love poetry are bound together in communities that cannot be dissolved. As Schlegel observed, “Religion is the all-animating world soul of culture” and must “encircle the spirit of the moral human being, as if it were its element” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 326-27).

Schlegel, in his Dialogue on Poesy, called for a “new mythology” which would be “formed from the deepest depth of the spirit” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 183). All ancient poetry, Schlegel believed, “joined one to the other” forming a whole because there was one underlying myth. Schlegel did not want to go back to the Greeks, however. He proposed developing a new mythology based upon Idealism. He saw myth as vital for poetry, stating that it made it possible to see “sensually-spiritually” and “hold fast” that which is “otherwise eternally [fleeing] consciousness” (186). He described myth in poetic terms as “the soul in its surrounding body through which it shines in our eye and speaks to our ear” and as a “colorful swarm of ancient gods” which recreates the “original chaos of human nature” (187). Myth allows us, Schlegel argued, to express the inexpressible, to give the highest form to the sublime.

Schiller felt that the Enlightenment’s reliance on reason had left humans out of balance, that the specialization of the age had left no one whole. In his On the Aesthetic Education of Man, he argued for the need to educate the human senses. Art, he felt, could restore the lost totality of the human soul, but it would require a new myth. He believed that a return to the forms of the Greeks, united with the content of his present age, could
heal society. Likewise, Friedrich Schelling believed that "each truly creative individual must invent a mythology for himself," a universal mythology which would harmonize Greek myth with the claims of Christianity (qtd. in Abrams 67).

Blake would take Schelling and Schlegel's advice and create his own largely unique mythic vocabulary. However, most Romantic poets borrowed liberally from the Greeks and the Judeo-Christian tradition and revitalized these ancient patterns for a new era. M.H. Abrams suggests this motive came from a recognition that there was a shared vocabulary they could draw upon, and their "helplessness to escape religious formulas which, since they are woven into the fabric of our language, control the articulation of our thinking" (66). Walter Evert argues a similar point with regards to Keats' poetic mythmaking. In the myths of classical antiquity, Evert maintains, Keats found "a ready-made vocabulary and symbolism of those natural forces and ideal concepts on the balance of which he believed the cultural health of the individual to depend, and which he thought to be artificially stifled by the prevailing Christian culture" (14). The structures and patterns of our inherited myth are so ubiquitous that Romantics felt it futile to escape them, but, likewise, they recognized the potential power these symbols maintained. However, they would not be content to simply reuse these symbols. Romantics would recast them in ways that revitalized and reinterpreted these ancient symbols, making them, as Abrams suggests, "intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being" (66). Across Europe, it became fashionable to recast myth (and its close cousin folklore) in literary forms.5

4 In particular, see Schiller's Sixth Letter, pages 31-42 of the Wilkinson and Willoughby edition.

5 With the emphasis placed on collecting folklore by Herder and the Grimms, it is understandable why folktales were more common in German literature than myth.
Literary Heritage of Creation Myths

Nineteenth-century creation narratives were influenced by both a long literary heritage of creation stories and by the science of the era. Hesiod’s *Prometheus* and Ovid’s *Pygmalion* are evident in several of these texts; however, the most important influence was the biblical Adam and Eve story, especially as mediated by Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. As Paul Cantor has demonstrated, Milton’s retelling of the Adam and Eve narrative “was the primary form in which Romantic mythmakers confronted the orthodox account of creation” (1). Cantor maintains that Romantic poets felt an anxiety of influence vis-à-vis Milton. They were “obsessed with surpassing Milton’s achievement as a poet,” but, moreover, they had a “genuine disagreement with Milton” about the nature and condition of humankind (xii). Where Milton sought to “justify the ways of God to man” (I, 26), the Romantics sought, in essence, to put God on trial for his crimes against humanity. To that end, Romantic texts transform the myth, giving it a decidedly Gnostic twist, recasting the Satan figure as a positive character motivated by a search for knowledge.

In the Bible, there are actually two accounts of the creation, one in Genesis 1 and another in Genesis 2-3.6 Scholars have identified the first narrative in Genesis 1, which they labeled P, as the more recent of the two accounts, dating to the sixth century BCE. In that version, at the conclusion of the six periods of creation, the man and the woman are created simultaneously. The passage is recorded in lovely parallelism that many scholars have seen as emphasizing the equality of the two sexes:7

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6 The idea that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, is composed from multiple sources dates to the nineteenth-century critical work of Bleek, Hupfeld, and Graf, and was more fully developed by Julius Wellhausen. For an entertaining but scholarly introduction to the Documentary Hypothesis, see Richard Eliot Friedman’s *Who Wrote the Bible?*

7 See for example Robert Alter (145-47) and Anne Gardner. On the contrary, scholars like Phyllis Bird see this kind of reading as problematic at best. For a summary of the commentary see Pamela Milne’s article “Ève and Adam: A Feminist Reading.”
So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The second biblical account of the creation, which scholars have named J, actually dates to an earlier period than the first one, approximately 950 BCE. In this account which comprises Genesis 2-3, God creates Adam (ha ‘adam, literally the person) from the earth (ha ‘adama), and then, in an interesting inversion to normal human reproduction, creates the woman (ha ‘isha) from the man (ha ‘ish). He places them in a garden where a serpent tempts the woman to eat a forbidden fruit. When she succumbs to the temptation and then gets the man to eat, the two are cast out of the garden and cursed, the man with toil and labor and the woman with pain in giving birth. It is at this point that the man names his wife Eve (havva, the word recalls the word for life), “because she is the mother of all living” (3:20).

From the time of the narrative’s composition to the Second Temple period, Adam and Eve remained in the Garden undisturbed by commentator, critic, rabbi, or priest. The story never seems to have caught on among its original Jewish audience. It was never cited or retold within the corpus we now call the Hebrew Bible and is seldom mentioned in other writings from the period. However, from the Second Temple period to the present, the story became ubiquitous in scripture, art, and literature. The story is a common theme in Jewish midrashim; it achieved a central position in the Christian economy of salvation; and is retold in the Quran and in Islamic sources. In the Middle Ages, the story was discussed in both philosophical texts and was featured in passion plays to instruct the people about the enticements of Satan.8

8 The seminal feminist analysis of the Adam and Even narrative is in Phyllis Trible’s God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, chapter four, “A Love Story Gone Awry.”

9 A useful overview of the interpretations of the Adam and Eve narrative from the time of the Hebrew Bible to present is found in Kvam, Shearing, and Ziegler’s Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender.
The most influential literary reworking of the biblical narrative ever written, however, was Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. While Milton has a decidedly apologetic goal, to help his readers understand the workings of God, he nevertheless challenges some of his inherited readings of the Adam and Eve narrative. Unlike earlier interpretations from the Church Fathers onward, Milton sees Eve as a good creation, “Godlike erect, with native Honour clad/In naked Majestie,” and he portrays both Eve and Adam as “lords of all./And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine/The image of their glorious Maker shon” (IV, 288-92). Milton also shows sexuality in a positive light: the “conjugal attraction unreprov’d” by God, and with “kisses pure,” they were “imparadis’t in one another’s arms” while innocently enjoying “their fill/of bliss on bliss” (IV, 492-508). All nature, says Milton, rejoiced in their “nuptial bowre (VIII, 506-32). Nevertheless, Milton’s God is often viewed as more patriarchal than the one in Genesis, and his Eve—“a noveltie on Earth” but a “fair defect/Of Nature”—is seen to reflect Puritan ideals about womanhood and domesticity. Others have seen these negative aspects of Milton’s Eve as mitigated by the fact that Adam is incomplete without Eve and that if she is Adam’s downfall, she is also his salvation (Kvam, Schearing, and Ziegler 287). *Paradise Lost* is certainly an important text in two of the works considered here: both Mary Shelley and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam use epigrams from Milton in their books. (Hoffmann makes no allusion to the Adam and Eve narrative in *Der Sandmann*, but it is present in his tale *The Golden Pot.*).

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10 For background and excerpts from the negative interpretations of this narrative that Milton likely inherited, see Alcuin Blamires’s *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*.

11 As an epigram to her novel, Shelley cites book X, 743-45, “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/To mould me man? Did I solicit thee/From darkness to promote me?” Villiers cites two passages from *Paradise Lost*: As an epigram to book three, chapter three, he cites (incorrectly) from Milton book III, 39-40, and as an epigram to book three, chapter five, Villiers cites the invocation from Milton’s book III, 1.
Yet another source for nineteenth-century myth-making came from the ancient legend of the golem. Based on a mystical Jewish reading of Genesis chapter one where God creates by speaking the world into existence, the golem is a humanoid creature without a soul which is created out of dirt using a magical incantation of God’s divine name. The word “golem” only appears once in the Bible (Psalm 139:16), and from this originated the Talmudic usage of the term: something unformed and imperfect. The legend of the golem is tied back to the magical uses of the Sefer Yetzirah (or Book of Creating) which was written sometime between the third and sixth centuries BCE. To create a golem one needed virgin soil from which to sculpt a human form. When the participants in the ceremony danced around the form chanting the letters of the divine name of God in accordance with a set of detailed directions, the golem would arise and come to life. In some legends the word emet or “truth” is inscribed on the golem’s forehead, and when the first letter of the word (aleph) was erased (spelling the word met, or death) the golem would disintegrate. The most popular version of the legend is associated with Judah Loew, Rabbi of Prague. According to the legend, Rabbi Loew created the golem to be a servant, but was forced to turn him to dust when the golem began to destroy things and to endanger people’s lives (Scholem 351-55).

The world of alchemy provided another myth for creation narratives. In this medieval lore the creation of the homunculus (or little man) was made possible through a process of elaborate distillation procedures that border on magic and proto-science. The most important account of this process dates from the Renaissance philosopher Paracelsus. In his Philosophia Sagax (1536) he describes the process:

If the sperm, enclosed in a hermetically-sealed glass, is buried in horse manure for about forty days and properly “magnetized,” it begins to live and to move. After such a time it bears the form and resemblance of a human being, but it will be transparent and without a corpus. If it is now artificially fed with the Arcanum sanguinis hominis until it is about forty

Robert Plank’s “The Golem and the Robot” is a fine, brief overview of the traditions of the golem, the homunculus, and the automaton.
weeks old, and if allowed to remain during that time in the horse manure, in a continually even temperature, it will grow into a human child, with all its members developed like any other child, such as may have been born of a woman, only it will be much smaller. We call such a being a homunculus, and he may be raised and educated like any other child, until he grows older and obtains reason and intellect, and is able to take care of himself. (qtd. in Rowen 171)

The rational, almost scientific, attitude in this formula suggests, as Rowen puts it, that the homunculus is “the child of an age of dawning science” (172). However, from a post-Enlightenment perspective, it is evident that this was a natural, spontaneous process, nothing like the assembly-line produced engineered machines of the nineteenth century.

As one would expect, the science of the day also impacted the nineteenth-century creation myths. “Romantic nature writing owed an important debt to scientific observation and to the analysis of natural processes during this same period” (Nichols 3). Natural science—the study of the chemical and material world—as well as natural history—the systematic study of plants and animals—had a strong influence on Romantic writers. As Wordsworth wrote in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, “The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet’s art as any upon which it can be employed” (qtd. in Nichols 2).13

Perhaps the greatest influence on these creation narratives was technology. Human-made humanoid creations began to appear during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The fascination the era had for these clockwork-run, life-like replicas is hard to imagine today. In exhibition halls throughout Europe, automata (or machine men) became the rage. People would stand in long lines for hours to view these technological wonders. Two child automatons were first exhibited in Neuchâtel by the inventors Pierre Jaquet-Droz and his son Heri-Louis in 1774. Gaby Wood describes witnessing these two automata at work, the one drawing a portrait of Louis XV and George III and the other writing “I think therefore I am”:

13 See Nichols generally for a concise overview of the interplay between the sciences and literature during the Romantic period.
These prodigies, who look no older than toddlers, are dressed for the occasion in identical velvet jackets and silk pantaloons. Their faces are doll-like and blank; their bare feet dangle some way off the ground. The first boy begins by dipping his quill pen in a tiny ink well at the side of his desk. He shakes it twice, then methodically moves his hand across the paper and starts to trace the letters in his message. Meanwhile, his twin works on a sketch. He slowly draws a head in profile, then drops his chin and blows away the dust from his pencil. While the boys perform their dutiful activities before a small but avid crowd, they are turned to face the wall: their clothes are pulled away and their spines are prized open. Inside each child is a moving piece of golden clockwork. (Wood xiii)

These automata must have seemed fantastic to the eighteenth-century audiences who, as if on a pilgrimage, traveled many miles to view them.

Another Jaquet-Droz automaton, a “Musical Lady,” was exhibited in 1776 in London. She played five tunes on a harpsichord while her eyes moved coyly from side to side and her chest moved lightly as if she were breathing (Wood xiv; see Figure 1). During this new era, people were creating in fact what had previously only been a product of folklore. There were rumors that Albertus Magnus, the medieval alchemist and philosopher, created an automaton out of brass. Likewise, it was said that Descartes created a mechanical person. However, the automata of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were more than rumors; they were displayed publicly in exhibition houses and fairs. The most famous of these automata was “The Turk,” a chess playing automaton created by the Hungarian national Wolfgang von Kempelen in 1769 (see Figure 2). The Turk was carved out of wood and was dressed in a white turban, striped silk shirt, fur-trimmed jacket, white-gloved hands, and a drooping mustache. Sitting next to a wooden chessboard, the Turk could move his head, eyes, and arms. Touring from Vienna to Paris to Dresden, the Turk won almost every game of chess he played (see Wood 60-110). ¹⁴

¹⁴ Book-length studies of the history of automata and puppets are Gaby Wood’s Edison’s Eve; Harold Segel’s Pinocchio’s Progeny; Victoria Nelson’s The Secret Life of Puppets; and Tom Standage’s The Turk.
Figure 1. The Jaquet-Droz automata: the drawer, the musician, and the writer

Figure 2. Wolfgang von Kempelen's automaton: the Turk
Each text considered here draws on creation myths and legends as well as the science of the day. E.T.A. Hoffmann's Der Sandmann portrays the creation of a homunculus and an automaton. Villiers's L'Ève future shows the creation of an automaton, and alludes to the biblical Adam and Eve narrative. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein exhibits influences of all of these mythic traditions: Victor reads alchemical texts, the Creature is formed in golemesque ways, the process involves engineering an automaton, and the text alludes to both Milton and the Bible.

**Fantastic Creation Narratives**

Nineteenth-century creation narratives required a new genre, one that could accommodate extraordinary (i.e., beyond the ordinary) events within a scientific worldview. Creation narratives from ancient cultures would not be considered fantastic by their audience since their constructed world parallels the world their author appears to believe to be reality. However, the worlds of these nineteenth-century authors are not the same as the worlds they construct in their texts. The scientific worldview had triumphed, and the supernatural was completely and irreparably cut off from the natural. The fantastic solved this dilemma. My interest here is not to classify these fantastic narratives—either structurally or rhetorically—or to create a new definition of the fantastic. My interest is to see how creation narratives require the fantastic, how the fantastic is necessary for poetic construction of a creation story in a post-Enlightenment world. The world of myth, where gods and demons really exist, is not fantastic; however, the world of mythic monsters and automatons is necessarily fantastic.

What we now divide into separate genres all existed in one genre in the nineteenth century. That genre contained elements of horror (e.g., Poe and Maupassant), fantasy (e.g., Tieck and von Arnim), and science fiction (e.g., Shelley and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam). Unlike earlier folktales and most modern science fiction and fantasy, nineteenth-century fantastic texts draw limits on our natural senses and call those limits into
question. They both highlight and problematize the borders between our world and other worlds, sanity and madness, dream and reality, sobriety and drunkenness, altered states of consciousness and reality. We are confronted with what one author describes as “the brutal intrusion of mystery into real life” (Castex 8) or, as Gerard de Nerval in “Aurélia” called it, “the overflow of dream into real life” (269). Eric Rabkin argues that the fantastic is a “quality of astonishment” that results not from a merely extended or shifted perspective, but a contradicted perspective, when “the ground rules of a narrative world are suddenly made to turn about 180 degrees” (41). Drawing a distinction between what he terms the “unexpected” (something merely surprising like the late introduction of a main character), the “dis-expected” (something like a double entendre which is consistent with the narrative but from which the reader’s attention has been diverted), and the anti-expected (something that violates the ground rules set up by the narrative), Rabkin argues the latter is the hallmark of the fantastic. It is an epistemological shock recognizable by markers within the text: the reaction of the characters, statements of the narrator, or implications of the narrative structure.15

Fantastic narratives emphasize the real world, the world of science, as Robert Scholes calls it. As Dorothea von Mücke states, they “invoke a model of reality shared by the reader, of commonly held assumptions about the nature of the material and spiritual world of what can be seen and known” (1-2). At the same time, some element unknown to the real world “brutally intrudes” in a way that both highlights the borders of the

15 Criticism about the fantastic ultimately can be traced back to Plato, who decried any mimetic art for its distance from the true Forms. In *Phaedrus*, Plato directly considers the Fantastic by dismissing mythologically inspired supernatural tales as “absurd.” Plato would distrust any encounter with the fantastic on the grounds that it tells us nothing about things that really happened and things as they really are. Parting with his teacher, Plato, Aristotle allowed within his *Poetics* some element of what he called “the marvelous” in works of tragedy and epic since it is appropriate to the structure and purpose of the genre. This early distrust in the Fantastic may be the source for some of the dismissive attitudes and genre marginalization that have continued to the present.
reasonable and calls them into question. This intrusion may be a character (e.g., fairies, demons, or ghosts); a power (e.g., to create life); or an event (e.g., a dismembered hand that moves by itself). When the depiction of the real world is suddenly shattered by something unknown to this world, the reader must revise his or her assumptions about the genre of the text. This shattering of assumptions creates an affect of "being tricked" or "taken in," a reason some people love speculative fiction while others hate and distrust it.

The most important psychological approach to the fantastic is Freud's famous essay on "The Uncanny," which analyzed E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*. For Freud, the uncanny (unheimlich) is that which is both familiar and unfamiliar, and represents the return of the repressed. Freud's reading of Hoffmann focused on the "uncanny" nature of the Sandman, the mythic character who snatches the eyes from children, who he saw as evidence of a repressed childhood castration anxiety.

More recently, Todorov has taken structuralist approach to the fantastic, contending that the category of the "fantastic" resides in between the categories of the "marvelous" and the "uncanny." For Todorov, the fantastic is found only in works where there is a hesitation between the possibilities that the "other-worldly" events are real or a figment of the imagination. Todorov classifies as "marvelous" texts that create a world in which supernatural events actually exist. On the other hand, those that suggest the "other-worldly" events are a result of an over-active imagination or of psychological breakdown he classifies as "uncanny." Todorov also notes the common use of the first-person narrative in fantastic texts, and maintains that the reason for its frequency is that "the first-person narrator most readily permits the reader to identify with the character" (84). Readers "do not doubt the narrator's testimony" since it is common to believe that "a character can lie, the narrator must not" (85).16

16 It is true that we identify closely with the first person narrators in Maupassant's "Le Horla," Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemiel*, and Gautier's "La morte amoureuse." Furthermore, *Frankenstein* has three first-person narrators: Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the monster. However, it is not uncommon to find third-person
Todorov's approach has been seen as too restrictive by recent critics who express concern that his genre classifications are overly limiting and simplistic (e.g., see Lem). More recent critics are apt to look at fantastic texts as expressions of cultural, economic, or psychological realities of the period. Tobin Siebers sees the fantastic as a rebellion against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and a sentimental return to superstition which culminated in condoning victimization and social violence. Rosemary Jackson, on the other hand, calls the fantastic "a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence or loss," and attributes to the genre a libatory, subversive function—"a desire for something excluded from cultural order" (Fantasy 176)—opposing the capitalist/patriarchal order of the time. On the other hand, José B. Monléon sees the fantastic as defending the status quo and preserving economic order (14). Deborah Harter has looked at the fantastic as a poetics of fragmentation with a complementary aesthetic and poetic program. "The dream of material completeness that often defies yet fundamentally defines the realist enterprise is countered here by a seeming delight in reproducing reality in its 'pieces' where even the human body succumbs to morselization" (2). Harter sees the fantastic as both supporting and subverting the ideal of a unified subject.

The approach taken by Dorothea von Mücke sees the fantastic as having no unifying ideological agenda, but rather as a program that participated in producing a subjectivity that is intricately embedded in the history of sexuality in the nineteenth century. It is a literature obsessed with "dark secrets" (rather than openness) of the Other and is framed within a growing consumerist, journalistic interest in escapist fiction (16). Robert Scholes's recent approach to the fantastic is more pragmatic in nature, describing what a reader encounters in fantastic texts: a world with invented rules which must be

fantastic narratives like Hoffmann's "Mines of Falun," Tieck's "The Blond Eckbert," or Maupassant's "La main." Therefore a first-person narrator is a common but unnecessary condition for the fantastic.
internally consistent. Additionally, the world must be created using “imaginative credibility,” without which the “spell is broken” and the reader falls into criticism. Scholes argues that Frank Baum lacked vision to support his created worlds; C.S. Lewis had too much vision so that his created worlds seemed always to become a vehicle for allegory; while J.R.R. Tolkien combined them perfectly.\(^\text{17}\)

In a sense, what we today call the fantastic has always existed in the fables, epics, romances, and fairy tales. But in the eighteenth century, a shift takes place, partly because of a rising disbelief in the supernatural, partly as a negative reaction to the ascendancy of the “realistic” novel, and partly as a result of the emerging field of psychology. Perhaps more significant was the emergent discourse on the sublime, a point I will discuss in the conclusion. In summary, there are three characteristics of nineteenth-century fantastic texts that are commonly identified by critics.

First, because of the transformation to a scientific worldview, from the eighteenth century on, the fantastic realm is no longer assumed to be part of our “natural” world. Citing the work of medievalist Carolyn Walker Bynum, Dorothea von Mücke argues that for earlier generations encounters with the fantastic were portrayed with a sense of respect and acceptance. For the medieval writer “wonder is a given, and the marvelous is accepted in its singularity and facticity” (von Mücke 4). By the nineteenth century writers depict encounters with strange, otherworldly phenomena in terms of uncertainty and insecurity. Von Mücke also cites a little-known essay by Ludwig Tieck, one of the first German writers of fantastic tales, which betrays a “distinct concern” that the marvelous is threatening to disappear. Tieck argued that a modern audience can only be persuaded by a fantastic tale if the author first persuades it to forget the “real” world while simultaneously “revitalizing” common markers of the real world. A text must work to

\(^{17}\) Scholes finds the Harry Potter books intriguing because J.K. Rowling brings fantasy into our “actual” world, with two sets of laws running simultaneously, one set for the “muggles” or regular humans and another for the wizards and witches.
deemphasize the real and at the same time reinforce it. The program Tieck outlines is only necessary because the fantastic is no longer seen as part of the real. Fantasy came to exist, argues Robert Scholes, when science came to be seen as the proper description of this world. Without science, there is no fantastic, since folktales assume that this world is full of monsters and magic. Only the development of positivist science and realism made folktales fantastic because they made the actual world scientific/realistic. Scholes notes the important point that each fantastic tale borrows more details from this world than it invents in its imaginary world, and it borrows more details from the Middle Ages than any other period of history. He argues that this is likely because magic fits more comfortably within a pre-scientific world.

Second, fantastic tales arose alongside realism in the novel. Throughout the eighteenth century, argues David Sandler, the novel and romance became “marked off from one another as, respectively, realistic or fantastic” (Sandler 7). Samuel Johnson described the emerging novel as depicting “life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind” (qtd. in Sandler 7). In so doing, Johnson implicitly dismisses fantastic fiction as outmoded and unenjoyable for his generation. Fantastic tales appear as a reaction against this type of prescriptive writing.

Third, nineteenth-century fantastic literature, as Sanders puts it, displays “an increasing interest in the interior faculties of the mind” (Sanders 8). The emergence of psychoanalysis, with its focus on dreams, hypnotism, and the unconscious, was almost as mysterious as the fantastic tales of bygone days and proved ripe for poetic exploration. Furthermore, the explosion of syphilitic-induced madness in the literati of the time produced fertile visions of “real” fantastic material. The realm of madness was often all-too-real for writers like Guy de Maupassant and Gerard de Nerval. When confronted with the “brutal intrusion of mystery” into the real world, the main character will often worry that he is mad. “Am I mad?” asks the narrator of Poe’s “Tell-Tale Heart” (555). The
narrator in Maupassant’s “Le Horla” asks “Have I lost my reason?” (320). In Hoffmann’s Der Sandmann, Nathanael tells Lothario that “you will certainly consider me a crazy spirit-seer” (85). It is only when he finds himself “among the mad” at an insane asylum that the narrator of Nerval’s Aurélia “understood that everything up to this point had been mere illusion” (304), yet at the same time parts of his mad visions still seemed real. While Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein assures us that he is “not recording the vision of a madman” (30), Walton tells us that when he first meets Frankenstein “his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness” (14). Madness does not concern characters who encounter ghosts in folk tales, and in modern fantasy and science fiction we find characters fully accepting the often radically different worlds they encounter.¹⁸

The fact that nineteenth-century writers often preferred the fantastic was not coincidental. The imaginative faculty of fantasy plays a central role in early German philosophy. Etemologically, “fantasy” literally means “to make visible,” and it came to be associated with the imaginative faculty that made visible any idea, notion, image. It created mental images or pictures. For Friedrich Schlegel, fantasy, which is diametrically opposed to reason, helps to dismantle the rules and boundaries of the Enlightenment system. Fantasy is the beginning of poetry, which he defines as the:

> sublimation of the course and the laws of reasonably thinking reason and our transportation again into the beautiful confusion of fantasy, the original chaos of human nature for which I have yet to know a more beautiful symbol than the colorful swarm of ancient gods. (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 187)

Fantasy, chaos, myth, and allegory, as I hope to demonstrate, are all intricately linked in the Romantic project. The genre of the fantastic employs the imaginative faculty of fantasy in an extreme way. While realism makes visible something seen in the real world, the fantastic makes visible the invisible world of the imagination.

¹⁸ The exception here may be horror, where it seems likely that some texts would have characters worrying about madness.
Each text considered here participates in this nineteenth-century fantastic discourse. Again, my interest does not lie in classifying fantastic narratives or in creating a new definition of what constitutes the fantastic. My point is that nineteenth-century creation narratives require the fantastic. My interest is in showing how the fantastic is employed to construct a creation narrative in a post-Enlightenment world.

**Print Culture and Discourse Networks**

This post-Enlightenment world was certainly “fantastic” in and of itself. The technological changes of the period were both unexpected and amazing. Dorothea E. Von Mücke has linked nineteenth-century fantastic texts with changes in the print and reading culture of the day. She notes, for example, that in Cazotte’s *The Devil in Love*, “the devil appears as a technician of the imaginary.” Mücke concludes that “the experience of the supernatural and the sensory delights of the devil’s magic can be read as a reflection on the temptations and cultural effects of what was then still the new print technology” (9). The changes in print and reading culture are reflected in the literature of the period, and Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and Villiers’ *L’Ève future* all portray these changes. In E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, two forms of creation are described: the alchemical homunculus and the mechanical automaton. The former may be seen as representing an “organic” aesthetic and the latter as a “mechanized” or post-Enlightenment aesthetic and the “sensory delights” of industrialized print technologies. In *Frankenstein*, the Creature is described as an assembly of parts animated by electricity. He is quite literally a creation of a new technological age. Finally, Villiers’ *L’Ève future* concerns itself in a very substantial way with the production of art—sculpture, photography, film, literature—in a technological age. The ideal woman, an assembly of whirling gears and gadgets, is “photosculpted” after a real woman who has an uncanny resemblance to the Venus de Milo. The texts mirror both the technological and epistemological transformations of the period.
Certainly the production and distribution of texts evolved rapidly during this period. By the end of the century, the processes of composition, printing, and paper production had all become automated and mechanized. This meant that mass production was possible and production prices were reduced. The nineteenth century marks, as Ben McCorkle puts it, the precise moment when “print achieves its hegemonic status” (27). While early printers went out of their way to create elaborate imitations of ornate manuscripts, it is during the nineteenth century that the familiar, regularized look of print became standardized and ubiquitous. The cost of paper, hand-made through 1800, was twenty percent of the cost of a book in 1740, and only a little more than seven percent by 1910. Transportation and communication developments led to wider distribution.

These societal changes often led to indirect changes in the book industry. For example, the expansion of railway systems encouraged travel, which, in turn, created a demand for books as a source of entertainment on long journeys. Reading became, for the first time, a common pastime. Educational standards also evolved to create a larger reading public (a term invented at this time). Between 1775 and 1830, literacy rose from seventy five to ninety five percent among the middle class, while the rate among the labor classes remained substantially lower, rising from less than fifty percent to sixty percent. The average publishing output in Great Britain was roughly one hundred new titles per

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McCorkle further argues that both the bellettristic and elocutionary movements of the period, commonly assumed to have been mutually antagonistic, actually worked together to naturalize the fast-growing print medium so it eventually became the arbiter of discursive standards. This had a regularizing effect on both print and oral discourse.

For background on technological changes in the nineteenth-century print culture, see Lucien Fèvre and Henri-Jean Martin’s *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800* and David McKitterick’s *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830*; on the evolving nature of the reading public, consult Richard Altick’s *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*; and on the impact of literacy on Western thought see Eric Alfred Havelock. *Origins of Western Literacy* and Walter J. Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.*
year through 1750, rising to 600 by 1825, and to 6,000 before the end of the century. While stamp duties and taxes kept the cost of books artificially high, the overall cost dropped dramatically, making reading affordable. Furthermore, by the end of the century, inexpensive “penny dreadfuls” and periodicals began to appear. Magazines, previously read by only the wealthy, emerged in more popular, less-expensive forms by the 1830s. These changes, in turn, led to thematic changes in literature.

The rapidly expanding reading public posed additional challenges for authors. As Scott Hess and others have pointed out, nineteenth-century authors confronted the first commercial reading public in history. Prior to the nineteenth century, an author wrote for a known audience, his or her benefactors, the people collected on his or her subscription list, etc. As the reading public grew larger and more heterogeneous, nineteenth century authors had no clear idea whom they were writing for or how their writings would be received. This created an anxiety of reception. Hess stresses that “poets around the turn of the nineteenth century were thus increasingly forced to construct their own poetic roles, standards, and even audience and desired reception, by internalizing these factors within their texts” (21). Hess shows how authors would often frame their narratives or enact some dramatization of the process of reception in order to “control the general anxiety of reception” (21). Wordsworth’s 1800 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads can be read as a direct attempt to control audience reaction by “drawing up a kind of contract” between the author and his readers. Wordsworth outlines his authorial intentions for his audience as a way of defining the aesthetic criteria they will use to judge his work. Hess goes on to argue that the frame narrative of Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere” dramatizes the author/reader relationship in order to engender an implicit response from the audience. It “addresses this same anxiety of reception,” not by persuading the reader, but by “drawing the reader through a symbolic dramatization and enactment of the reading process, thus attempting to control its author’s anxieties of reception through the symbolic possession and compulsion of its reader(s)” (22). Attempting to control
reception, the author imposes his or her presence in the text and enacts the desired relationship with the audience.

Perhaps even more significant was the pedagogical means employed for creating this new reading public. As Friedrich Kittler has shown, the focus of that educational movement was mothers. “Around 1800,” as Kittler aptly demonstrates, “a new type of book began to appear, one that delegated to mothers first the physical and mental education of their children, then their alphabetization” (27). With titles like *Handbook of Early Moral Education, Intended Primarily for Use by Mothers, in Epistolary Form* (1795) and *Handbook for Mothers, or Rules for the Early Education of Children* (1796), these books “emphasize that it is only by conferring elementary acculturation techniques on mothers that the Self of this identity has been found” (28). The mother’s voice substituted, as Kittler maintains, sounds for letters. At the same time, another pedagogical shift was made from learning complete words and phrases to the phonetic approach of oralizing the consonants and syllables of the alphabet. These two movements became so entrenched, so thorough, that “when later in life children picked up a book, they would not see letters but hear, with irrepressible longing, a voice between the lines” (34). The effect of this coupling of the mother’s mouth with the phonetic alphabet is WOMAN, a collective maternal imago, who, Kittler demonstrates, raises daughters to become good mothers and readers and sons to become civil servants and writers. Kittler quotes one contemporary as saying “Every citizen of the state is a servant.” Of course only men were citizens. Women, Kittler maintains, were to avoid any direct service to the state (57), while they became the prime means for establishing that civil service. An “abyss” came to separate writing from voice. “Civil servants wrote [...] ; the Mother did not write, she made men speak” (63). She “neither speaks nor writes, but from the depths of her soul arise the unembellished accents that the author rescues by writing” (67).  

21 Kittler’s Discourse Network of 1800 roughly corresponds to the change in *epistémé* as noted by Foucault. The beginning of the nineteenth century constitutes,
As noted, Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and Villiers’ *L’Ève future* reflect the emerging print technology and reading culture of the day. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* depicts two forms of creation: one representing an “organic” aesthetic; the other a “mechanized” or post-Enlightenment aesthetic. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* describes the Creature as an assembly of parts animated by electricity, a creation of a new technological era. Villiers’s *L’Ève future* portrays an array of creation possibilities and hazards in a new technological age. These texts anticipate Walter Benjamin’s argument that mass production would dissipate the “aura” of a unique work of art by devaluing the notion of an “original.” The technological and epistemological

according to Foucault, the second half of an “archaeological upheaval,” as a new *epistémé* or discursive formation, replaced the previous neoclassical *epistémé*, when a new network of discursive practices became dominant over other previous networks. In this case, it was a time when things began to be viewed as ever-changing but temporarily stable products of historical forces rather than the instantiations of ideal forms. The revolutionary change to Western epistemology was that the concept of history was introduced into the fields of labor (as the concept of “exchange” was replaced by “production”), life (as “taxonomy” was replaced by “organic structure”), and language (as “discourse” as a mode of knowledge was replaced by “language”) (Foucault 252). Foucault characterizes the latter of the three changes, this “displacement of the word,” as “one of the most important events of Western culture” of the era and “one of those that have passed most unperceived” (281). This upheaval in thought about language moved along four fronts: First, formal features of grammar systems became the distinguishing marks of languages (282-83). Second, as these grammar systems became the primary focus for study, language came to be treated as a “totality of sounds emancipated from the letters that may be used to transcribe them” (286). The oral replaced the written as the focus of philology. Third, philology came to focus on roots as elements of a system and as verbs, hence as expressions of action and volition rather than attempts to know. Fourth, this emphasis on roots led to a focus on the history of languages as the key to determining relations between languages. The result of these changes in the *epistémé* of the age was that language moved from being a transparent representation of the ideal order of things, to being a central issue for thought—it became an object of thought rather than the mode of subjectivity. One outgrowth of this revolution, a “compensation,” as Foucault puts it, for language’s “demotion” is the modern concept of “literature.” Certainly Dante and Homer existed prior to this, but a certain type of self-conscious literature appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century “whose peculiar mode of being is ‘literary’” and which exists “wholly in reference to the pure act of writing” (300).
transformations of the period likely left both authors and their reading public in a state of confusion, a confusion that is also apparent in the narratives themselves.

**Poetics of Confusion, Allegory and Irony**

One sign of the philosophic upheaval that transformed the literature of the period is the emphasis on confusion in this emerging literature. "Characterlessness is the sole character of modern poesy," writes Schlegel, "confusion is what its mass has in common, lawlessness the spirit of its history, and skepticism the result of its theory" (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 294). The Romantics, as Maria Tatar maintains, "never tired of extolling the virtues of chaos and confusion" (585). Schlegel described the genius of Shakespeare and Cervantes as an "artificially ordered confusion, this charming symmetry of contradictions, this wondrous, eternal exchange of enthusiasm and irony" (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 186). He singled out myth as being able to provide just such "artificially ordered confusion." In poetic terms reminiscent of a fairy tale, he continues, "the highest beauty, indeed the highest order, is only that of chaos, namely of a chaos that waits but for love's touch in order to unfold into a harmonious world, a chaos such as ancient mythology and poesy were" (qtd in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 183). Tatar notes that Tieck's preferred literary genre, the *Naturmärchen*, was "a fairy tale that confuses the imagination to the point of poetic madness" while Novalis "felt that chaos must forever threaten to shatter the illusion of order in art" (585). Similarly, Schlegel states, "absolute unity would [...] be a chaos of systems" (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 243). Additionally, promoting the intentionally confusing fragment as a literary genre was a central part of Schlegel's project in publishing the *Athenäum*. While Novalis took an "active, theoretically informed interest in this novel form of discourse," he once remarked that he found some of Schlegel's fragments "thoroughly unintelligible" (Kubiak 413). The delight of confusion was a central part of Romantic poetic production.²²

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²² I recommend Laurie Johnson's article as a thorough survey of Schlegel's
This Romantic reveling in confusion was not just a literary trend, it was part of a philosophical program. Early German Romantics sought to bring together disparate discourses, the natural sciences, history, mathematics, and the philosophy of consciousness to create a new poetic-philosophical form, a “symphilosophy” or “sympoesy” as Schlegel would call it (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 319). Delight in this confusion of genres was as much a necessity of the new era’s *epistémé* as it was a program designed to reform aesthetic judgments. Schlegel writes in his “Concerning the Study of Greek Poesy” that:

The borders of science and art, of the true and the beautiful, are so confused that conviction in their permanence has begun to weaken almost everywhere. Philosophy poeticizes, poetry philosophizes: history is treated as creative fiction and creative fiction as history. Even the genres exchange their features with one another; a lyrical mood becomes the object of drama, and dramatic material is forced into lyrical form. And this anarchy does not remain on the periphery; rather it covers the entire field of taste and art. Creative talent is restless and unsteady; individual as well as public receptivity is always at once insatiable and discontent. Theory itself seems altogether doubtful of a fixed point of unending change. (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 293-94)

There was a philosophical goal to be found in this confused state. The method of this new approach was to maintain “a productive tension between seemingly antagonistic concepts and [make] the process of reflection an object of reflection itself” (Johnson 119). “Romantic poesy is a progressive universal poesy,” writes Schlegel in what comes close to a Romantic manifesto:

thought on the interrelationship between myth, chaos, and allegory. For a look at the chaos of the fragment as a literary genre developed by the Early Romantics, see Christopher Kubiak’s “Sowing Chaos: Discontinuity and the Form of Autonomy in the Fragment Collections of the Early German Romantics.” For a look at the concept of Romantic chaos from a mathematical perspective see Bianca Theisen’s “χά Absolute Chaos: The Early Romantic Poetics of Complex Form.”

23 A fine discussion of symphilosophy may be found in Todorov’s *Theories of the Symbol*, 164-67.
It is not only destined to reunite the separated genres of poesy and to bring poesy into contact with philosophy and rhetoric. It wants to—and also should—blend and merge poesy with prose, geniality with critique, the poesy of art with the poesy of nature, give life to poesy and render it sociable, make life and society poetic, poeticize wit and fill up and saturate the forms of art with every kind of genuine cultural material and animate them through the oscillations of humor. Romantic poesy comprises everything that is in the least poetic, from the greatest systems of art that themselves contain multiple systems to the sigh, the kiss breathed out in artless song by the poetizing child. [...] The romantic genre is [...] still in the process of becoming; indeed, this is its essence: to be eternally in the process of becoming and never completed. (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 320-21)

In the process of continually becoming, Romanticism attempted to fuse disparate discourses into a new art form.

Chaos and allegory were necessary parts of this philosophic endeavor. For Schlegel, chaos had a significant status in his philosophies of history, of self-consciousness, and self-other relationships and for transforming these philosophies into a theory of poetic representation. As Laurie Johnson summarizes

[T]he poet-artist creates a cosmos in which chaos, while not completely ordered by him, is under his control to a certain extent. This artistic control over the formation of “Universalpoesie” is exercised in order to create a beautiful cathexis between subject and object rather than a difference-extinguishing totality. (122)

Thus nineteenth-century mythmaking was a systematic process of creating out of chaos.

Likewise, allegory and chaos function, as Johnson maintains, “in reciprocal interdependence rather than in opposition” (Johnson 120). It is through allegory that Romantic poets are able to represent the unrepresentable. “All beauty is allegory,” states one of Schlegel’s imaginary interlocutors in his “Dialogue on Poesy.” “Precisely because it is inexpressible, one can only express the highest allegorically” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al., et al. 189). Allegory is consistently used to denote an ideal that relates to some indescribable characteristic of temporality (Seyham 67-68). As Seyhan puts it,

Allegory mediates in the temporal context between an elusive revelation of being and the sensible finitude of poetic representation, between unrepresentability and representability. It constitutes an empirical representation of the world of experience in image. (69)
Thus every work of art is, in some sense, an allegory, an imitation of the infinite, and it performs a "scientific" function of synthesizing the "flowing images of life and nature in time" (Seyhan 70). It is the approximation of an ideal, the condensing of infinity in a moment. Allegorical myth allows the poet to synthesize the chaos into poetry, thereby yielding a new system, to represent society as an organism rather than as a machine (Johnson 123 and 126).

In discussing the use of allegory in nineteenth-century texts, I am well aware of the contemporaneous critique of allegory by Romantic poets. While Schlegel is perhaps the lone exception to the rule, most Romantic poets dismissed the term "allegory" in preference to "symbol." This fact is well-known and discussed most notably by Walter Benjamin in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. However, what Romantic poets were likely responding to was the use of the term by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the father of Weimar Classicism, who, in his attempt to regenerate art, advocated a comprehensive system of allegory. The essential difference between "symbol" and "allegory" for Romantics appears to be that, while allegory was merely a sign pointing to another meaning, a symbol contained the essence of the thing in itself. In point of fact, however, the meaning which Winckelmann gave to allegory could have adequately comported this Romantic conception. But their reaction to classicism caused them to reject a term which was so closely allied with it, despite the fact that it described so well a central part of their program (Berefelt 201-203). Jon Whitman argues that historical forces are largely responsible for the uses and preferences particular eras have for the two terms. The terms "not only vary in definition over time; in the course of their development, they expose varying attitudes toward time itself" (161).  

Todorov has identified four characteristics of the Romantic distinction between symbol and allegory: First, allegory is always transitive, whereas symbols are

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24 Significantly, most literary criticism at present prefers the term "allegory" over "symbol." A reflection on that concept, while intriguing, is not part of this project.
intransitive; the symbol speaks to the perception, while allegory speaks to the intellect alone. Second, allegory signifies directly while symbol signifies indirectly. Allegory designates but does not represent, while symbol represents and potentially designates as well. Third, the symbolic is the “exemplary, the typical, that which allows itself to be considered as the manifestation of a general law” (Theories 201). Finally, the fourth difference concerns the mode of perception. With the symbol, one encounters a sort of surprise resulting from an illusion. At first, one believes that the symbol exists expressly for itself, and then observes it also has a secondary meaning. With allegory, there is no such illusion. “The symbol is, the allegory signifies,” Todorov summarizes; “the first fuses signifier and signified, the second separates them” (214).

In the end, one thing that separates Romantic allegory (or symbol) from its use in previous eras is the way it is destabilized by another Romantic staple: irony. In his reading of Percy Shelley’s “The Triumph of Life,” Earl Schulze argues that undermining Shelley’s use of allegory is irony.

Shelley’s strategy is to undermine traditional allegorical method, which presupposes a world of stable values, in order to free the mind—literally, the mind of the poet’s persona, but the reader’s mind as well—from the gross delusions through which it dooms itself. (34)

Likewise, Azade Seyhan sees allegory and irony as the “twin tropes of Romantic writing.” Seyhan continues, “allegory signifies an approximation and irony an implicit impossibility of the ideal” (67). Irony is, I will argue, central to the allegorical readings possible within these texts.

Each of the texts considered here, I will demonstrate, may be read allegorically, and indeed call out for allegorical interpretations. But each is destabilized by irony. The authors point us toward an allegorical interpretation and at the same time undermine that interpretation. Likewise, each author employs a poetics of confusion, calling into question the differences between genuine and artifice, beauty and ugliness, illusion and reality, fantastic and fact, life and death, shadow and light, in and out, up and down, truth...
and lie. Hoffmann's text depicts Nathanael as a decidedly confused character. He accidentally mails a letter intended for Lothario to Clara. He calls Clara an automaton while he is fooled into believing the automaton Olimpia is real. He mistakes Coppelius for Coppela. The fairy tale of the sandman becomes reality and his reality becomes a frightening fairytale. Ultimately, Nathanael's confused state disintegrates into complete madness. A similar state of affairs exists in Frankenstein. In Shelley's text, life and death are closely linked. Frankenstein works at night and sleeps during the day. His dreams become reality and his reality becomes dream-like. His dreams link his dead mother, his fiancée, and the Creature. Death becomes living and the living Creature kills. Creation and destruction become synonymous. And in Villiers' text, Edison creates his new Eve in an underground Eden where artificial birds sing with life-like beauty. The beauty of real women is shown to be artificial and manipulative, while the artificial beauty of Hadaly is shown to be authentic. Conversations with Hadaly—created out of pre-recorded words—are more authentic than real conversations. Real is shown to be artificial and artificial is shown to be real. Each text is a disorienting vortex of confusion. This confusion, I believe, is foundational to a Romantic philosophical program: autoengenderment—the male subject writes himself as a woman child bearer who, in turn, produces his own self.

**Autoengenderment**

Throughout the Romantic period, woman is postulated as the inspiration for poetry. Although critics may take very different approaches, they come to very similar conclusions about the singular status of the feminine in Romantic poetic production. Alice Kuzniar states that "the romantic artist was, though not a woman, unmistakably feminized" (75), while David Wellbery writes that "[r]omanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discursive production" (xxiii). Martha Helfer argues that, "woman and the feminine are troped as the originary condition of possibility of Romantic self-definition and Romantic artistic production and feminine descriptors
shape Romantic conceptions of subjectivity and creativity” (“Male Muse” 299). It is not, therefore, surprising that when the birth topos was allegorized—that is when a narrative concerns itself with the creation of life—male authors primarily depict a male creator producing a female body. In doing so, the texts inscribe the female body as text and text as body. Male Romantic poets most frequently position themselves rhetorically as mothers of female progeny.25

This confusion of gender roles creates, as Martha Helfer calls it, “a profound identity crisis for the male subject” (“Confessions” 190). Helfer notes that both Schlegel and Novalis posited the woman, as childbearer, as the sole source of authentic poetic production. She continues, “Since the Romantic subject posits itself in and through poesy, and only women can create poesy, a man cannot define himself fully unless he somehow becomes a woman” (“Confessions” 190). In this sense, the birth topos takes on new meaning in Romantic discourse. It is not simply reflective of the Romantic ideal of spontaneous, natural poetic production, but becomes a trope that reflects the intense identity crisis within Romantic poetics. The male writer desires the impossible: to usurp the role of mother.

This identity crisis is worsened by one of the foundational theories of early Romanticism: autopoiesis, a theory that self-definition can come “through representation of the unrepresentable, the pure ego” (Helfer, “Male Muse” 301). As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy explain, “Romantic poetry sets out to penetrate the essence of poiesy, in which the literary thing produces the truth of production in itself, and thus [...] the truth of production in itself, and thus [...] the truth [...]

25 This is not surprising when one takes into account the Fichtian philosophy, which Benjamin as well as other critics have argued, is the foundation for Romantic discourse on representation. According to Fichte, the self (Ich) can only represent itself to itself by positing the not-self (Nicht-Ich). Only the presence of the not-self can validate the self as a self. Thus, selfhood comes only through a relationship with the Other. (Seyhan 9; Helfer, Retreat 67-75). In his Fichte Studies, Novalis sees “the self-positing ego [defining] itself in opposition to the ‘Mutterfäre’ from whence it originated” For Novalis, the subject becomes feminine (Helfer, “Male Muses” 299).
of the production of itself, of autopoiesy" (12). In this process, called the "subject-work" by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, the "becoming-artist" is transformed through the "work or absolute auto-production itself: man as the work of art creating itself, art henceforth identified with the being-artist" (77). The Romantic subject auto-produces his own subjectivity in the literary work. Accordingly, the ultimate goal of Romantic production is "the constitution or formation of the subject" (67). Helfer has illustrated this process of autopoiesis or "autoengenderment" in Schlegel’s Lucinde, where the male subject writes himself as a woman child bearer who, in turn, produces his own self ("Confessions").26

Elsewhere, Helfer has shown how autoengenderment is problematized throughout the Romantic project, that the ironic and self-reflexive nature of the program created a discourse in which gender categories are more fluid than in other periods. Indeed the real locus of male libidinal interest appears to be not the woman’s body, but the male body. For instance, Helfer finds in Eichdorff’s Das Marmorbild a “pronounced homoerotic aesthetic” that “programmatically undercuts the surface storyline” (“Male Muses” 301).

Ultimately, however, this aesthetic is neither heterosexual nor homosexual so much as it is narcissistic. Helfer refers to Novalis’s fragmentary novel Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs, where the protagonist, Hyacinth, leaves his lover, Rosenblütchen, to set forth on a journey for self definition. Eventually he enters the temple of Saïs where lifts the statue’s veil only to discover his love, Rosenblütchen, who falls into his arms. In a distich Novalis wrote to the novel, Hyacinth lifts up the veil and discovers not his lover, but himself (“Male Muses” 300). In this distich, as I hope to show in the texts I consider in this study, the focus of Romantic poetic production was not the female or the male Other, but the self-positing male subject.

Finally, Helfer has shown that the recursive process of autoengenerment evolved from early Romanticism to late Romanticism into a more self-critical endeavor. Later

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26 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s The Literary Absolute discusses autopoiesis in early Romantic discourse.
works are more “radicalized [. . .] almost to the point of parody” (“Male Muse” 309). The texts I consider here, each following in the wake of early Romanticism, offer a critical appraisal of Romantic autoengenderment. The male gaze into the automaton or Creature’s eyes is a narcissistic gaze into his self. Each text ultimately offers a critique of the project of autoengenderment, as each creation becomes destruction: the automaton causes madness, the Creature becomes a killer, and the immortal and perfected female automaton sinks to the bottom of the ocean in a coffin. Hoffmann portrays the futility of the endeavor, in effect writing a parody of the program; Mary Shelley writes a female critique of this male poetic fantasy; and Villiers’s text signals the end of Romantic poetic production altogether.

Fragmented Texts and Fragmented Bodies

Undermining the totalizing tendencies of the emerging print culture and central to the Romantic project of autoengenderment is the Romantic theory of the fragment. The new print culture made reproduction a fantastic process that mesmerized the new reading public into believing in a represented unitary wholeness. Likewise, the new discourse network totalized men and women into, respectively, civil servants and Mothers-who-made-men-speak. The Romantic discourse on the fragment systematically destabilized and called into question all of these universalizing trends. On the other hand, the Romantic quest for representing the unrepresentable pure ego through autopoeisis was similarly trapped by the concept of a unitary subject, an incorporated individual. Nevertheless, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy maintain, the Romantics dismissed the notion of a unified subject, believing instead in a “subject that cannot or can no longer conceive itself in the form of a Discourse on Method and that has not yet truly undertaken its reflection as subject” (40). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue that the Romantics view the subject as essentially fragmented. They cite Novalis’s line from Grains of Pollen where he calls the fragment a germ or seed: “Fragments of this kind are literary seeds:
certainly, there may be many sterile grains among them, but this is unimportant if only a few of them take root” (49). Fragmentation, they conclude, “is not, then, a dissemination, but is rather the dispersal that leads to fertilization and future harvest. The genre of the fragment is the genre of generation.” The organic is always fragmented; it is “engendered from and through the fragment” (49). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy assert that not only is the fragment “the romantic genre par excellence” (40), but “fragmentation [. . .] persists and traverses all of romanticism” (61).

Perhaps the best way to understand the importance of the fragment for early Romanticism is to return to the discussion of the importance Romantics placed in “symbol” over “allegory.” In Romantic thought, a symbol contains the essence of the thing it represents, while allegory is merely a sign pointing to another meaning. The word symbol comes from the Greek (symballein) “to throw together,” and derives from the practice in ancient Greece of dividing a piece of pottery into two halves. One half could then serve as a token of recognition. While the pottery shard is no longer whole, it contains in itself the shadow or outline of the part that is missing. Thus, a symbol is a fragment of a whole which contains the essence of the totality. So it goes with the fragment: “A fragment should be, like a miniature, completely separate from the surrounding world and complete unto itself like a hedgehog,” states Schlegel (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 322). The paradox of the fragment is that it is separate from a larger totality, but complete in and of itself.

The centrality of the fragment to Romantic thought came from two primary sources: a recognition that all knowledge of the ancient world comes from fragments, and the acknowledgment that nature itself “mimics the nonlinear thrust of the fragment” (Seyhan 29). The importance of the fragment can be seen in both Schiller’s belief that the Enlightenment left humans fragmented selves as well as in Schlegel’s belief that an underlying myth unified the fragments of Greek poetry. Both see the fragment as a real and essential part of the human condition, but one that contains the essence of a missing
whole. Likewise, one of the central questions for Schlegel and Novalis in their goal to create a universal encyclopedia out of fragmentary knowledge was the form it would take. Schlegel proposed the fragment (Seyhan 93). “Each system only grows out of fragments,” states Schlegel (qtd. in Shulte-Sasse 333). The system Schlegel advocates is Socratic in nature, a conversation: “A dialogue is a chain or garland of fragments. An exchange of letters is a dialogue on a greater scale, and memorabilia are a system of fragments” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 320).

The dialogic nature of thought within the Romantic project is based upon the idea that there are no absolute claims, that knowledge is temporal and ephemeral. The fragment, as Azade Seyhan has written, questions the “postulate of continuous representation and induces cracks in the fundament of the idea” (Seyhan 29). It simultaneously represents a totality and calls into question the possibility of representation at all. Thus every fragment reminds us that no text can have the last word.

Deborah Harter has noted that ultimately every narrative is created through a process of fragmentation. “The writer must construct a world through the process of description in language, and to describe a thing is already to be obliged to break it into its parts before striving in the telling to reassemble its wholeness” (10). Any storytelling is an act of creating out of fragments. Harter also notes that the rise of the fantastic took place at the same time as the rise of the novel, the one “pressing toward the other away from totalization” (4). The fantastic narrative appears to be a reaction to the totalizing forces of the novel. Furthermore, Harter has noted the fragmented nature of these fantastic narratives, and how fragmented bodies dominate those narratives:

It lingers with and promotes the fragment rather than seeking the whole; it puts forth partially named or unnamed characters rather than characters with full names; it is best realized in the form of the short tale rather than in the form of the novel. The loose ends and divergent energies forcibly integrated into the fabric of the novel are here left purposefully uncontained. Consciousness often drifts among several fragmented psyches. Endings seem inevitably to leave us hesitating. The dream of material completeness that often defies yet fundamentally defines the realist enterprise is countered here by “pieces,” where even the human
body succumbs to morselization. In story after story, and with a kind of synecdochic fury, the body is captured and contemplated through its severed hands, its beating heart, its lost meshes of hair. (2-3)

Synecdoche, I believe, is a key to understanding these narratives. The narratives create a synecdochic link between the text and the characters created in the text: they allegorize the production of poetry through the production of bodies, and the bodies in the texts mirror the very texts that create them. The textual “bodies” and the bodies created in the texts are fragmented, partial, and put together in odd ways. Both fragmented texts and fragmented bodies float in a continuing chain of synecdochic relationship.

Myths of Male Mothers

In the body of this dissertation, I will look at five central issues: First, I will show how these texts all employ a poetics of confusion, a confusion that is central and necessary to their theme and purpose. Second, I will look at how these creation narratives reflect the changes then taking place in the technology of print culture and within the period’s discourse networks. Third, I will argue that these texts critique, at times to the point of parody, the Romantic ideal of an autoengenderment of poetic production, the male subject creating himself through an act of self reflexivity. Fourth, I will show how these fragmentary texts participate in the Romantic theory of the fragment, and in so doing undermine the totalizing tendencies in the emerging print culture, and discourse networks. Chapter 1 focuses on E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* and looks at how the central character, Nathanael, is positioned between two eras of discourse networks. Chapter 2 looks at how, in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley critiques the practice of Romantic autoengenderment, while at the same time Shelley is erased from her own text by the patriarchal system of print production. In chapter 3, I examine Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Ève future* as a text that reflects the deep anxieties about the new technologies of representation, one of the first to reflect on both traditional forms like literature and sculpture, but also emerging forms like photography, film, and the phonograph. Finally, in the conclusion I will look at how these texts critique the contemporaneous rhetoric of
the technological sublime—the rhetorical idealization of technology that was so common during the period, and, at the same time, participate in shoring up the boundaries established by the nineteenth-century theories of the sublime.
CHAPTER 1

THE ALCHEMY OF REPRESENTATION IN
E.T.A. HOFFMANN'S DER SANDMANN

At the conclusion of Der Sandmann, when the townspeople discover that Olimpia is an automaton, the professor of poetry and rhetoric sums up the event by stating, "the whole thing is an allegory, an extended metaphor" (121). In saying this, the professor implicitly invites us to read Hoffmann's text as an allegory, an allegory on the process of poetic production itself. Der Sandmann, which was published in 1816 as the first story in the first volume of Nachtstücke, thematizes Nathanael's tragic quest to become a poet as he finds himself trapped between two sets of men who are also engaged in creative production: his father and Coppelius's work to produce an alchemical homunculus and Coppola and Spalanzani's work to produce an automaton. Moreover, poetic production is not only a central concern of the narrative's characters, but also of the narrator. As Neil Hertz has shown, the narrator of the text and the main character, Nathanael, share similar rhetorical positions: both crave poetic power and are frustrated at their inability to express themselves. Finally, as Robin Lyndenberg has noted, "narration seems to be linked (for some male characters and authors) to envy of, desire for, and identification with the maternal function" (1078). The birth topos is transformed from metaphor to allegory as the text symbolically portrays male characters giving birth. Ultimately, Der Sandmann explores both the methods and the limits of poetic production by male artists.

In this chapter, I will first give an overview of the seminal criticism on the text. Second, I will examine the way the text employs a poetics of confusion. Third, I will explore ways the text thematizes the aesthetic, print, and discourse cultures of the period. Fourth, I will demonstrate the ways the text parodies the Romantic project of
autoengenderment. Finally, I will show how the text portrays fragmented bodies which mirror the fragmented nature of the text.

The Mad Myth of Der Sandmann

In a discussion of Der Sandmann for a review published in 1827, five years after Hoffmann’s death, Sir Walter Scott stopped short before completing a plot synopsis, stating, “[b]ut we should be mad ourselves were we to trace these ravings any farther” (“On the Supernatural” 96). He explained:

It is impossible to subject tales of this nature to criticism. They are not the visions of a poetical mind, they have scarcely even the seeming authenticity which hallucinations of lunacy convey to the patient; they are the feverish dreams of a light-headed patient, to which, though they may sometimes excite by their peculiarity or surprise by their oddity, we never feel disposed to yield more than momentary attention. In fact, the inspirations of Hoffmann so often resemble the ideas produced by the immoderate use of opium, that we cannot help considering his case as one requiring the assistance of medicine rather than of criticism. (“On the Supernatural” 97)

Scott admitted that Hoffmann was a genius, but cautioned that his works “ought to be considered less as models for imitation than as affording a warning how the most fertile fancy may be exhausted by the lavish prodigality of its possessor” (98). Since he felt that fantastic elements should be used rarely and with great discretion, Scott was troubled by Hoffmann’s “unbounded license” and “irregular fancy” which are “executed without scruple” (72). Contrasting Hoffmann’s work with Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, Scott stressed that, while the fantastic elements of Frankenstein were extravagant, its purpose was grounded in “philosophical reasoning and moral truth,” whereas Hoffmann’s use of the fantastic “encumbers itself with no such conditions and claims no further object than to surprise the public by the wonder of itself” (73). Scott was just as troubled by Hoffmann’s real life, his “extremes in all undertakings,” his using “wine in considerable quantity” and liberal use of tobacco (74), and seems to see his lived experience as the cause of his fantastic flights of fancy. Employing the birth topos himself, Scott warns readers that the poetic “children of [Hoffmann’s] own imagination, were no less
discomposing to him than if they had had a real existence and actual influence upon him’’
(81). Scott worried that Hoffmann’s crazed literary “children” might have a negative influence upon readers.

It is hardly surprising that Scott would associate Hoffmann’s text with madness. Had Scott written his review fifty or sixty years later—after Wilhelm Wundt founded his laboratory for the study of psychology at Leipzig University in 1879, after William James published his *Principles of Psychology* in 1890, and surely after Sigmund Freud published the *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900—he likely would have employed a psychological approach to reading the text. Hoffmann himself took an interest in the psychology of his day, and “had acquired an impressive amount of knowledge about psychiatric pathology and treatment practices” (Dillman 138). Madness and the treatment of madness was an obsession with Hoffmann, and that obsession is reflected in his work. Surely this is what drew Freud to the text. In his reading of *Der Sandmann*, Freud discounted the uncanny nature of the automaton Olimpia and found it instead in Nathanael’s fear of losing his eyes. He saw the text as a literary expression of his psychological theory of the castration complex. Most critical readings of *Der Sandmann* following in the wake of Freud, whether prompted by Freud’s treatment of the text or by the wealth of fantastic elements within the narrative, have undertaken psychological readings of the narrative.

It would be impossible to review all the criticism on this text here, but some of the most important recent analyses to be published in English are as follows: Neil Hertz has looked at the relationship between Freud’s reading of the Hoffmann story and his articulation of the repetition compulsion in a chapter called “Freud and the Sandman” in his book *The End of the Line*. Ursula Mahlendorf has read the narrative as the “psychobiography of a Romantic poet” in her book *The Wellsprings of Literary Creation*. Maria Tatar has explored Hoffmann’s use of irony. Gabriele Dillmann has viewed Hoffmann’s narrative through the lens of the psychoanalytic theories and the case studies of Heinz Kohut and Ernest Wolf. Shelley Frisch has looked at the text from a reader-response
perspective in light of the concept of the uncanny. Adam Bresnick has studied the uncan
ny effect created in the text and the way it disappears once the ironic structure is ac
counted for. Robin Lydenberg’s feminist perspective has informed her reading of the uncan
ny in both Freud and Hoffmann. John Fletcher has looked at the text from the
perspective of Freud’s theory on the death wish. Michiel Scharpé has compared Freud’s
interpretation of the text with that of his rival Ernst Jentsch and concluded that the
reading by Jentsch is more coherent. Malcolm Jones has considered the possibility that
Olimpia is the materialization of Nathanael’s incestuous feelings towards his youngest
sister as opposed to Freud’s view that she was the materialization of his feminine attitude
towards his father in his infancy. Ruth Ginzberg’s feminist critique of Freud’s reading of
the text has argued that woman functions as a source of the uncanny by virtue of her
“heterogeneous plenitude” (26). Finally, Sarah Kofman has dedicated a chapter of her
book *Freud and Fiction* to a reading of *Der Sandmann* in which she blurs the boundaries
between the real and the imaginary, demonstrating the important function mimesis plays
in the narrative. In all of these studies, Freud’s reading has remained as much an object of
criticism as has Hoffmann’s text.

What is evident in all of these critical readings is that Hoffmann’s text is, just as
Walter Scott noted, maddening, perhaps even mad itself. What Walter Scott completely
missed, however, is the philosophical program at work in this narrative. This is not
surprising, however, since that program is both deeply ironic and depicted in occult
terms. Here I will focus less on the psychological state of the artist than on the ways the
text reveals contemporaneous philosophical ideas and changes in the print culture and
discourse networks, the theoretical and material rather than psychological world in which
the text positions itself. In that light, it becomes apparent that by narrating two forms of
creation—the alchemical creation of the homunculus and the scientific creation of an
automaton—Hoffmann allegorizes the birth topos to show an artist positioned between
two different discourse networks. The folk myth of the sandman haunts the protagonist,
suggesting a different form of poetic production—the act of purloining the vision from one “child” and feeding it to another child. The story of the sandman stealing the eyes of children to give to his children, may be read as an allegory of a literary hack who steals the “vision” from the literary texts of others to create his own literary progeny.

**Poetics of Confusion**

That Walter Scott would be confused by *Der Sandmann* is not surprising. The text is a dizzily confusing narrative in which the confused thoughts and actions of a decidedly confused protagonist are described by a similarly confused narrator. We begin with the protagonist. The narrative opens with a letter from Nathanael in which he describes the visit of the barometer salesman Coppelius, a “real” character whose looks cause Nathanael to confuse him with his father’s associate Coppola. Both of these men, in turn, are confused in Nathanael’s mind with the sandman, a folk tale his mother mentions in passing to get her children to go to bed. At first, Nathanael believes the sandman is real. When he asks his mother about the sandman, she confesses “There is no sandman, my dear child [...] When I say the sandman is coming, all that means is that you are sleepy and cannot keep your eyes open, as though someone has sprinkled sand into them” (87). But the fact that Nathanael hears footsteps on the stairs and senses that there is stress in the home when Coppelius comes calling leads him to believe that his mother “had denied the sandman’s existence only so that we should not be afraid of him, for I continued to hear him coming up the stairs” (87). When he asks the old woman who cares for his younger siblings about the sandman, she paints a vivid portrait which becomes real in Nathanael’s imagination:

> It is a wicked man who comes after children when they won’t go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes, so that they jump out of their heads all bloody, and then he throws them into his sack and carries them to the crescent moon as food for is little children, who have their nest up there and have crooked beaks like owls and peck up the eyes of naughty children. (87)
As Nathanael grows up, he comes to understand that the story the babysitter told him could not be true; however, within his mind “the sandman himself remained a dreadful spectre” (87), an “uncanny ghost” (88). In other words, the sandman exists within Nathanael’s mind even if he does not exist in real life. Within Nathanael’s confused mind, the image has become more real than reality.

Nathanael’s confused state is further emphasized in the second letter. While the first letter was intended for Lothario, the second letter, which comes from Clara, announces that Nathanael has mistakenly mailed the letter to Clara. In a classic “slip of the pen,” Nathanael has confused Clara’s address with Lothário’s.²⁷ It is in the third letter, from Nathanael to Clara, that we discover that Nathanael has mistaken Coppola for Coppélus and that we first encounter his confusion about the automaton Olimpia. As the narrative progresses, Nathanael’s perception reveals many traits about Olimpia that should alert him to her artificiality, but, instead, he sees her as the perfect woman. “O you glorious, profound nature,” Nathanael exults to Olimpia, “only you, you alone, understand me completely” (118). Conversely, his poem describes looking into Clara’s eyes and seeing death gazing back at him, and Clara’s negative reaction to his poem

²⁷ In his analysis of this text, Freud misses this important detail: Hoffmann’s text offers a superb example of Freud’s theory of parapraxes. Parapraxes is a minor inadvertent mistake usually observed in speech or writing or in small accidents or memory lapses which, Freud believed, reveal unconscious wishes or conflicts that arise from unconscious processes in normal healthy individuals. The theory was advanced in his The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, which was first published in the Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie in 1901, and appeared in book form three years later. His essay “On the Uncanny” was published in 1919. Certainly his Psychopathology was not fresh on his mind when he wrote “On the Uncanny,” but the slip found in Der Sandmann is strikingly similar to ones he cites in his book. Furthermore, Freud had, as his self-appointed editor James Strachey put it, a “special affection” for these slips since they “enabled him to extend to normal mental life the discoveries he had first made in connection with neuroses” (7). As Strachey notes, several of the examples of parapraxes first cited in Psychopathology reappeared in the first three Introductory Lectures of 1916-17 (7). Freud also discussed these slips in his contribution to Marcuse’s encyclopedia in 1923 and in his “Subtleties of a Faulty Action” in 1935 (7-8). It is remarkable that he missed it in this story.
causes him to shout, “Oh, you lifeless accursed automaton!” (106). He has become completely confused by objectifying a subject and subjectifying an object. Nathanael has confused dream with reality, fairy tales with truth, and real with artificial.

Our narrator is almost as confused as Nathanael. The text begins as an epistolary novel; however, the narrator unexpectedly interrupts to confess his own confusion. “Nothing stranger or more singular could be invented than that which happened to my poor friend, the young student Nathanael” (99). The narrator is just as confused by the events as is Nathanael. But the narrator is also confused about how to tell this story, specifically with how to begin. The narrator wants “to express [his] inner vision in all its colours and light and shade and wearied [himself] to find words with which even to begin” (99-100). He is struck by an inability to find the right words and by the inability to find an appropriate way to commence the narrative. “Once upon a time” he finds “too sober,” “In the little provincial town of S. there lived” is better but still not right. He toys with the idea of starting in medias res with “‘Go to the devil!’ cried the student Nathanael” but found it too light for such a serious story. Finally he confesses, “I decided not to begin at all,” inserting the letters as a false beginning (101).

The problem of beginning, of origins, is problematized in this text which focuses on the very issue of origins and the originality of the sandman. The origin of the sandman, like any folktale, has no clear origin, but is passed down from generation to generation, growing in detail even as its origins grow in obscurity. The sandman who haunts Nathanael’s imagination is all the more threatening because unclear and without provenance. The confusion of the sandman’s origins, like the narrator’s choice to begin without beginning, helps to create the very dread that haunts this narrative.

The confused protagonist and the confused narrator create a confused audience. We become confused about their states of mind, their actions, and their words. But on the rhetorical level, the text is also confusing. First, we are confused by the insertion of the three letters used to begin the narrative. As Neil Hertz has noted:
Hoffmann’s feint in the direction of epistolary fiction confers an odd status on those three opening letters. Like any supposedly documentary evidence embedded in a narrative, a greater degree of authenticity seems to be claimed for them, and the reader is inclined to go along with the illusion and accept them as underwriting the narrator’s account. That would be so wherever the letters were placed; as it is, though, because the letters precede the appearance of the narrator, what he says of them has the effect of requiring the reader to make a funny retroactive adjustment, granting them a kind of documentary reality just as he is most strongly reminded both of their fictitiousness and, more important, of how badly the narrator seems to need them to initiate and impel his own writing. (107)

Hertz calls the effect created by these letters “playful but nonetheless complex” and characterizes it as “a temporal lag which produces, retroactively, a situation in which a text cannot be characterized as unequivocally ‘real’ or unequivocally ‘fictitious’” (107). In short, the rhetorical convention of beginning the text without a beginning is confused and confusing. Second, we are confused by the use of the fantastic in this narrative, a confusion that is never fully resolved. For example, when Nathanael gets caught spying on his father and Coppelius, Nathanael writes that Coppelius “unscrewed my hands and feet, and fixed them on again in this way, now that” (92). Next he writes that he “awoke as if from the sleep of death” (92). This text appears to be about Nathanael’s descent into madness, but, like a mad person, we are never able to distinguish the real from the fantastic, reality from the dream. This text never resolves the question of whether the fantastic events are dreams taken for reality, visions of madness, or actual supernatural happenings. We cannot know for sure whether Nathanael is experiencing a supernatural event, a mental hallucination, or a dream.28

It is easy to see why Walter Scott felt this text was so dangerous; it is extremely disorienting and chaotic. However, that very confusion is central to the program Hoffmann is engaged in: illustrating the problem of artistic production in an era of changing print culture and discourse networks while critiquing the Romantic poetics of autoengenderment.

28 Since this hesitation is never fully resolved, Todorov would position this text firmly in the realm of the fantastic with the uncanny and the marvelous on either side.
Alchemy and Automaton: Aesthetic, Print, and Discourse Cultures

The confusing nature of the text and its thematic concern with alchemy are significantly linked. The etymological meaning of the word “confuse” is “to pour together.” “Confusion” is etymologically linked with mixing together different fluids, with chemistry. Whether conscious of this meaning or not, in his review of Der Sandmann, Sir Walter Scott employs the metaphor of mixing chemicals to describe Hoffmann’s confused, madness-inducing narrative. Comparing Hoffmann with Wordsworth, Scott states that “[o]bservers of poetical imagination, like Wordsworth and Hoffmann, are the chemist who can distill [that imagination] into cordials or poisons” (“On the Supernatural” 81). For Scott, Wordsworth distills the cordials, tonics that invigorated the soul, while Hoffmann distills the toxic potions. Scott does not take this metaphor further, but chemistry, specifically alchemy, is a central theme in Hoffmann’s writings, and is clearly important in Der Sandmann where Nathanael’s father is involved in alchemical experiments with Coppelius. More than simply a theme, however, alchemy is an important key for understanding the larger philosophical program at work in Hoffmann’s fantastic tale.

Two groupings of men are engaged in creative processes in Der Sandmann. Nathanael’s father and Coppelius are occupied in alchemical experiments to create a homunculus, while Spalanzani and Coppola are employed in scientific experiments to create an automaton. It is significant that alchemy is associated with Nathanael’s father. Alchemy, as I will argue, reflects the same atavistic tendencies found in Romanticism; Romanticism represents a return to many of the aesthetic values of its literary forefathers. Furthermore, Romantic aesthetics and alchemy, as I will argue, are comparable systems, employing similar means and working toward similar ends. Alchemy is the aesthetic program of Nathanael’s father, just as Romanticism is the aesthetic program of Nathanael’s poetic father, Hoffmann himself. Likewise, Coppelius’s attire, with his “ash-grey coat of old-fashioned cut” buckled shoes, and wig and pigtail, hearkens back to the
baroque style of the *ancien régime*. Spalanzani, on the other hand, is a professor of physics, and Coppola is described as a mechanician. Both are associated with an age of reason, with a mechanistic and hierarchically-ordered view of the world. In particular, the name Spalanzani has, as Nathanael states, the same name as the "famous scientist" (98), Lazzaro Spallanzani, the eighteenth-century Italian biologist. Spallanzani was the first to discover that certain lizards and snails could, if injured, regenerate certain parts of their bodies. He was also the first to perform artificial insemination on a dog. Spallanzani is associated with an age of science and particularly with the science of reproduction.

Within the pairings of Nathanael’s father/Coppelius and Spalanzani/Coppola the atavistic tendencies within Romanticism are contrasted with the formalism of the Enlightenment. While alchemy is portrayed as dangerous, it is also, like the Romantic ideals of poetic production, a spontaneous and natural form of creation. Creating a homunculus involves following a recipe and letting nature create the life. Creating an automaton, on the other hand, is a deliberate, scientific, technological production. Similar to Enlightenment attitudes about poetic production, it involves scientific rules and processes. Creating a homunculus is an art, while creating an automaton is a craft.

Throughout the text of *Der Sandmann*, alchemy exists as a "middle world" between the folk myth of the sandman and reality; it also accounts for the strange behavior of Coppelius and Nathanael’s father. Clara, the voice of clarity, is familiar enough with alchemy to recognize in the "uncanny night-time activities" of Coppelius’s and Nathanael’s father’s “secret alchemical experiments” (95). Conversely, Nathanael, whose childhood trauma has left him in shock, is unable to make this connection. Nevertheless, the evidence is in the text of his letters. In his first letter, Nathanael writes

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29 As David Kropf notes, in the eighteenth century many governments took action against alchemical practices which were then extremely popular. Governments were concerned about fraud and the risk of chemical explosions (213). The risk of such explosions and of police intervention accounts for Nathanael’s mother’s gloomy and fearful attitude every time Coppelius would come to the house.
about “a subtle, strange-smelling vapour” which emerged from his father’s bedroom
during the visits from Coppelius (88). When Nathanael spies on his father and Coppelius,
he cannot know it, but their curious work is obviously alchemical experiments: They
“both clad themselves in long black smocks” and worked with “all kinds of strange
implements” where a “blue flame flickered” at a “small hearth” (91). Coppelius
“seiz[ing] the glowing tongs” lifted up “gleaming substances out of the thick black smoke
and began to hammer away at them” (91). Around the experiment, Nathanael witnesses
“human faces appearing all around, but without eyes—instead of eyes there were hideous
black cavities” (91). What Nathanael cannot understand, one familiar with alchemy
would immediately recognize as the creation of a “homunculus,” an artificially created
“little man,” which are said to be transparent in their early stages of development. When
Nathanael’s father is killed while working with Coppelius, it is likely they botched an
alchemical experiment wherein, if the delicate procedure is not followed carefully, the
test tube “will explode and vanish as dust” (Hall 506).

Like many Romantics, Hoffmann used images and themes from alchemy in his
works. In The Golden Pot, Lindhorst seems to have an alchemical library which is
reminiscent of the Emerald Tablets ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus. Likewise, the
Golden Pot itself recalls the alchemical notion that if a tiny particle of the magic elixir
known as the Philosopher’s Stone is dropped in water it will recapitulate in miniature the
history of the universe. David Kropf notes similar alchemical allusions in “Das Fräulein
von Scuderi,” Die Elixiere des Teufels, and Kater Murr. Likewise, Danny Praet has noted
the alchemical and Rosicrucian motifs embedded in Die Irrungen and Die Geheimnisse.
Romantics in general and Hoffmann in particular turned to alchemy for its symbolic
deepth because of the similarities of both means and ends of the two arts. As Maureen
Roberts has stated, Romanticism was obsessed with alchemy because of its
“introspective, radically symbolic and mythic language” and its “affirmation of a
meaningful correspondence between mind and Nature.” While alchemy as an actual
occult pursuit was dying out with the eighteenth century’s Enlightenment, Romanticism embraced and appropriated many of its themes and symbols.

Significantly, alchemy and Romanticism are cognate programs, sharing similar methods and similar goals. The word “alchemy,” as David Kropf explains, has a complex etymology, part Arabic and part Greek. The “al” is the definitive article in Arabic, while “chemy” comes from the Greek word “Khemía” which is related to the words “to found” (as in “to melt”), “liquid,” “black,” and to the verbs “to achieve” or “to realize” (as in a work of art). It is, as Kropf maintains, “a process of artistic production” wherein “various originals—raw materials—are melted (combined, transmuted)” (210). Alchemy’s principal concern was the art of transforming base metals into more valuable ones, and practitioners insisted on calling it an art since an emphasis was placed on the particular talents of the individual practitioners. However, at its core was a more philosophical and metaphysical quest: human perfection. Thus, transformation at the material level was symbolic of a transformation at the spiritual level: the quest to transform the human subject into a perfected being. For as the art of alchemy transforms base metals into gold, so learning transforms ignorance into wisdom (Hall 499). Danny Praet sums up the dominant interpretation of alchemy from the Middle Ages onward, “[t]he processes of creation, transformation, and transmutation that seemed to talk about material things such as the philosopher’s stone [...], were widely interpreted as guidelines from allegorical handbooks on the transformation of the self (255). Likewise, the philosophical basis for Romanticism was the creation of the absolute subject in and through poesie (Helfer, Retreat 68-69). Romanticism and alchemy shared similar ends and means.

Like Romanticism, alchemy thrived by combining many disciplines. One of alchemy’s central goals was the pursuit of the Philosopher’s Stone, which would not only turn base metals into gold, but also cure disease, restore youth, and prolong life. Since it was preoccupied with the stars, it was also aligned with astrology. As Kropf maintains, just as alchemy is concerned with the transmutation of metals, it also “‘melts’ what
during the Enlightenment came to be regarded as separate disciplines or fields of study,”
combining the “alloys” of biology, astrology, medicine, and philosophy (211).
Romanticism, as was previously noted, hoped for a “symphilosophy,” as Schlegel would
call it, of poetry with prose, myth with reality, philosophy with poetry (Schulte-Sasse, et
al. 319). The theoretical and literary pursuits of disciplinary synthesis and fusion which
Romanticism pursued were similar to those of alchemy.

Furthermore, alchemists’ writing practices shared similarities with those of
Romantic poets. One encounters in alchemical texts, not elucidation but obfuscation,
layers of textual history that have been transmuted into a new text. As Carl Jung noted:

Every original alchemist built himself, as it were, a more or less
individual edifice of ideas, consisting of the dicta of the philosophers and
of miscellaneous analogies to the fundamental concepts of alchemy.
Generally these analogies are taken from all over the place. [...] The
method of alchemy, psychologically speaking, is one of boundless
amplification. (289)

Alchemical texts, like alchemical recipes, confuse rather than illuminate. In fact, David
Kropf compares the construction of alchemical texts with the construction of a building:

Textual production—original textual production—resembles the
construction of a building in that raw materials are combined to create an
edifice, yet this apparent whole becomes the raw material in the
construction of subsequent ‘edifices of ideas.’ The text itself consists of
various adjustments made in terms of preexisting works. (215)

Strata of texts are folded in together in ways that make any textual archaeology
impossible. This is, in many ways, similar to the poetics of confusion we find in
Romantic texts like Hoffmann’s Der Sandmann. They are allusive, polysemous, and
ultimately chaotic. Alchemical texts shared with Der Sandmann a problem of origins, of
how and where they begin.

If alchemy represents the Romantic project of poetic production, then the
automaton represents a different aesthetic system for poetry, that of the Enlightenment.
Assembling an automaton is a science which must take account of the rules of physics. In
Der Sandmann, Hoffmann contrasts the rigid, rules-based construction of the
Enlightenment with the Romantic project’s attempt at a “natural” process of growth. Hoffmann’s text tells us that while Olimpia “played the piano with great accomplishment, and performed equally well a bravura aria in an almost piercingly clear, bell-like voice” (113), there was an “unpleasant soulless regularity of a machine, and she dances in the same way” (116). Her physical appearance, although “she might be called beautiful” (116), is distorted. “Her somewhat oddly bowed back and the wasp-like thinness of her body seemed to be the product of too tight lacing” (113). She is described as a “witless girl” by her father, and Nathanael’s friend says “she has appeared to us in a strange way rigid and soulless” because her eyes are “completely lifeless” and “she walks with a curiously measured gait; every movement seems as if controlled by clockwork” (116). In short, she has a form of beauty, but no soul. This is an almost clichéd critique of Enlightenment aesthetics.

Furthermore, this description recalls a conversation in one of Hoffmann’s other works, The Devil’s Elixirs, where the protagonist Medardus visits a park that has been decorated with both Gothic and Classical architecture. Medardus comments that “classical forms—which by their nature, are only successful on a large scale—appeared to have led the architect into trivialities.” Imitating Gothic forms, continues Medardus, “is almost more dangerous than to strive after Classical ideals.” He resolves that “the only architect who will achieve anything genuine in this style is he who is inspired by its inner spirit, that spirit which filled the old masters who were able to fuse the apparently separate and contradictory elements into a single glorious, meaningful entity” (128). Hoffmann’s protagonist seems to be proposing a Romantic “symphilosophy” of styles.

On another level, we can read Olimpia as the embodiment of changes brought about by the Enlightenment to nineteenth-century print culture. She is quite literally a work of art created by mechanical means. If Olimpia is the work of art, then Nathanael is part of the viewing public. While not human, Olimpia fools Nathanael into believing she is human. Her creators have accomplished something our narrator longs to achieve in his
poetic work: “although you never knew its original, you will nonetheless think it lifelike, that you had indeed seen the person many times with your living eyes” (101). With this new technological production of art, the very notion of an original evaporates. Olimpia is, evidently, modeled after some pattern, but that pattern is unknown. Nevertheless, this “copy” is more lifelike than any original. Coppola and Spalanzani, like the Devil in Cazotte’s novel, are sinister “technicians of the imaginary,” as Dorothea von Mücke has termed it, toying with “supernatural delights” of the new print technology (9). Their science has a magical effect over Nathanael, convincing him that Olimpia is real, more real, in fact, than Clara, whom he calls an automaton. In an age of mechanical reproduction, the boundaries between real and artifice, original and copy are blurred to the point of extinction.

Highlighting the anxiety created by technological representation is a moment of comic relief which breaks into the dark dénouement of the narrative. When the town discovers that Olimpia is an automaton, right after the professor of poetry and rhetoric announces that it was all an allegory, the narrator tells of the effect this incident had on the town:

[T]he minds of many esteemed gentlemen were still not set at rest: the episode of the automaton had struck deep roots into their souls, and there stealthily arose in fact a detectable mistrust of the human form. To be quite convinced they were not in love with a wooden doll, many enamoured young men demanded that their young ladies should sing and dance in a less than perfect manner, that while being read to they should knit, sew, play with their puppy and so on, but above all that they should not merely listen but sometimes speak too, and in such a way that what they said gave evidence of some real thinking and feeling behind it. Many love-bonds grew more firmly tied under this regime; others on the contrary gently dissolved. “You really cannot tell which way it will go,” they said. To counter any kind of suspicion, there was an unbelievable amount of yawning and no sneezing at all at the tea-circles. (122)

While the passage is truly humorous, it also points to a very serious issue about artifice in a technological age. Technology’s ability to erase the boundaries between real and artifice creates a strong sensation of dread and fear, what Freud will call the uncanny. The narrative asks us to consider how many copies of humans coexist within the
community of humans and reminds us that in a technological age it is difficult to discern the difference. The townspeople see the automaton's most significant defect as its all-too-perfect nature, a perfection that cannot be achieved by humans. Technology has created an anxiety in the townspeople that can only be resolved by observing human defects. What the townfolk have forgotten is that Olimpia also had defects, her “wasp-like back” and “curiously measured gait,” both of which can also be human defects. Even her defects are “human.” Thus, as technology confuses the boundaries between real and artifice, original and copy, it also confuses the boundary between human and machine. The narrative thematizes ways in which the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction creates anxiety for both artists and readers of art.

The narrative also reveals an anxiety Hoffmann likely felt toward his reading public. In an age when writers faced the first commercial reading public and no longer knew their readers, writers were faced with a new concern: How to capture an audience they did not know. As Scott Hess has argued, this new situation “forced [writers] to construct their own poetic roles, standards, and even audience and desired reception, by internalizing these factors within their texts” (21). This nineteenth-century anxiety of reception, as Hess has called it, is reflected in Der Sandmann in the narrator’s concern about how to begin his narrative. The epistolary opening works, in ways Hess has demonstrated in other nineteenth-century texts, to inscribe both the author and his reading public into the text in an attempt to control the reception of that text by his readers. Hoffmann dramatizes the author/reader relationship in the characters of Nathanael and Lothar/Clara. Nathanael serves as a sort of disguised double of the author (although not specifically of Hoffmann himself) confronting the new print market. The novel begins, “Gewiß seid Ihr alle voll Unruhe, daß ich so lange—lange nicht geschrieben.” “Surely you all must be worried that I have not written for such a long time.” It is a sentence that rhetorically inscribes the reader into the text—the reader immediately identifies with the second person pronoun “you” in the sentence. We readers must be worried. Why?
Because Nathanael/our author has not written for a long time. The text immediately creates a dramatization of the reading process. Furthermore, we come to sympathize with Nathanael as we read his personal letter. We come to sympathize with his situation in ways we could not if the text were written in the third person. It is as if Nathanael is writing to us. However, this letter also illustrates the central fear of an author who writes for an unknown audience: that the attempt to connect to that audience will fail.

Nathanael’s letter is ultimately a failed attempt to enact the reading process; it goes to the wrong reader. In Der Sandmann, Hoffmann enacts his central anxiety—that an author cannot know who his or her audience ultimately will be, nor can he or she know what reaction they will have to his text. However, he also enacts the reception he desires for his text—a sympathetic response. When Clara responds to the letter she mistakenly received, Nathanael ignores her and writes back instead to Lothar. Nathanael as an author has failed to reach his audience and futilely attempts to repair the damage. Nevertheless, Clara remains a sympathetic and loving companion. Her kind feelings toward Nathanael remain unchanged by his botched communication and his ungracious attempt to repair the damage.

If Hoffmann’s text both reflects the anxiety of its author toward his readers and enacts the potential reception of that text, it also illustrates the new discourse network of 1800. Kittler celebrates Hoffmann as the “judicial civil servant” who “found a poetic discourse capable of measuring the entire field, from Mother’s Mouth to educational bureaucracy, from untranslatable origin to the universal circulation of discourses” (77). According to Kittler, Der Sandmann correctly represents Mother in the new discourse network of 1800 as Olimpia, who never speaks but makes her lover speak. Kittler cites a long passage from Der Sandmann which emphasizes Olimpia as the embodiment of Mother:

He sat beside Olimpia with her hand in his and spoke passionately of his love in words incomprehensible to either of them. Yet she, perhaps, understood, for she gazed fixedly into his eyes and sighed time after time:
“Ah, ah, ah!” —whereupon Nathanael said: “Oh lovely, heavenly woman! O beam of light from the Promised Land of Love! O heart in which my whole being is reflected!” and much more of the same, but Olimpia merely sighed again and again: “Ah, ah!” (114)

Olimpia, as Kittler maintains, is “a beloved given totally to ‘oh’-saying,” the “soul that, instead of speaking, makes her lover speak and speak exactly that inner life” (41-42). Mother, as Kittler argues, has evolved into an entity that neither speaks nor writes, but makes men speak and write. Olimpia represents this Mother; “from the depths of her soul arise the unembellished accents that the author rescues by writing” (67).

Furthermore, that Nathanael rejects Clara “follows the new language regulation word for word,” writes Kittler, since she “has been all too alphabetized” (41). For only a lover who speaks nothing but “oh” “can fulfill the wish that language (mathematically put) should have no greater power than the soul, that it should really and exclusively ‘portray man’s inner life’” (41-42). Despite the fact that, as Kittler maintains, Clara is all too alphabetized, she describes herself as unable to “find the right words” and struggling because “the way I go about saying it is so awkward” (96). Finding the right words is, even among one as alphabetized as Clara, more properly the role of sons and fathers in the new discourse network.

A significant detail that Kittler neglects to mention is that in Der Sandmann, Nathanael’s mother is in charge of teaching her children (86). This new era was, as Kittler maintains, a time when alphabetization of children was the responsibility of mothers. Alphabetization and phoneticization occurred, not in the classroom, but in the home under the mother’s tutelage. Likewise, in this new discourse network, sons became civil servants and writers. It is, significantly, Nathanael’s father who tells the children “strange stories and became so excited over them that his pipe went out and [Nathanael] has to relight it for him” (86). Fathers and sons are writers and speakers in the discourse.

Hoffmann himself was a civil servant and, while there are no civil servants in Der Sandmann, they abound in other Hoffmann tales (e.g., Sub-rector Paulmann and Registrar Heerbrand in Der goldne Topf).
network of 1800. The father’s stories—like his other creative activity, alchemy—disturb Nathanael’s mother and cause her to “become very gloomy” (86). As Kittler states, there arose in 1800 an abyss, separating writing from voice, speaking from sounds. The Mother no longer enters the male world of artistic creation, whether storytelling or alchemy.

There is one character in Der Sandmann who remains outside the discourse network of 1800: the old woman who looks after Nathanael’s youngest sister. Within the realm of the nursery, she resides outside the community of adult communication. It is she who violates the rules of that discourse network by telling Nathanael the story of the sandman. Furthermore, like the sandman itself, the old woman has neither origin nor name, yet her story, which “assumed hideous detail” (87) within Nathanael’s imagination, will ultimately compel Nathanael to become a poet.

Who is the Sandman?

The old woman’s story of the sandman provides yet another clue for interpreting Der Sandmann. Nathanael’s attempt at poetic production is threatened by the frightening image of the sandman. To understand how the sandman threatens poetic production, we must go back to the myth as described by the old woman. The sandman, she tells Nathanael, steals the eyes of children, takes them back to the moon, and feeds them to his own children. Unlike Frankenstein and L’Ève future, Der Sandmann does not demand an allegorical link between the text and the body created in the text. There is no “allegorical imperative,” as Harold Fisch calls it, which compels the reader to look for an allegorical interpretation. 31 It is, nevertheless, possible to impose an allegorical interpretation on this

31 On the contrary, Fisch argues that there is an inscribed ambiguity in the biblical Song of Songs, which compels readers to seek an allegorical interpretation. Certain phrases and imagery within the text, argues Fisch, have “resonance” to other books within the biblical corpus, which creates a “pressure within the text [. . .] vibrations that it sets up in the minds of its readers” (98). These “vibrations” then compel us to move from reading the Song as a simple love poem to reading it as a commentary on the relations between Isreal and the land, on the one hand, and Isreal and God, on the other. In both Frankenstein and L’Ève future, I would argue, there are likewise “vibrations” in the text,
folk tale to find another Romantic expression of the birth topos. The children in the
critical to find another Romantic expression of the birth topos. The children in the
folk tale can be read as the literary progeny of a parent, an author's texts. One group of
children (texts) has their eyes snatched out by the sandman who feeds them to his own
children (texts). The sandman steals the "vision" from one group of texts, someone else's
literary children, and gives them to his own literary progeny, the texts he has created. If
we read this folk tale allegorically, the sandman is a theft of other authors' "vision,"
which he uses in creating his own texts. He is a literary thief, a hack.

If we read "eyes" as literary vision, as the unique creative productions of an
author, we must note that eyes are everywhere in this text. They blaze, they burn, they fly
out, they are colorblind, and they are frequently stolen. The two people most associated
with eyes are Coppelius and Coppola. Coppelius is described as having "grey bushy
eyebrows" and a "pair of green cat's eyes" which "blaze out piercingly" (89). In the
laboratory, it is Coppelius who cries out "Eyes, bring eyes!" (91). Likewise, Coppola is
described as having "eyes blazing out piercingly from under long grey eyelashes" (109).
It is Coppola who provides the eyes for the automaton, Olimpia, but these eyes are
somehow taken from Nathanael. Nathanael is correct, therefore, in seeing both Coppelius
and Coppola as the sandman. At the beginning of the text, Nathanael notes that the
homunculi in the glass jars have no eyes, only "hideous black cavities" (91). Coppelius’s
creative works are eyeless. When Nathanael falls out of his hiding place in the laboratory,
Coppelius attempts to steal Nathanael’s eyes. "Now we have eyes—eyes—a lovely pair
of children’s eyes,” shouts Coppelius (91). These words are the same as those spoken by
Coppola when he appears later as the spectacle salesman, a fact that reinforces
Nathanael’s view that this doppelganger is really Coppelius himself. “I also got lov-ely
oce, lov-ely occe,” announces Coppola when he comes to Nathanael’s door.

which I will discuss in more detail in their respective chapters, that compel us to read the
texts allegorically.
It is also significant that after his terrifying encounter with Coppelius in the laboratory, Nathanael states that it is not the "weakness of [his] eyes which renders the world colourless" but rather a "dark destiny" and a "veil of gloom" which hangs over his life. Coppelius has, in fact, stolen his ability to see colors. The narrator shares a similar colorblindness with Nathanael. He is able to see things "invisible to other eyes" (99), but which he cannot portray to express "the colours of my inner vision" (101). Both the narrator and Nathanael have a colorful inner vision. But while Nathanael’s real eyes render everything colorless, the narrator is unable to represent in colors, he is unable to realize his inner vision as art.

Nathanael’s poem, which the narrator is unable to reproduce, recreates his inner vision of the sandman. Clara, whose eyes are described as clear, bright, and "pure azure of a cloudless sky" (102), and Nathanael are about to be married when Coppelius appears and steals Clara’s child-like eyes from her and throws them at Nathanael. When they fly out they become "blood-red sparks singeing and burning" Nathanael’s breast (105). The imagery from this scene is clearly repeated when Coppola comes to sell the spectacles. As Coppola piles the spectacles onto the table "flaming glances leaped out more and more wildly together and directed their blood red beams into Nathanael’s breast" (109-110). When Nathanael finally buys a telescope from Coppola, he remarks that he felt like he had paid "much too high a price" (111). Nathanael is not deluded; Coppola and Coppelius really are incarnations of the sandman. Like the sandman, they are constantly stealing other people’s eyes. Throughout the narrative, eyes, as symbols of literary vision, are constantly being purloined or are flying out from where they belong.

Hoffmann provides another hint to help readers understand the significance of the Sandman as "author" when he mentions that Spalanzani looks like Cagliostro (98). Cagliostro was the name taken by the Sicilian rogue Giuseppe Balsamo who was associated with alchemy, but was revealed to be a charlatan. He claimed to possess the Philosopher’s Stone and traveled throughout Europe swindling thousands of people out
of their money (Aylesworth 24-32). For Thomas Carlyle, Cagliostro was the epitome of all that was wrong with Europe in the late eighteenth century. In an “age of imposters, cut-purses, swindlers, double-goers, enthusiasts, ambiguous persons; quacks simple, quacks compound,” Carlyle wrote, Cagliostro was a “Quack of Quacks” (qtd. in Sorensen 61). His name became, as Corkhill maintains, the “sublime archetype” within Romanticism of “quackery and imposture” (80). Common in Romanticism were Cagliostro or Cagliostro-like characters, which came to be synonymous with the literary charlatan: the hack writer.

In Der Sandmann, Hoffmann symbolically enacts and self-consciously explores his own anxiety of influence vis-à-vis the literary fathers who preceded him. He is aware of the literary terrain explored by previous authors and anxious to find his own place within the canon. The fact that the sandman figure exists in both aesthetic programs and print cultures within this narrative suggests that Hoffmann also recognizes that this battle for literary space is timeless. As David Kropf sums up the theme of charlatanism in another of Hoffmann’s works, “the danger always exists that the practice of one’s art will be reduced to the level of an object or commodity, despite attempts to maintain its sanctity” (212). The anxiety of being dismissed as a hack writer is one that haunts both Hoffmann and Romantic literature in general.

A Parody of Romantic Autoengenderment

Another source of anxiety for Romantic writers was the fact that woman was seen as the ultimate source of creativity. In Der Sandmann, as in other literary works from the

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32 Cagliostro or “Cagliostroism” is found in many literary works of the period, Klinger’s Der Derwisch, an oriental farce about secret societies; Wieland’s “exotic tale” Der Stein der Weisen, a satire on Egyptian freemasonry; Schiller’s unfinished novel Der Geisterseher, in which two spiritualist rogues spin a web of deception; and Goethe’s comedy Der Groß-Cophta. Corkhill maintains that Mephistopheles in Faust I is a “Cagliostroian” character, playing tricks similar to the ones the real-life Cagliostro played. Goethe took a particular interest in Cagliostro, monitoring his fortunes and eventually going on a genealogical fact-finding mission to Palermo in 1787 (Corkhill 81).
period, woman is posited as the source and product of poetic production. It is Nathanael’s mother who initiates the sandman into his imagination, Clara who inspires Nathanael’s tragic poem, the old woman who inspires Nathanael’s imagination, and, most importantly, Olimpia who creates in Nathanael a frenzy of poetic production:

From the profoundest depths of his writing-desk Nathanael fetched up everything he had ever written: poems, fantasies, visions, novels, tales, daily augmented by random sonnets, stanzas, *canzoni*, and he read them all to Olympia without wearying for hours on end. And he had never before had so marvelous an auditor: she did not sew or knit, she did not gaze out of the window, she did not feed a cage bird, she did not play with a lapdog or with a favourite cat, she did not fiddle with a handkerchief or with anything else, she did not find it necessary to stifle a yawn with a little forced cough—in short, she sat motionless, her gaze fixed on the eyes of her beloved with a look that grew ever more animated and more passionate. Only when Nathanael finally arose and kissed her hand—and no doubt her mouth, too—did she say: “Ah, ah!” and then “Good night, my dear!” (117-18)

Throughout the text, the female is positioned as the source of poetic discourse and locus of male libidinal interest. However, Hoffmann problematizes the idea of woman as the source of poetic production to the point of parody. In each of the two creative processes depicted in the narrative—alchemical creation of the homunculus and scientific creation of an automaton—two men act as creators. Ursula Mahlendorf has noted the abundant and confusing imagery at work here:

We witness the establishment of a rich store of primal images concerning the origin of life through alchemical means, in homosexual parentage, primal images of mechanical homunculi, of splits into good and bad fathers, of explosive childbirths, of parental giants of immense power, and of omnipotence. (19-20).

In her reading of Schlegel’s *Lucinde*, Martha Helfer finds “a coded homoerotic aesthetic” which “subtly debunks the feminine ideal” (“Male Muse” 300). We find a similar homoerotic aesthetic in this narrative. Framing the narrative are two “primal scenes,” as Mahlendorf calls them, of homosexual parentage. When Nathanael spies on the alchemical work of his father and Coppelius, he watches as Coppelius “threw off his coat” while his father “slowly and gloomily removed his dressing gown” and then both “clad themselves in long black smocks” (91). An aggressive and stereotypically
masculine Coppelius towers over Nathanael’s submissive and stereotypically feminine father. As they engage in their creative act, Nathanael notices that his father’s features show a “convulsive pain” which turn them into a “repulsive devil mask”: his father “looked like Coppelius” (91). The scene is overtly homoerotic. Later, Nathanael witnesses a similar scene of homosexual parentage when he happens upon Coppola and Spalanzani fighting over their creation, Olimpia. Nathanael hears a “stamping, a clattering, a pushing and thumping against the door, with oaths and curses intermingled” (119), as the two men fight like lovers over their creation. In both cases, the two forms of creation in the narrative are brought about through the coming together of two men.

Significantly, both Olimpia and Nathanael are ripped apart during these “primal” scenes. In the first, Coppelius takes off Nathanael’s limbs and reassembles him in different ways, like a child playing with a doll. While in the second, Olimpia is pulled apart in a tug-of-war between Coppola and Spalanzani, her eyes falling onto the floor as Coppola rips her out of Spalanzani’s hands. In addition to the latent homosexuality of the scenes, there is a violent act. It is not too far of a stretch to see them as incestuous rape scenes. John Fletcher sees in the first “all male scene” certain “affinities with the primal scene in a narrower, later Freudian sense—that of a scene of violent sexual encounter between the mother and the father, either overheard or overseen by the childish voyeur” (131). The second scene is strikingly similar. If Olimpia is, as Freud argued, an extension of Nathanael’s personality, then we can read these primal scenes as being psychologically damaging. As Gabriele Dillman writes, “the experience of the body falling apart is the expression of the person’s inner world collapsing” (144). The narrative symbolically portrays the self ripped apart by a trauma.

Both of these homosexual pairings are creative. However, they both create monsters: The homunculi are described as “without eyes” and Olimpia, despite her ability to fool Nathanael, is described as awkward and inhuman. These monstrous creations as allegorical representations of the birth topos are the equivalent of the neoclassical use of
the topos to satirize and parody the works of bad poets. Nathanael, in contrast, is successful in his efforts to create, to become a poet. While his poem is only recounted as prose in the text, it is amazingly productive. Everything he writes in his poem comes to be in the text of Der Sandmann. While he is never paired in a homoerotic relationship of his own choosing, he is the victim of what might be seen as a homosexual rape, a rape that has the symbolic effect of impregnating him with the very image of the sandman he will give voice to in his poem. He reanimates the sandman, bringing him out of the shadows of his imagination, into his poem, and, ultimately, into his life.

Nevertheless, the narrative highlights the fact that Nathanael’s poetic inspiration does not ultimately come from either a woman or another man but from a gaze inward. In Nathanael’s obsession with Olimpia, he is really showing a narcissistic obsession. As Michiel Scharpé has noted, in Der Sandmann “narcissism is the basis of artistic creation and replaces real procreation.” When Nathanael first sees Olimpia, he notices how she appears “not to notice [him], and her eyes had in general something fixed and staring about them, [he] could almost say they were sightless” (99). When he gazes at her through Coppola’s telescope, he again sees how her eyes seem “strangely fixed and dead” (110). Yet as his gaze lingers, he notes that “as the image in the glass grew sharper and sharper it seemed as though beams of moonlight began to rise within [her eyes]; it was as if they were at that moment acquiring the power of sight” (110). He discovers that he cannot tear himself away from “the seductive sight of Olympia” (111). What Nathanael cannot know is that Olimpia’s eyes are incapable of reflecting her inner soul; she has none. They are only capable of reflecting the gaze of those eyes observing her. As Mahlendorf puts it, while Nathanael thinks Coppola’s glasses “look out on the world although they, in fact, look in upon his own psyche” (Mahlendorf 27). Hoffmann recreates the myth of Narcissus.

Seeing his own reflection in Olimpia’s eyes has the effect of hypnotizing Nathanael. While he notes her “oddly bowed back” and “wasp-like thinness,” when he
looks in Olimpia’s eyes he “became aware how she was gazing across at him with eyes full of desire and how every note she sang merged with the look of love which was burning its way into his heart” (113). If Spalanzani and Coppola are Olimpia’s creators, Nathanael is her animator; if they are the Pygmalion of the story, Nathanael is the Venus. It is his gaze and his touch that brings her to life. When he touches her hand, it was “icy cold” (113), but “as he looked into Olimpia’s eyes, which gazed back at him full of love and desire” he senses that “at that instant it seemed as though a pulse began to beat in the cold hand and a stream of life blood began to glow” (114). When he kisses Olimpia, Nathanael’s “passionate lips encountered lips that were icy-cold” but as she drew closer, “her lips seemed to warm into life” (115). Just as the light that animates Olimpia’s eyes is actually a reflection of Nathanael, the warmth that grows in her hands and lips is really transferred from Nathanael. Nathanael’s love for Olimpia is really a love for himself. Ironicly, he states that “only in Olimpia’s love do I find myself again” (117), just as it is when he confesses to her that “only you, you alone, understand me completely” (118).

Since Olimpia only says “ah” in responding to his poems, it is Nathanael who reads into those “ahs” the approval he seeks. As the narrator ironically states, “it seemed to him that what Olimpia said of his work, of his poetic talent in general, came from the depths of his own being, that her voice was indeed the voice of those very depths themselves” (118). When Nathanael is confronted with the fact that Olimpia is an automaton, Spalanzani tells him that her eyes were purloined from Nathanael (120). While this comment is ultimately one of the many fantastic elements of the story, it is also true: Nathanael has ultimately seen his own soul peering back at him in the eyes of the lifeless automaton Olimpia; it is his own artistic vision he sees peering back at him. As Adam Bresnick states, “Nathanael has found the perfect screen onto which he can project his narcissistic fantasy and from which he may have it returned, a screen fantasmatically removed beyond the limitations of everyday language” (127). While looking into Olimpia’s eyes, Nathanael sees only himself reflected back at him. Martha
Helfer has noted, "the metaphysical ground of the Romantic project—presumed to be the maternal, eternal feminine embodied in the form of the beloved—proves to be the self-positing male subject" ("Male Muse" 300). Der Sandmann can be read as a parody of the Romantic project of autopoeisis, and Hoffmann implicitly argues that this obsession with the self produces not only poetry but madness. Nathanael has achieved his goal of becoming a poet, but it comes at a cost much greater than he expected.

There is another creative process that may have been more successful in this narrative: The relationship between Nathanael and Clara has all the components of a positive relationship, but it is never realized. If we take another look at the theme of alchemy, we may begin to understand the poetic program that Hoffmann views as potentially most successful. As discussed previously, the philosophical end goal of both alchemy and Romanticism is the same—the creation of a perfected subject. Likewise, this narrative suggests that it is through an appropriate pairing that positive poetic production may emerge, the pairings of Coppélius and Nathanael’s father, and Coppola and Spalanzani are all unsuccessful.

The potential pairing of Nathanael and Clara, on the other hand, is unrealized, but promising, given the characterizations of the two of them. Clara is described as clearheaded and practical; her name suggests Aufklärung, enlightenment. She is associated with reality and the physical world. Nathanael, on the other hand, is associated with the world of myth. It is he who is obsessed with the myth of the sandman; he is taken away by “mystical flights of fancy,” and for him “all life consisted of dreams and premonitions,” (100). He is consumed with “mysteries” and “mystical books” (101). Nathanael and Clara also represent two other opposites that the Romantics sought to unite: poetry and prose. Nathanael is trying to be a poet. Clara, on the other hand, represents a more common world which is characterized as “prosaic” (102, 104). While Nathanael strives to achieve his goal to become a good poet, Clara describes herself as “awkward” in expressing herself (96).
To encourage us to follow an allegorical reading of the narrative, Hoffmann characterizes Clara and Nathanael in alchemical terms. Clara, as the character who is "down to earth," and functions as a base metal in the narrative, contrasts with Nathanael, who is more ephemeral and is associated with fire. His poem, which is never reproduced but often quoted in the narrative, speaks of a "circle of fire" (105); when he reads the poem, an "inner fire coloured his cheeks" (106); and when he challenges Lothar to a duel, he was "ignited into blazing anger" and there was a "bloodthirsty belligerence in their burning eyes" (107). It is significant that it is following these "fiery" scenes that Nathanael’s house burns down (108). When Coppola brings spectacles and lorgnettes for Nathanael, "flaming glances leaped more and more wildly together and directed their blood red beams into Nathanael’s heart" (110). When he gazes into Olimpia’s eyes, which is the equivalent of looking into his own eyes, her look of love "burn[s] its way into his heart" (108). In alchemy it is fire that purifies the base metals; the marriage of both is necessary for the process to be successful. Thus the characters function as polar opposites, but opposites that must be united to achieve perfection—whether in Romantic terms or in alchemical terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nathanael</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Fire</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Base Metal</td>
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To unite these opposites is the equivalent of a "chemical marriage," which for the alchemists was not only a marriage of matter, but also "a mystical union between two cosmological principles" (Eliade 151). This union must exist at the physical level as well as at the spiritual level. As Carl Jung characterizes the alchemical philosopher, “he is the androgynous original man” (161), the representation of wholeness and selfhood, “the union of opposites par excellence” (19).
Alchemists believed that the elemental components of their experiments had to be added in the exact proportions and at the exact moments in order to produce the Philosopher's Stone. Moreover, the experiment would only be successful if the alchemist labored within his soul, as well as in his laboratory. The experiments had to take place in four worlds: the world of God, the world of man, the world of elements, and the world of chemicals. The greater alchemy of the soul must precede the lesser alchemy of material world (Hall 504-506). Likewise, Hoffmann thematizes the importance of the mystical union within Romanticism of reality and myth, poetry and prose. For just as Nathanael goes mad without Clara, poetry and myth cannot achieve transcendence unless they are united with prose and reality.

The final words of the narrative are important, but seldom noticed by critics: Clara may be the only one to ultimately become successful as a creator. At end of the text, the narrator states:

Several years later, you could have seen Clara, in a distant part of the country, sitting with an affectionate man hand in hand before the door of a lovely country house and with two lovely children playing at her feet, from which it is to be concluded that Clara found in the end that quiet domestic happiness which was so agreeable to her cheerful disposition and which the inwardly riven Nathanael could never have given her.

In the original German, Hoffmann has, in typical ironic form, rendered this entire ending in the subjunctive. "It is reported that Clara was seen" and "this would seem to suggest that" is a better translation. However, if we are to believe the hearsay that concludes this narrative, Clara has produced two real, living, whole children. She may have achieved what Nathanael was unable to achieve. If so, the narrative gives us a clue why she may have been successful in describing why Nathanael failed: the problem with Nathanael is that he was "riven," internally divided, incomplete. Hoffmann suggests that the artist can only be successful if he or she incorporates the totality of artistic expression into the poetic work. The rest are hacks.
Bodies in Pieces

Literary hacks, commercially-aware but artistically-challenged writers—steal the words and ideas of others and claim them as their own, quite literally “hacking” up another author’s work. Significantly, fragmented, hacked-up bodies abound in this very fragmented text. Deborah Harter has noted that in Der Sandmann there is a parallel between the fragmented nature of the text and the fragmented bodies it portrays. She notes the narrator’s frustration in telling the story, that he can only tell it one part at a time. He would like to be able to capture the totality of the experience “everything marvelous, glorious, terrible, joyful, harrowing that had happened” and present it in “the very first word so it would strike your hearers like an electric shock” (100). Instead he must weave together several stories, using different methods, all of which are fragmentary.

It is significant too that the narrator compares his work as a storyteller to that of a painter. He feels discouraged that as a writer he has to break his story into pieces, while a painter can give the full impact of his image at the very moment of the first gaze. Harter notes Gotthold Lessing’s discussion in Laokoon (1766) that a narrative “may only express with certainty what is consecutive in time,” while a painter can only express with certainty what is consecutive in space (Harter 10-11). Furthermore, she discusses how painters often “block” out their subject matter by looking at them through carefully divided grids that allow them to see a whole scene divided into representable parts. Both painters and writers create by first fragmenting their subject matter. But the end result is different for the painter and the writer, for, as Harter argues,

\[\text{[t]he writer is unable to suppress, in the final creation, a reliance all along on the fragment—on a part-by-part creation that remains ineluctably visible. He or she is faced with a kind of descriptive partialization that makes even of the narrated realist portrait a scene made up of “blocks” of meaning. (11)}\]

Thus, each reading of a text is, as Roland Barthes would call it, a “cubist reading” in which the “blocks” of text are juxtaposed against each other to create a narrative. While
painting takes the three-dimensional and renders it two-dimensional, writing takes the three-dimensional and renders it one-dimensional, as a reader works through the linear rows of words to reassemble the parts of the portrait. All writing is ultimately a fragmentary and fragmented art form.

In *Der Sandmann*, Harter maintains, “there is a privileging of the part that takes place as much in the narrative strategy as it does in language” (23-24). The fragmented narrative is emphasized even as that narrative portrays an array of partial bodies. The homunculi Nathanael observes in his father’s laboratory are only faces without eyes. Nathanael is pulled apart by Coppelius and his parts are rearranged on his body. Olimpia is assembled from mechanical parts and her eyes fall onto the floor as Coppola drags her away. Nathanael’s poem speaks of “Clara’s lovely eyes, which sprang out like blood-red sparks, siring and burning, on to Nathanael’s breast” (105). Even full bodies are rendered grotesque by the text lingering on their individual parts. Coppelius is identified and made horrible by the narrative focus on his particular features:

Imagine a large, broad-shouldered man with a big misshapen head, an ochre-yellow face, grey bushy eyebrows from under which a pair of green cat’s-eyes blaze out piercingly, and a large heavy nose drawn down over the upper lip; the crooked mouth often distorted in a malignant laugh, at which times two dark red blotches appear on the cheeks and a strange hissing sound comes from between the clenched teeth. (89)

His attire is likewise rendered grotesque by the fragmented description, but the most grotesque part of all is his “great knotty, hair-covered hands” which he delighted to use to disgust the children by touching the desserts and fruits which their mother placed on their plates (90). Likewise Nathanael is mesmerized by the many spectacles that give the appearance of “a thousand eyes gaz[ing] and blink[ing] and star[ing] up at Nathanael” (109). The text is a fragmented network of fragments. As allegories of textuality, these bodies call attention to the fragmentary nature of art. The text highlights the impossibility of representation even as it represents this unrepresentability. Like the fragmented bodies in the narrative and the narrator’s frustration of capturing a whole made only of parts,
Hoffmann has composed a narrative out of fragments. The text abandons any claim at totality even as it reflects totality in its fragmentation.

**Romantic Irony and Hoffmann as Alchemist**

Combining the various fragments of this text into a text requires a sort of textual alchemy. The text is an alchemical production, an alchemical soup. It is quite literally a *con-fusion*, a mixing together of fragmented pieces. David Kropf sees alchemy as a key to understanding Hoffmann’s *Kater Murr*, where, he argues, the text “becomes a multiplicity, an alloy in which the metals are liquid, continually flowing, transmuting, combining” (224). *Der Sandmann* is likewise an alchemical multiplicity, and the key ingredient of that alchemical soup is irony.

Throughout his texts, Hoffmann slyly and ironically links the character, the narrator, and the author in subtle ways. Neil Hertz has noted how in *Der Sandmann* Hoffmann creates a strong link between the forces driving Nathanael and those driving the narrator. The dazzling colors of the narrator’s inner vision parallel Nathanael’s vision of the dazzling spectacles. The vision that makes the narrator “bubble and boil and drove the blood glowing hot through [his] veins, so that [his] cheeks burned red” (99) parallels the “inner fire” that “colored [Nathanael’s] cheeks bright red, [until] tears welled from his eyes” (106). Both also share a grandiose wish for rhetorical power and a sense of helplessness in actually bringing their vision to life. Maria Tatar also notes the similarity between the narrator’s dilemma and that of Nathanael. The narrator confesses two problems in trying to tell his story: the poverty of language to actually describe his inner thoughts, and the difficulty finding a place to start. These are also problems he shares with Nathanael. Nathanael puts off writing, just as the narrator puts off beginning his narrative. Both also confess they do not know how to tell their tale. The words of Nathanael are very close to those of our narrator: “how can I begin to make you feel in any way how what took place a few days ago might actually destroy my life?” (85).
The reflexive nature of the text is emphasized when the narrator “perceive[s]
something comical in the wild eyes of the student Nathanael” (101). The narrator’s gaze
into the eyes of Nathanael parallels Nathanael’s gaze into the eyes of Olimpia, and again
there is an unstated reflexivity in this gaze. For just as Nathanael sees himself in
Olimpia’s eyes, the narrator sees himself in Nathanael’s eyes. The narrator gazing into
his character’s eyes is reflected in a text about reflexivity, a gaze in a gaze in a gaze. The
text folds in on itself like an alchemical mixture; individual elements meld together in
ways that prohibit textual archaeology.

In addition to linking the narrator to the Nathanael, Hoffmann links them both
back to himself as the author. The narrator states, “I belong to that strange race of authors
who . . . seem to hear everyone they encounter . . . asking: ‘What is the matter? Tell us
about it!’” (100). The narrator, like Hoffmann, is an author. Furthermore, both Maria
Tatar and Ursula Mahlendorf note that the name Nathanael is the Hebrew equivalent of
the Greek “Theodore” (both meaning “gift of God”), the name by which Hoffmann was
known to his intimate friends. So in naming his character Nathanael, Hoffmann has
created a further linkage, tying himself to his character and narrator. As Mahlendorf
notes, “[]like his fictional alter ego, and through him and his opposite, the narrator,
Hoffmann bares the origins of creativity. Where Nathanael fails, Hoffmann succeeds, as
author of the structured, concluded work” (Mahlendorf 29).

When the narrator in Der Sandmann confesses that he sees “something comical in
the wild eyes of the student Nathanael,” we should understand that the “comical”
expression is being reflected onto Nathanael’s eye through the narrator by the comical
look of our author. Kropf sums it up this way, “[t]here seems to be someone lurking at
the fringes, in all the interstices, who is combining, transmuting, and making hybrids and
textual alloys, all of which would make the near-invisible Hoffmann a kind of alchemist
as well” (218). But we as readers are also lurking at the fringes of this narrative. For this
is a text about being susceptible to aesthetic illusions, about mistaking the imaginary for
the real. Hoffmann ironically reminds us that we are essentially having the same experience in reading his text that Nathanael has when gazing into the eyes of Olimpia; we are giving ourselves over to the lie that the imaginary is real. As Adam Bresnick puts it, “when one reads ‘The Sandman’ literally it becomes a humorous allegory of the work of art, while when one reads it figuratively, it remains an uncanny tale of romantic madness” (126). The reader has, by repressing the use of irony in the tale, cathected with the narrative of Der Sandmann in much the same way Nathanael cathected with the automaton Olimpia.

Hoffmann is thus an alchemist who succeeds where the characters and narrator in his text fail. As Mahlendorf notes, from Nathanael’s point of view, the story tells of the “utter defeat of the artist”; however, when looked at from the point of view of Hoffmann, the story tells of the “artist’s victory over fear of experimentation with unusual states of mind, with regression, with the return of the repressed, with alienation, with guilt and violence, with failure of ego mastery, and rejection and punishment by the world. Through his insight into the artist who failed Hoffmann achieves victory” (Mahlendorf 30). In this sense, Hoffmann is the only successful artist in this text. He is the only artist who successfully creates art and survives to tell the tale.
CHAPTER 2

MOURNING LOST MOTHERS IN MARY

SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

In the preface to her 1831 third edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley writes of her childhood fantasies:

> It was beneath the trees of the grounds belonging to our house, or on the bleak sides of the woodless mountains near, that my true compositions, the airy flights of my imagination were born and fostered. [...] I could people the hours with creations far more interesting to me at that age than my own sensations. (xxii)

Here Shelley employes the birth topos, describing the “births” of her imagination as she would “people the hours with creations,” to depict the imaginative creativity of her childhood. Following this “portrait of the artist as a young girl,” as Lillian Porten has called it (11), Shelley goes on to describe a period of literary withdrawal as she enters the domestic sphere of mother and wife. “After this my life became busier, and reality stood in place of fiction. [...] Travelling, and the cares of a family, occupied my time” (xxii). The figurative birthing of her childhood days is exchanged for literal parenting during adulthood, texts exchanged for children, and an uneasy tension develops between the roles of literary parent and literal parent.

Combining these roles creates its own tension, which can be seen in her frequently quoted but highly revealing sendoff to this revised edition of her novel: “I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words which found no true echo in my heart” (xxvi). In that same preface, she describes the process of composition as coming “to dilate upon so very hideous an idea” (xxi, emphasis mine); she refers to “the
pale student of unhallowed arts” as an “artist” who is terrified by the success of his creation (xxv); and she adds to the revised text a section detailing how Victor sought to “unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (33). Shelley makes explicit in the preface to her novel’s revised edition a point implicit in the first edition: that her text is her literary child and that it parallels the monstrous creation depicted therein.

The first edition of the novel certainly hints at this metaphor. For example, the first letter from Walton is dated December 11, 17— and the last letter is dated September 12, 17—; as Anne Mellor states, “[e]xactly nine months enwomb the telling of the history of Frankenstein, bringing Mary Shelley’s literary pregnancy to full term” (54). This parallels Victor’s metaphoric pregnancy as he works to bring about the creation of his Creature; the gestation time of the Creature is likewise approximately nine months (Huet 132). As if to stress the point, Victor calls this period a “confinement” (32) during which he struggles through “days and nights of labour and fatigue” (30); “oppress[ion] by a slow fever” and nervousness “to a most painful degree” (33). Many critics have also noted the womb-like symbolism of his laboratory: “a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase” (32). The 1831 preface makes explicit what is implicit in the novel: the text is the literary offspring of its author.

Recently, critics have seen the 1831 preface as a key to reading the novel as an allegorical tale of Mary Shelley’s own creative life (Friedman, “Creativity” 68; Gilbert and Gubar 222; Johnson, “My Monster” 7; Moers 93; Poovey 333; and Porten 10-13).

33 References here are to the Bantam republication of the 1831 revised third edition. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, references will be to the Norton critical edition of the 1818 printing unless otherwise noted.

34 Mellor notes too that the dates correspond closely to those of Mary Shelley’s third pregnancy which was ongoing during the actual writing of Frankenstein (54). It was Percy, however, who added to the first edition references to Victor as the “author” of the Creature (65).
They see, as Barbara Johnson puts it, “meaningful parallels between Victor’s creation of his monster and Mary’s creation of her book” (7). For Mary Shelley reading was creating. She quite literally “created” her mother out of her dead mother’s writings, which she read at the site of her grave at the St. Pancras’ Churchyard. Her father, though an educational theorist, was emotionally incapable of educating Mary.\footnote{For background on Godwin’s educational theories, see Margaret Fearn’s “William Godwin and the ‘Wilds of Literature.’” A very interesting overview of Mary Wollstonecraft’s theories of education and the family can be found in Eileen Hunt’s “Family as Cave, Platoon, and Prison: The Three Stages of Wollstonecraft’s Philosophy of the Family.”}

William Godwin wrote:

The poor children! I am totally unfitted to educate them. The skepticism which sometimes leads me right in matters of speculation, is torment to me when I would attempt to direct the infant mind. I am the most unfit person for this office (qtd. in Lipking 324).

Thus, Mary Shelley’s self-education through books was simultaneously an act of creation—creating her parents from their written works. As Gilbert and Gubar write, “books appear to have functioned as her surrogate parents, pages and words standing in for flesh and blood” (223). For Mary Shelley to think of her own novel as her literary offspring must have seemed quite natural in such a context.

On the other hand, for Mary Shelley to think of her novel as “hideous” seems unnatural. To employ the birth topos to characterize her work as a “hideous progeny” sounds quite similar to the way late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poets used the metaphor to lampoon the works of bad poets. Her “hideous progeny” is a monstrous creation, an abortive birth. But Shelley is not using the trope in a self-deprecating way, for horrific monstrosity was her goal from the beginning. She describes the literal nightmare that led to its literary incarnation as a boon: “what terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow” (xxv). Her nightmare gave her an idea that she could exploit for the ghost-story parlor game she was engaged in with Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and John Polidori. As Lillian Porten puts it, “Shelley manages to call herself a bad author/parent (her literary offspring
is hideous) and a good one ('her'—that is Frankenstein’s—monstrous offspring is suitably hideous)” (12-13).

Nevertheless, for a novel whose theme is the creation of life and whose author claimed it as her offspring, it seems odd that we find so few mothers in the text itself. Many critics have noted the absence of mothers, or their ubiquitous premature death, in *Frankenstein*. Elizabeth’s mother dies; Victor’s mother dies; Victor’s mother has no mother; the De Laceys are a motherless family; and the Creature has no mother. In fact, for a text written by a woman, there are few female characters at all, and they are all fairly passive. The absence of the mother in *Frankenstein* leaves a hole that cannot be ignored. If motherlessness haunts *Frankenstein*, it clearly haunted Shelley. Mary Shelley’s own birth was immediately followed by her mother’s death. As Barbara Johnson states, “Mary herself was in fact the unwitting murderous intruder present on her own parents’ wedding night: their decision to marry was due to the fact that Mary Wollstonecraft was already carrying the child that was to kill her” (64). She read and admired the words of her own mother, while her foster mother—a “staunch housewifely mother of two who clearly preferred her own children to Godwin’s” (Johnson 65)—only reminded her of that loss.

Motherlessness in *Frankenstein*, however, is not simply a reflection of Mary Shelley’s own tragic life story, but also functions as a critique of nineteenth-century philosophical ideals and technological changes. Here I will examine four issues: First, central to its agenda, the text employs a poetics of confusion. Second, it depicts the way technology impacts the creation of art and signifies the emerging discourse network of 1800. Third, it functions as a feminist response to the male process of autoengenderment, a Romantic philosophical system that seeks to usurp the role of mother even as it destroys

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*For example, Marc Rubenstein notes the “series of motherless family romances which form the substance of Frankenstein’s past” (177), and Barbara Johnson sees the story as being concerned with “eliminations of the mother” (9).*
the feminine. Finally, it participates in the Romantic theory of the fragment, the fragmentary text mirroring the fragmentary creation created therein.

**The Creation of Frankenstein**

The first question one must face when discussing *Frankenstein* is which *Frankenstein*? Mary Shelley states in her foreword to the 1831 revised edition published for Colburn and Bentley’s Standard Novels Series that her changes to the text are “principally those of style” and that she had “changed no portion of the story nor introduced any new ideas or circumstances,” (xxvi). However, there are, in fact, significant and substantive changes between the 1831 edition and the first edition, published in 1818, most occurring in chapters one, two, and five (Poovey 340). As Anne Mellor notes, the 1831 revisions came during the lonely, sorrow-filed years after the deaths of her second daughter, her son William, her husband Percy; the betrayals of Byron and Jane Williams; and strained financial circumstances. Reflecting her bleaker philosophical views, Shelley reshaped her novel to “reflect her pessimistic conviction that the universe is determined by a destiny blind to human needs or efforts” (171). Mellor and Poovey extensively document this philosophical shift which can be summed up in two principal categories: In the 1818 novel, characters seem to have moral choice; in the 1831 revision they are the victims of fate. In the 1818 novel, nature is organic and generally benevolent; in the 1831 revision it is a machine that can ruin an individual.

More importantly, relationships are altered or reemphasized in significant ways in the later edition. In the first edition, Elizabeth is Victor’s cousin, adopted by the family and raised as his sister. Because Elizabeth is beautiful and possesses “a gentle and affectionate disposition,” Victor’s mother decides the two should eventually marry in order “to bind as closely as possible the ties of domestic love” (19). In the 1831 edition, Elizabeth is not related to Victor, but an orphan adopted by the family. However, she is presented to Victor as “a pretty present,” a “possession of [his] own,” then raised as his
sister, and called his “more than sister, since till death she was to be [his] only” (21). If Mary Shelley recast this relationship “partly [. . .] to avoid insinuations of incest,” as Mary Poovey maintains (340), she was both successful and unsuccessful in that design. For while they are no longer cousins in the third edition, Elizabeth is called Victor’s “more than sister,” and the two are raised as siblings in both texts. While the relationship between Victor Frankenstein’s parents remains unaltered, the two texts emphasize different aspects of that relationship. In both texts, Caroline is the daughter of Alphonse’s best friend, and Alphonse takes the daughter under his wing after his friend dies, eventually marrying her. While the 1818 text is careful to stress that Alphonse “came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care” (19), the 1831 edition of the text makes a stronger assertion that this relationship was proper, stating that Alphonse “strove to shelter her as the fair exotic is sheltered by the gardener” (19). However, it also undercuts this assertion by emphasizing the “considerable difference between the ages of [Victor’s] parents” (18).

Other alterations, as Mary Poovey demonstrates, “idealize the harmony of Victor’s childhood home” (341). In the 1831 edition, Shelley devotes more description to the protectiveness of Victor’s parents and the happiness of his childhood. Victor stresses, “[m]y mother’s tender caresses and my father’s smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me are my first recollections” (19). Furthermore, in the third edition, when the family adopts Elizabeth, an orphan and beggar, Victor’s mother becomes her rescuing angel of mercy (20-21). There is a distinct idealization of the family in the 1831 edition.

To complicate matters further, yet another version of the novel exists. Mary Shelley made a corrected and amended version of her first edition, which she gave to a

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37 It is also important to remember that her soon-to-be husband, Percy, was writing his play The Cenci, a story involving incest between a father and his daughter, at the same time Mary Shelley was writing Frankenstein. Paul Cantor notes that “[f]or [Percy] Shelley, the act of father-daughter incest symbolizes the old regime’s oppression” (79).
friend named Mrs. Thomas in July 1823. Today it is housed in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City. Few of the changes in the so-called Thomas edition made it into the 1831 edition. However, Mary Shelley notes several inconsistencies in the Thomas edition that are revised in the third edition. In his 1972 edition of the text, James Rieger incorporated the Thomas edition changes within brackets into the 1818 edition. Despite the fact that Rieger believed few of these changes “improve the style, and several detract from the imaginative integrity of the narrative” (Introduction xxii), he included the Thomas edition changes in order to show “the author’s mind at work” and to illustrate “some of the dangers a writer faces when he [sic.] tinkers with a completed imaginative act” (xliv). Thus, there are three variant editions of the text currently used in Frankenstein scholarship: the 1818 first edition, the 1831 third edition, and Rieger’s 1818/Thomas hybrid.

Prior to the publication of the James Rieger edition in 1972, the 1818 edition had fallen out of print and remained largely inaccessible. In the past, scholars generally assumed that the final edition of a text represents the author’s final wishes and best judgment. They also assumed that the revising author preserved the integrity of the original text and that the revisions clarified, rather than veered away from, the original artistic conception. However, with such radical changes to the third edition, most scholars have been swayed by arguments that the text of 1818 better represents the book in its original historical moment and creative integrity. A combination of critical scholarship comparing the two versions and the recent introduction of less expensive publications of the 1818 edition has changed the critical tide about the preferred version of the text; most scholars now use the 1818 edition.38 Since I am primarily interested in the original

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38 There are currently three scholarly editions of Frankenstein available as college texts: Norton published its critical edition of the 1818 text in 1996. It included background on the composition of the text, some contextual materials (the 1831 preface, Percy Shelly’s “Mont Blanc,” a selection from Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, and a letter from John Polidori), several nineteenth-century reviews, as well as a nice...
composition of the text, I will be using the 1818 edition throughout this chapter unless otherwise noted.

The story of the novel’s composition is well-known but fascinating. Mary Shelley found herself in a ghost-story competition with her husband, Percy, Lord Byron, and John Polidori as they gathered at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland in 1816. She began writing

selection of the most important contemporary scholarship on the novel. In 2003, Longman came out with a “cultural edition” of the 1818 text which gives a greater number of contextual materials (the 1831 preface, a selection from chapter one of the 1831 edition to illustrate the type of changes Shelley made, selections from Edmund Burke, Milton, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and others), as well as some nineteenth-century reviews. However, this edition has no contemporary scholarship on the text. Meanwhile the edition of Frankenstein prepared for the Bedford series Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism, first published in 1992 with a new edition published in 2000, continues to use the 1831 text. Designed for use in an introduction to literary theory course, this edition gives a nice sampling of contextualizing texts (selections from Mary’s parents, Godwin and Wollstonecraft, as well as selections from Paracelsus, Rousseau, Goethe, and Galvani) as well as examples of psychoanalytic, feminist, gender, Marxist, and cultural critical approaches to the text. Of course there are also a number of inexpensive editions of the novel, most of which continue to use the 1831 text. See Jacqueline Foertsch’s essay from College English for a fine discussion of the special problems and advantages the textual and critical history of Frankenstein creates for a college class.

Mary Shelley’s recollection of the events as recorded in her 1831 preface is most certainly inaccurate, but scholars disagree about the details of that inaccuracy. James Rieger calls into question the chronology of events based on Dr. Polidori’s journal. Shelley’s version gives the following order to the events: 1) during the summer of 1816, Percy Shelley, Polidori, and Mary Shelley stayed in Switzerland with Lord Byron; 2) the weather became rainy and they were confined in the house where they read ghost stories; 3) Byron proposed that they each write a ghost story; 4) Mary searched for a story she could write, a period of time passes, possibly several days; 5) during this time Mary listened to conversations between Byron and Shelley about “the principles of life,” which led immediately to; 6) Mary had a nightmare of a man creating a human life; 7) Mary began her novel the very next day. From Polidori’s journal, Rieger notes that the discussion about the “principles of life” likely took place between Shelley and Polidori rather than Shelley and Byron, and occurred before the proposal to write ghost stories. Rieger’s claim that “no statement in [Mary Shelley’s] account of the writing party at Diodati, or even of the inception of her own idea, can be trusted” (“Dr. Polidori” 465) is, I believe, hyperbolic since Rieger succeeds only in proving that her chronology of events is likely flawed and that the conversation about “principles” may have had different participants, both common errors of long-term memory. Unfortunately Mary Shelley’s journal for the period of Frankenstein’s composition has been lost, so Polidori’s is the
with “It was on a dreary night in November,” a line that came to be the first line of chapter four. What she had initially intended to be a short story, Percy urged her to turn into a larger work. Percy also made substantial changes and contributions to the manuscript, a point I will consider later. The Shelleys approached several publishers with the manuscript and were initially turned down; the book was finally accepted by Lackington, Allen and Company a month later and was published anonymously in March 1818 (Joseph 157-60).

Reaction to the book was mixed. Most reviewers assumed it to be the work of a man, a follower of Godwin. While the novel became very popular it also gave reviewers cause for concern. The moral effect of the story, many felt, was sensational rather than educational. The *Quarterly Review* published one review in 1818 calling the novel a “tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity” which could only please readers with “deplorably vitiated” tastes, since it “fatigues the feelings without interesting the understanding.” Another contemporary review felt that the novel’s “gloomy views of nature and of man, border[ed] too closely on impiety” and, most troubling, “the expression ‘Creator,’ applied to a mere human being” may shock “some of our highest and most reverential feelings” (qtd in Smith, “Critical History” 239).

40 only contemporaneous account. While M.K. Joseph questions the accuracy of Polidori’s journal, and notes that Polidori made errors in dates in other entries (158), Polidori’s contemporary recollection is likely more accurate than Mary Shelley’s much later retelling of those events. Regardless, Mary Shelley’s account is most likely a fairly accurate account of the essentials of what transpired, although the details are likely a bit muddied by time.

40 Walter Scott, who so disliked Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, raved about *Frankenstein*, calling it a work that “impresses us with a high idea of the author’s original genius and happy power of expression.” While he found aspects of the Creature’s self-education improbable, he stated further that the novel merits praise for being “written in plain and forcible English,” comparing it with other fantastic tales which are written “as if it were necessary that the language should be as extravagant as the fiction.” He concluded that the novel “has enlarged the sphere of [reading] enjoyment” and “excites new reflections and untried sources of emotion” (“Remarks” 314-15).
The book was quite popular with the reading public; however, that very popularity was likely one of the reasons it was not taken seriously by literary critics for many years. As traditional notions about literary canon were called into question and feminist criticism began to look for texts written by women to bring into that canon, the status of the text has been recovered. As Johanna Smith observed in her overview of the critical history of the text, there was a significant increase in academic criticism about the novel after 1970 and that increase has grown exponentially since 1990. She found more than four hundred entries under “Mary Shelley Frankenstein” in the MLA Bibliography and more than half of those publications appeared after 1990 (237). That trend shows no sign of slowing. My own search yielded 155 scholarly publications between the years 2000 and 2005.

With so much current scholarship on the text, any summary of that scholarship can only focus on the major trends and seminal readings. One focus of 1970s-era criticism has been to “rescue” the text by focusing on its underlying philosophical content. Some have looked at the Creature’s education as an expression of a Lockean system of education, while others have focused on the parallels to Rousseau’s system of education. Still others have compared the text to the works of Mary Shelley’s father, William Godwin, while others to the works of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. One significant rescue operation was performed by scholars who began to read Shelley’s novel as a critique of idealism within the Romantic tradition. Even as scholars were trying to reclaim Frankenstein as “high” culture, another group of scholars began attempting to reclaim the much-maligned genre of science fiction by calling Frankenstein its precursor (Smith 241-42).

Scholarship on Frankenstein over the past forty years has focused on three primary areas: feminist approaches, psychological approaches, and, most recently, cultural studies approaches. In the feminist school, one of the most important early works is Ellen Moers’s 1963 analysis in Literary Women, which looks at the text as a woman’s
myth about the subject of birth, and how “[f]ear and guilt, depression and anxiety are commonplace reactions to the birth of a baby” (93). In their seminal book from 1979, *Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read the text as an expression, through the monster, of Mary Shelley’s own sense of longing for a mother. Mary Poovey’s 1980 analysis sees the narrative as a network of relationships that allowed Shelley both to express and repress her unladylike desire for literary fame. Poovey’s analysis of the textual changes between the 1818 and 1831 editions is one of her most influential contributions. Barbara Johnson’s 1982 article, “My Monster/My Self” argues that the text can be read as an autobiography of the female author and points to ways in which “autobiography [. . .] attempt[s] to neutralize the monstrousity of autobiography” (4). Susan Winnett’s 1990 article “Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure” looks at *Frankenstein* as a tale that undermines our culture’s acceptance of a male scheme of “Masterplots” by using “the rhythms and dynamics of the experience of birth” (510).

Surprisingly, since one of the central themes of the text is the creation of subjectivity, *Frankenstein* elicited little psychoanalytical criticism until the mid-1970s. Since then, the psychological dimensions of the novel have remained in the foreground, even in studies that are decidedly not psychological.41 Among the first to produce a psychoanalytic reading of this text was Morton Kaplan. In his essay from 1973, Kaplan sees Victor as exhibiting the classical Freudian Oedipal complex and the monster as a return of the repressed. Marc Rubenstein’s 1976 article postulates that the text reenacts Mary Shelley’s search for her mother in its “endlessly repeated primal scene observation” (178). While many of the earlier analyses examine Mary Shelley’s psychology through her text, more recent work—informated by New Criticism’s critique of authorial intent—

41 For example, Paul Cantor’s book *Creature and Creator*, which gives a perceptive analysis of Gnostic elements in Romantic literature, is mostly devoid of psychological readings. Yet his chapter on *Frankenstein* is decidedly psychological.
focuses on the psychology of the text’s characters. Likewise, it is only recently that articles have appeared which employ the works of psychoanalytic theorists other than Freud. Peter Brooks’s 1979 Lacanian reading looks at the concept of “language as relation” to explain the novel’s failures of communication. Two other articles employing a Lacanian approach are Rosemary Jackson’s 1986 article and Dean Franco’s 1998 article. Lee Zimmerman’s 2003 article which employs object-relations theory sees the monster’s tale as “the autobiography of the unseen Victor” (146).

Much of the recent growth in Frankenstein criticism has come in the area of cultural studies. While there has been a long history of criticism on Frankenstein movies, the latest wave of criticism has looked at the novel in terms of its cultural contexts in science, medicine, political theory, and race and class distinctions. Gayatri Spivak’s 1985 reading of the novel as a critique of English Imperialism argues that the text is “ostensibly about the origin and evolution of man in society” (248). In her 1993 book Monstrous Imaginations, Marie-Hélène Huet situates the novel within the long medical tradition of ascribing monstrous births as product of the female imagination. In his 1996 article, Jonathan Glance places Victor’s dream in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century dream theory. Looking at cultural differences, Steven Vine’s 1996 article examines gender; Margo Perkins’s 1992 article examines class; and H.L. Malchow’s 1996 article examines race. Joyce Zonana (1991), Joseph Lew (1991), Jeffrey Cass (1996), and D.S. Neff (1996) all explore the text through the lens of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism.

What is clear is that Mary Shelley’s “hideous progeny” has “gone forth and prospered” in the imaginations of both the popular and academic reading public.

Poetics of Confusion

As popular as Frankenstein has become, it is a decidedly confusing novel, made confusing by the confused state of a succession of confused narrators. Walton is
confused; Victor Frankenstein is confused; and the Creature is confused; and since each of these confused characters is a narrator of the novel’s events, readers should be even more confused than they often are. Walton’s confusion makes him a decidedly unreliable narrator. He confesses to his sister that as he travels further northward, his “day dreams [have] become more fervent and vivid” (7) and “more extended and magnificent” (10). As his dreams become more vivid, his life becomes more dream-like as he moves further into the foreign ice lands of the north.

As if to emphasize the reversal of dream world with real world, Walton’s dream of finding a friend is realized in the lonely deserts of the frozen north Atlantic. Eight months into the journey, the ship trapped by fog and ice, the marvelous events of the narrative begin to take place. When the mist momentarily clears, Walton first glimpses the Creature riding on a sled towed by a team of dogs. He and his crew watch “the rapid progress of the traveler with [their] telescopes, until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice” (13). Was the sighting real or a mirage? Walton does not question his own senses even though the conditions of the ship’s passage have grown severe and his own mental faculties are becoming frail. When he rescues Victor Frankenstein, Walton tosses aside his own skepticism about Victor’s account of events based on the limited evidence he has seen: “the letters of Felix and Safie, which [Frankenstein] showed [him], and the apparition of the monster [. . .] brought [him] to a greater conviction of the truth of [Victor’s] narrative” (146).

Walton’s second sighting of the Creature occurs when he is experiencing even more mental duress. The ship is surrounded by “mountains of ice”; they are in “imminent danger of being crushed”; the “cold is excessive”; and many of the ship’s crew “have already found a grave amidst this scene of desolation” (149). The ship’s crew has threatened mutiny and Walton has had to abandon his quest for the North Pole. In particular, Walton has grown so emotionally attached to Victor that he is in a state of shock at Victor’s death. Walton expresses his deep love for Victor to his sister:
Margaret, what comment can I make on the untimely extinction of this glorious spirit? What can I say, that will enable you to understand the depth of my sorrow? All that I should express would be inadequate and feeble. My tears flow; my mind is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment. (152)

It is at midnight, in the midst of this deep emotional crisis, that Walton sees the Creature for the second time. Was Walton’s encounter with the Creature real, a dream, or a hallucination inspired by the depth of his emotional crisis? He does not question its veracity, but there is every reason we as readers should.

While Victor Frankenstein assures us that he is “not recording the vision of a madman” (30), Walton tells us that when he first meets Frankenstein “his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness” (14). Furthermore, Victor’s description of his obsessive desire to create life and his feverish pursuit of that obsession show signs of madness. The text describes his “days and nights of credible labour and fatigue” (30), his oppression “by a slow fever” and his being “nervous to a most painful degree” (33), “the nervous fever, which confined [him] for several months” (37), and daytime visions of the “monster on whom [he] had bestowed existence [which] was forever before [his] eyes and [he] raved incessantly” (38). Walton suggests Victor’s hold on reality is tentative when he states that Victor’s “one comfort” is in his dreams:

[T]he offspring of solitude and delirium: he believes, that, when in dreams he holds converse with his friends, and derives from that communion consolation for his miseries or excitements to his vengeance, that they are not the creations of his fancy, but the real beings who visit him from the regions of a remote world. (146)

Victor’s dreams become real, while his reality becomes dreamlike. “The whole series of my life appeared to me as a dream,” Victor confesses after Clerval’s death (123).

Furthermore, Victor’s methods to create life are decidedly confused. In order to understand “the causes of life,” he seeks out death (30). He desires to create life without sexual relations, to become the “father” of a child that is “of a gigantic stature [. . .] about eight feet in height and proportionally large” (32). He works at night, “the moon gaz[ing]
over [his] midnight labours” and sleeps during the day (32). To assemble the Creature, he uses parts of dead bodies that he gathered from graves and charnel houses. He literally creates life out of death. Likewise, as his dreams of creating his child become reality, his reality becomes dream-like. “The form of the monster on whom I had bestowed existence was for ever before my eyes and I raved incessantly concerning him” (38). His dream immediately following his animating the Creature is indicative of Victor’s confused state: He confuses Elizabeth, his mother, and the Creature, and, at the same time, the dead become living and the living become dead. All are monstrous.

The Creature is every bit as confused as Victor. It is confused about its origins: “Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant” (80). It is confused about its species: “What was I?” the Creature asks, and confesses, “[w]hen I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me” (80-81). Also, like Victor, it confuses creation with destruction. When it kills William, it exclaims “I, too, can create desolation” (97).

Despite the confused state of the Creature, Victor reports the Creature’s account without questioning its accuracy. Readers of *Frankenstein* are blind to the fact that Walton may be an unreliable narrator; Walton is blind to the fact that Victor might be an unreliable narrator; and Victor is blind to the possibilities that the Creature might be an unreliable narrator. Three narrators and three strands of narration should be called into question but are not.

We readers should be more confused than we are by this text. Just as Victor can no longer distinguish between reality and dream, and just as Walton is blind to the accuracy of his senses and to Victor’s narrative, we as readers are blinded by the compelling nature of this narrative into accepting Walton’s, Victor’s, and the Creature’s accounts as accurate. In other words, there are plenty of reasons for readers to hesitate between the Todorovian notions of the uncanny, the fantastic, and the marvelous. Are we reading the deranged words of madness? Is it a dream? Or is this a marvelous world we have never before encountered? We should hesitate. Yet as readers we are inclined to
accept the interpretation that the Creature, Victor, and Walton each give of the narrative and come to accept the narrative as marvelous.

Additionally, the way Mary Shelley has employed myth in the narrative creates more confusion. On the title page of the novel, Shelley alerts readers to two of the myths employed in the novel: Milton and Prometheus. She subtitles her book “A Modern Prometheus” and uses an epigram from Paradise Lost: “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/To mould me man? Did I solicit thee/From darkness to promote me” (book X, 743-45). But Mary Shelley subverts these myths in ways that add to the poetic confusion. First, she sets up both the Creature and the creator with Promethean characteristics. As Paul Cantor notes, Victor, like Prometheus, “wants to be the benefactor of [humanity], rebels against the divinely established order, steals, as it were, the spark of life from heaven, and creates a living being” (103). Yet the Creature is the one who literally discovers and, in a sense, steals fire. It is the Creature who holds out the Promethean secret to Frankenstein about what will occur on Victor’s wedding night. Both characters have qualities that associate them with the myth of Prometheus. Furthermore the Promethean rebellion of each character does not lead to liberation but to slavery. Victor’s rebellion against nature leaves him separated from nature and a slave to his own creation. Likewise the Creature’s rebellion against his creator leads to his own tragic ends. The characteristics of the Promethean myth in Frankenstein are divided among the two principal characters and the structure of the myth is decidedly confused.

Likewise, the Miltonic/biblical myth in the narrative is confused. As the creator, Frankenstein is associated with God, but he also compares himself to Satan: “All my speculations and hopes are as nothing, and like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell” (147). Furthermore, Walton describes Frankenstein as “a glorious creature” who is “thus noble and godlike in ruin! He seems to feel his own worth and greatness of his fall” (146-47). Additionally, the Creature incorporates two Miltonic roles. He is at once an Adam figure and a Satan figure. He tells
his creator that he "ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather a fallen angel" (66). Later he states:

Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me. (87)

As Paul Cantor sums up this unique arrangement of characteristics:

In reducing three characters to two, Mary Shelley has in effect eliminated the middle term, taking some elements from the role of Satan and giving them to her god-figure, Frankenstein, and taking other elements from Satan and giving them to her Adam-figure, the monster. The result is to make both characters in her story, both creator and creature, in some sense Satanic. (105)

Shelley thus confuses the traditional order of her creation myth, and, by making both characters Satanic, the act of creation becomes equivalent to the fall.

Night and day, dream and reality, creation and destruction, Satan and God, good and evil, all become confused in the confusion that is Frankenstein, and we as readers are as beguiled by that confusion as are the characters.

A Technological Work of Art

The confusion in Frankenstein highlights the fact that it is a novel, like Der Sandmann, about a failed artist, in this case several failed artists. The novel's confused characters pursue confused aesthetic goals that ultimately fail. Despite the fact that few of the characters expressly attempt to become artists, they are all motivated by artistic vision, even in pursuits that appear to be far from artistic. In fact it was a fairly common practice in nineteenth-century poetic production to compare artists to artisans, scientists, or explorers. As Chris Baldick writes:

Given the then incipient division of art from technology, Romantic authors could better subsume the full range of human activity under their sense of the "creative" by using a conventional figure of creativity drawn from
economically retarded societies in which a cherished integration of imagination and manual skill was still embodied in a single person. This would seem to explain partly the strong Germanic influence on the short-story tradition in the nineteenth century, and why the protagonists in Hoffmann, Hawthorne, and their imitators are so often skilled craftsmen; theirs are tales of mystery in the archaic sense of “mystery” as a skilled and secretive trade. So we find in these stories a gallery or arcade of watchmakers, jewelers, violin-makers, goldsmiths, architects, opticians, and assorted experimenting doctors or professors, all of them obsessively independent producers who create marvels from their private researches, usually without Mephistophelean assistance. These figures are, in short, classical petty-bourgeois producers whose special knowledge and skill have allowed them to become their own masters, answerable to nobody and often feared by their fellow burghers. (64)

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley writes the failure of the artist as the failure of the scientist and explorer.

Walton is specifically referred to as a failed poet who “for one year lived in a Paradise of [his] own creation” (8). However, when he was unable to “attain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated,” Walton turned his pursuit of a self-created paradise into a pursuit of a self-discovered paradise, but both reside only in his imagination. He hopes to discover a new Eden that he imagines exists at the center of the North Pole, “a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe” where “the sun is for ever visible” and “snow and frost are banished” (7). Both of these paradisiacal visions excite Walton’s imagination and compel him to action. As he confesses to his sister, “I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man” (7). Despite the change in his career from poet to explorer, it is still a poetic vision that drives Walton’s quest. If he cannot create his own worlds out of his imagination, he hopes to discover in reality a world that exists in his imagination. Furthermore, Walton’s vision of this imaginary world has come to him through literature. As Jessica Richard points out, “poetry still has power over Walton; his vision of his voyage is shaped by the poetic language of travel narratives and of classical descriptions of hyperborean regions and peoples in Herodotus, Pliny, and Virgil” (295). That these narratives have no basis in reality proves that the science they
are based on, the journals and accounts of real explorers, was in reality a poetic recreation of the imagination. Richard stresses that Walton’s “romance of polar exploration [is] no less an enterprise of creation than [was] Walton’s beloved poetry” (296). The worlds of science and exploration are no more tangible than the imaginary worlds of poetic production.

That Walton sees in Victor a friend whom he can love “as a brother” (15) is not surprising since they share a similar poetic vision, are consumed by a similar passion, and suffer from a similar aesthetic failing. Walton’s vision of a lush, fertile land existing in the desolate ice-filled North Pole is similar to Victor’s vision to understand and create life from morselized corpses. Both want to “produce life where none seems possible” as Marie-Hélène Huet remarks (144). Furthermore, both acquired that poetic vision from flawed scientific literature, Walton from travel journals and Frankenstein from alchemical texts. Both also share a passion to be a lone creator, the sole benefactor of all humanity. Walton’s altruistic rhetoric barely cloaks his underlying egotistical motives:

>You cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine. (8)

Walton’s words register the same egoism masked as altruism that motivate Victor Frankenstein: “What glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death! (22). Both “artists” want to create for humankind’s benefit but mostly for their own glory.

Likewise, Victor’s pursuit is essentially aesthetic, to create eternal beauty. “One of the phænonema [sic.] which had peculiarly attracted [his] attention was the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with life” (30). His desire to create life out of death is an attempt to restore aesthetic beauty where death distorts it. He says that he “saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; [he] beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; [he] saw how the worm inherited the
wonders of eye and brain” (30). Frankenstein becomes essentially a medical sculptor, fashioning his creation out of flesh in much the way a sculptor creates out of clay. Indeed, the modern study of sculpture and medicine both include courses on anatomy. Sculptors take anatomy lessons in order to learn about the musculature of the human body. In this pursuit, they commonly use anatomical models called écorchés—the word is French for “skinned,” as in a cadaver that has had the skin removed. The models are painted, sculpted, or drawn figures depicting the muscles of the human body without skin. In the years before such models were easily accessible, students would sometimes dissect dead bodies which were difficult to procure and dangerous to use, since the Church frowned on the “desecration of the dead” and there was always the risk of disease. The similarities between the process of anatomical study which sculptors have pursued and the course that Frankenstein pursues to create his objet d’art are quite evident.

Furthermore, while Victor Frankenstein’s Creature turns out to be hideous, it was initially designed to be beautiful: “His limbs were in proportion, and [Victor] had selected his features as beautiful” (34). He was motivated by an aesthetic vision and pursued an artistic means in order to create his human-like sculpture.

Finally, both Walton and Victor Frankenstein suffer from a similar artistic failing. Walton confesses that in his explorations “his day dreams are more extended and magnificent, but they want (as the painters call it) keeping” (10, emphasis in the original). According to The Oxford English Dictionary, “keeping” was an eighteenth-century term from aesthetics which indicated harmony of proportions in a painting, particularly in terms of the dimensional relationships in a painting of objects in the foreground to those in the background. Walton’s weakness is one of perspective. Likewise, Frankenstein is hindered in his production of the Creature by the “minuteness of the parts” and therefore

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42 The architect Perrault, for example, died from the aftereffects of dissecting a putrefied camel at the Louvre in 1688. Likely the most famous écorché model was created by the sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon in 1764-68.
decides to "make the being of a gigantic stature, that is to say about eight feet in height and proportionally large" (31-32). Even though Victor makes sure the Creature's "limbs were in proportion," the Creature is out of proportion in relationship to human beings. His creation lacks proper perspective.

Some of the minor characters in the novel are more overtly artists. We are told that Elizabeth desired to draw, not to impress her peers, but to please her aunt with "the representation of some favorite scene done by her own hand" (20). Likewise Henry Clerval's love of chivalric literature led him to compose plays "out of his favorite books, the principal characters of which were Orlando, Robin Hood, Amadis, and St. George" (20). In Frankenstein, the characters are motivated by aesthetic vision, and we must read the explorer and the scientist as artists in their fields.

Like Der Sandmann, Frankenstein also begins as an epistolary novel, and also like Der Sandmann it dramatizes the author/reader relationship. Epistolary novels, as Michele Turner Sharp points out, "of necessity frame themselves directly in the context of their own reading. They write the reader, together with his or her own reading, into the text" (72). Like Der Sandmann, the reading public comes to identify with the second person pronoun, the very first word of the first letter in the novel. The reader internalizes the "you" in a way that inscribes him or her into the text. However, unlike Der Sandmann, the author of these letters is not in the author position in this text. We soon discover that he has failed as a writer, and now Walton is in the position of exploring and interpreting worlds that have already been created for him—he is a reader. Walton's position as reader is further highlighted by the fact that Frankenstein tells his tale to him. Frankenstein is both the creator of the monster and the creator of the story. Victor stands in as the double for the author figure, attempting to gain sympathy for himself and affect the reception of his story. Dramatizing the response Shelley wished for her novel, Walton is the perfect sympathetic reader. He identifies with Frankenstein as "the brother of [his] heart (15), and feels "the greatest eagerness to hear [Frankenstein's] promised narrative,
partly from curiosity, and partly from a strong desire to ameliorate his fate” (17). Shelley dramatizes the ideal reception she hopes for her book within the relationship of Walton and Frankenstein. Walton is the ideal reader, while Frankenstein is a marvelous storyteller.43

Another similarity between *Frankenstein* and *Der Sandmann* is the way alchemy figures as an indicator of evolving generational tastes, separating the aesthetic vision of one era from that of another. Victor Frankenstein is drawn to the books of alchemical writers, first to Cornelius Agrippa and later to those of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus. Victor’s father expresses the common Enlightenment view and dismisses the works of Agrippa as a “waste of time” and “sad trash” (21). Victor muses:

> If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical, under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside, and, with my imagination warmed as it was, should probably have applied myself to the more rational theory of chemistry which has resulted from modern discoveries. (21)

His father’s simple dismissal of Agrippa’s works turns them into a forbidden fruit, something that Victor “continued to read with the greatest avidity” (22). When Victor witnesses a tree being struck by lightning, the “catastrophe of this tree excited [his] extreme astonishment” (23). The real power of electricity contrasted with the imagined powers of alchemy that he read about and “completed the overthrow of Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, who had so long reigned the lords of

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43 Garrett Stewart sees *Frankenstein* as a transitional text in the British novel, conflating two traditions. It combines the eighteenth-century tendency to inscribe the reader as the text’s corroborator with the nineteenth-century tendency to posit the reader as an affected party formed through the process of reading (118). Stewart sees *Frankenstein* as problematizing the novel’s solicitude of its reader by the suggestion that the novel has no reader. While the “will to reading” is deeply embedded in the novel and recurs at core moments in Victor’s narration of events, “there is no structural room […] for the direct solicitation of the audience” (119-20).
[Victor’s] imagination” (23). That “overthrow” may have been more in theory than in fact, since, after his arrival at the university in Ingolstadt, he announces to Professor Krempe that he has read the alchemical texts. Krempe, another Enlightenment figure, dismisses these alchemical writers in much the same way Victor’s father did. “I little expected in this enlightened and scientific age to find a disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. My dear Sir, you must begin your studies entirely anew” (26). Victor feels slighted by the professor’s words, something he never would have felt had they not retained a place of importance in his imagination. “I was required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth” he confesses (27). Professor Waldman, however, shows more respect for the alchemists. He “smiled at the names of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, but without the contempt that M. Krempe had exhibited” calling them “men to whose indefatigable zeal modern philosophers were indebted for most of the foundations of their knowledge” (28). It is Waldman, a man who is able to respect the alchemists for their contributions, who becomes Victor’s mentor. Clearly, Victor Frankenstein is caught between two world views, he is clearly in an Enlightenment world, but has the same atavistic tendencies in the scientific sphere that Romantics had in the aesthetic sphere. He is a Romantic creator.

If Victor Frankenstein is an artist, we must see his creation as his work of art, and that objet d’art is a technological creation, produced using scientific machines and a chemical laboratory. The Creature is truly a work of art in age of mechanical reproduction. While the Creature is not the kind of mechanical creation Benjamin had in mind when he wrote his now-famous essay—clearly we cannot buy a monster kit as we can a camera—the Creature does, nevertheless, symbolically function in a similar way. He is animated, literally moved from the realm of the imagination to the realm of the real—using technological innovation. Just as the photograph is only produced with the technology of the camera, the Creature is only created through technology.
What is so frightening about this technologically-created objet d'art is that, as Paul Cantor puts it, "Human creativity appears to be dangerous in Frankenstein, because it is unpredictable and uncontrollable in its results" (109). Technology has increased both the potential power and the unpredictability of this creativity. Once the work of art leaves its creator, it takes on a life all its own. Mary Shelley knew first-hand from her life with Percy and as a daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft that publishing can have unexpected results. Percy had recently had difficulties with the publication of his radical writings: in 1816 one publisher refused to publish his Alastor, and the “moral quality” of Percy’s Queen Mab was cited as evidence in the Chancery Court decision of 1817 to not allow Percy custody of his children after he left Harriet (Reiman and Fraistat 15 and 71). Furthermore, many critics have noted that Mary and Percy must have felt a certain betrayal when Godwin—who published a principled opposition to marriage in his Political Justice—reacted to their liaison with such hostility. Furthermore, Godwin’s publication of a biography of Wollstonecraft had the unintended result of hurting Wollstonecraft’s reputation as a leader of the proto-feminist cause. Mary Shelley was well aware that a creative work left the control of its creator when it is published. The act of publishing could prove devastating to the creator.

Furthermore, like photography, the creation of an endless chain of creatures is possible through technology. As if to illustrate the potential for a work of art to be endlessly reproduced and reappropriated, the novel depicts two portraits of Victor’s dead mother which are repeatedly reenacted throughout the text. These portraits take on a life of their own, which, ironically, is always tied to death. The most obvious portrait, “of a most lovely woman” (97), is the one in the locket that little William wore around his neck the day he met the Creature. After killing William, the Creature was tantalized by the beauty of the image, and, realizing “that [he] was deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow,” became full of rage. He then placed the locket in the skirt of Justine, a woman he describes as “not indeed so beautiful as her whose portrait

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[he] held, but of an agreeable aspect and blooming in the loveliness of youth and health” (97). Although she was not the very image of Caroline, Elizabeth describes Justine as one who “thought [Caroline] the model of all excellence, and endeavoured to imitate her phraseology and manners, so that even now she often reminds me of her” (40). Justine is an inexact living reproduction of Caroline, a failed copy of the “most lovely woman.”

Of course, the discovery of the locket in Justine’s pocket indicts her as the murderer of William, and she is executed as punishment for the crime she did not commit. The reproduction (i.e., the portrait) of the image of Caroline has resulted in the death of William and, in turn, of Justine, the living reproduction of Caroline. The true killer, however, is also an inexact reproduction of the original Caroline, for, as Marie-Hélène Huet has remarked, “the ultimate model for Victor’s monster has been his mother” (133). The nightmare Victor has following the Creature’s birth indicates that Victor unconsciously links his mother with the Creature. When the Creature comes alive, “the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled [his] heart” (34). One dream ends as another begins: the first beautiful, the second horrific. The second dream occurs when he then passes a fitful night asleep “disturbed by the wildest dreams”:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. (34)

When Frankenstein wakes, “dew covered [his] forehead, [his] teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when by the dim and yellow light of the moon as it forced its way through the window-shutters, [he] beheld the wretch—the miserable monster” (35). The nightmare specifically ties together the images of the mother, of Elizabeth, and of the Creature. As Marie-Hélène Huet notes, the Creature’s “straight black lips” recall the lips of Victor’s mother in his nightmare which “became livid with the hue of death” (34).
Furthermore, the “dull yellow eye” of the Creature’s birth (34) is an imperfect reproduction of the closing of the “brightness of a beloved eye” at Victor’s mother’s death (25). Victor’s efforts to reproduce Caroline’s image has resulted in the creation of the Creature out of death. This, in turn, reproduces more death.

The literary tableau of death is repeated in yet another portrait of Caroline, one that hangs over the mantelpiece in Alphonse Frankenstein’s home:

It was an historical subject, painted at [Victor’s] father’s desire, and represented Caroline Beaufort in an agony of despair, kneeling by the coffin of her dead father. Her garb was rustic, and her cheek pale but there was an air of dignity and beauty, that hardly permitted the sentiment of pity” (49). This painting is remarkable in many ways. It contrasts with the portrait William wears in both its size and its emotive quality. Whereas the small portrait portrays a “lovely lady,” the large canvas portrays the morbid scene of the death of Caroline’s father. This suggests, as Marie-Hélène Huet points out, that “first and foremost” Victor’s father “loved the young Caroline as a suffering daughter, perhaps even because of her suffering” (139). In the portrait, Caroline is forever mourning the loss of her father, a man who was replaced by Alphonse Frankenstein. The painting becomes an image of all future deaths, one that is reenacted by various characters throughout the novel in a repeated chain of reproductions. First, the image is reenacted as Victor stands over his dying mother (23-24). Next, it is then reenacted as Elizabeth stands over the body of William after his death (45). It is then reenacted after Clerval’s death when Victor enters the room and throws himself on the body (122). It is reenacted at the death of Elizabeth, when Victor writes that he “still hung over her in the agony of despair” (136) just as Caroline had been “in the agony of despair” over the body of her father. It is finally reenacted when Victor dies and Walton discovers “over him hung a form which I cannot find worlds to describe” (152). The Creature is the final character to reenact the scene of Caroline’s bereavement.
This chain of reproduction predicts the postmodern condition described by Jean Baudrillard of a procession of simulacra without a clear referent, endlessly reproducing and signifying absence rather than presence. The portrait of Caroline Beaufort’s mourning is repeatedly reenacted, death repeatedly compounded. This replicating and reenacting tableau is emblematic of the way a text eludes its author as it is read and interpreted by an unknown, and perhaps misunderstanding or even destructive, audience.

That Shelley sees this endless repetition as a negative thing, as a reproduction of death, is reinforced by Victor’s violent refusal to create a mate for his Creature. It is an act that defiantly breaks the potential chain of mechanical reproduction, “a race of devils” as Victor refers to them (114). His concern is ethical rather than aesthetic: they “might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (114). Victor recognizes the potential for his technological creation to be endlessly reproduced, a cycle he can in no way control, and puts an end to it. It is a cycle of endlessly reproducing images from which, ultimately, neither Victor nor Shelley escape.

**Frankenstein as a Reflection of a New Discourse Network**

The recurring use of an artistic tableau of mourning and death is a visual echo of the difficulties of other human boundaries: between life and death, between isolation and community. One significant border is the boundary between infancy and speech. The novel clearly portrays language acquisition as an entrance into the discourse network of humanity. Despite the fact that there are no mothers mediating language instruction in this text, as Maureen Noelle McLane argues, the Creature’s acquisition of speech and

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44 See Baudrillard’s “The Precession of Simulacra,” chapter one in *Simulacra and Simulation*.

45 The word “infant” comes from the Latin *infantem* and means literally “not able to speak” (*in*=not + *fans* the present participle of *fari*="to speak").
writing, his becoming phoneticized and alphabeticized, is emblematic of the “nineteenth-century turn-to-language, in which scholars increasingly established the study of language as the basis of the human sciences” (972). The Creature understands the concept of becoming human, as McLane demonstrates, as a process of entering into a Kittlerian discourse network, and that alphabetization and phoneticization occurs, not in the classroom, but in accord with the discourse network of 1800, in a home. It is through observing the interactions of the De Lacey family, that the Creature first discovers language. “I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds” (74). By observation, he learned “some of the most familiar objects of discourse; [he] learned and applied the words fire, milk, bread, and wood” (75) as well as the names of the family members. Like the discourse network of 1800, the Creature searches “for ‘meanings’ or signifieds inherent in the smallest sound combinations” (Kittler 46). He next discovers the concept of writing as Felix reads to the old man. “This reading puzzled me at first; but, by degrees, I discovered that he uttered many of the same sounds when he read as when he talked. I conjectured, therefore, that he found on the paper signs for speech that he understood, and I ardently longed to comprehend these also” (76). His alphabetization, as per the discourse network of 1800, is oralized, and translated from “visual language” to “audible language” (Kittler 33). The Creature makes little progress, however, until Safie enters the family. The Creature notices that Safie cannot communicate with the family, that she “appeared to have a language of her own” and was “endeavouring to learn their language” (78). The Creature decides to “make use of the same instruction to the same end” (78-79). The end that both Safie and the Creature pursue is to enter the discourse

46 Even though, as Maureen Noelle McLane notes, “the creature has no mediating mother” (footnote 27), Felix is a decidedly feminized character and Safie, as Marc Rubenstein has noted, is a “cartoon, distorted but recognizable” of Mary Shelley’s own mother, Mary Wollstonecraft (169). In a sense the Creature’s alphabetization is through a maternal source.
network of the De Lacey family. As Felix instructs Safie, the Creature watches on, and they both “improved rapidly in the knowledge of language, so that in two months [the Creature] began to comprehend most of the words uttered by [his] protectors” (79). The Creature comments that “while [he] improved in speech, [he] also learned the science of letters” (79). Likewise, when he first discovered the concept of language among the De Laceys he referred to it as a “godlike science” (75). McLane notes the ambiguity of the word “science” in the Creature’s description:

he may well be using “science” in its full elasticity, as equivalent to a formal knowledge or method, but he may also register what Kittler describes as the “revolution of the European alphabet”—its oralization through syllabic and spelling methods around 1800 which contributed to ‘the epistemological shift’ from a general grammar to the science of language. (973)

Felix’s use of Volney’s *Ruins of Empires* to teach Safie allows the Creature simultaneously to learn language, politics, economics, and human affairs. The Creature is, as McLane argues, “translated into language,” into the discourse network of humanity.

That entrance would be complete if the Creature’s appearance could be disregarded. The fact that the blind old man De Lacey fully accepts the Creature indicates that the Creature’s belief that oralization and alphabetization will allow him entrance into the human discourse network is partially true. The fact that the sighted members of the family reject him indicates that oralization and alphabetization are necessary but insufficient causes of human being. The Creature’s problem, a problem he cannot overcome, is aesthetic. He is quite literally out of human proportion.

**A Feminist Critique of Autoengenderment**

The text of *Frankenstein* is, likewise, out of proportion. Its aesthetic program at once imitates and parodies the aesthetic program of Romanticism. While other critics, noting its parodic critique of Romantic “overreaching,” have seen *Frankenstein* as a deviation from texts by male authors, Matthew VanWinkle has argued that Shelley’s text is actually typical in this critique. Most Romantic texts, VanWinkle argues, use parody to
swerve away from an aesthetic norm while using that norm as a background. In this Romantic texts contain the critique of their own theory. They are self-reflexive and self-critical. Nevertheless, Shelley’s text clearly critiques the Romantic project of autoengenderment in a decidedly feminist way.

Despite the absence of mothers in the text, one might be tempted to think of woman as the source of poetic production in *Frankenstein* as she is in many other Romantic texts. After all, it is Walton’s sister, Mrs. Saville, who prompts Walton’s writing. Frankenstein’s attempt to create may also be inspired by an unconscious desire to bring his mother back from the dead. As previously noted, the mother, Elizabeth, and the Creature are directly linked in Victor’s nightmare, and the language used to describe both the Creature and the mother is similar. Likewise, Safie’s story, which occupies a central position in the novel, has an enormous impact on the Creature. However, Mary Shelley radically debunks the idea of the feminine as the source of poetic production. She must have known too well from being the “devout but nearly silent listener” (171) to the conversations between Byron and Percy, as she states her 1831 introduction, that the feminine was not the ultimate source of male poetic production.

Recently, a number of scholars have noticed the homoerotic relationships between men in the narrative. Walton’s relationship with Victor, Clerval’s relationship with Victor, and even Victor’s relationship with the Creature all have homoerotic overtones. Ann Mellor remarks that Victor Frankenstein’s “most passionate relationships are with men rather than with women” (121), while William Veeder observes that “[h]omosexuality is [...] a component of Victor’s pursuit of the monster and of Shelley’s intense relationships with various men” (88). Furthermore, Victor has an aversion to marrying Elizabeth, and when he finally does, he has an intense dread of his wedding night; “as night obscured the shapes of objects, a thousand fears arose in [his] mind”

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47 Many critics have remarked on the fact that Mary Shelley took on these very initials, M.S., by marrying Percy.
(135). Certainly, he remembers the Creature's warning: "I will be with you on your wedding night" (117), but Victor does not enter the bridal chamber where he can protect Elizabeth. Instead he wanders the house "inspecting every corner" (135). Victor's anxiety can be explained just as easily by linking it back to his earlier avoidance of Elizabeth as to his fear of the Creature. He seems just as frightened of Elizabeth as he is of the Creature.

On the other hand, Victor's relationships with the male characters in the text are all more pleasant—and more erotic—than his relationship with Elizabeth. Clerval is described as Victor's "friend and dearest companion" (127). Clerval nurses Victor back to health, and at Clerval's death, Victor describes his eyes, with "the long black lashes that fringed them" (126), in a way that borders on the erotic. Walton's relationship with Victor is equally homoerotically charged. While at sea, he longs not for a woman he has left back home, but for "the company of a man who could sympathize with [him]" (10). When he rescues Victor, he says "I begin to love him as a brother, and his constant and deep grief fills me with sympathy and compassion" and laments that, had they met sooner, "I should have been happy to have possessed [Victor] as the brother of my heart" (15). Victor's death leaves Walton inconsolable. He laments to his sister that nothing he could say would "enable [her] to understand the depth of [his] sorrow" and confesses that his "tears flow" and his "mind is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment" (152).

Taking a lead from the scholarship of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, James Holt McGavran sees Victor's relationships with Clerval and Walton as examples of "safe" homosocial desire, a bond of attraction and competition that is allowed in nineteenth-century British patriarchy. Sedgwick argues that in nineteenth-century British literature, men could do everything with each other except have sexual intercourse. "Homosexual panic," Sedgwick's term for the fear and repugnance that accompanied any conscious suspicion that either one's self or another man actually had homosexual desires, can instantly change a relationship from friendship to distrust or even hatred. Thus, men
constantly operate in a “coercive double bind” situation where they are required to take part in homosocial practices without crossing the line into homosexual practices. “For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being ‘interested in men’” (Sedgwick 89).

McGavran argues that the relationship between Creature and creator entails this homosexual panic. “The barriers indeed prove insurmountable, but their shared obsession also bespeaks attraction, parodies courtship, constitutes union—no matter how weird, how negatively expressed, how destructive to both” (46). Victor’s rejection of his creation once it is complete, despite his previous passion for the process of creation, can be seen as homosexual panic. Victor undergoes an instantaneous transformation from “the excited attraction that drove his creation, making him oblivious to both nature and his human family [. . .] to the utter revulsion which seizes him at the very moment of his success” (47). Anne Mellor sees Victor’s obsession with science as a passion that “can only be described as sexual” (121). Mary Shelley highlighted the sexual nature of this creative process in a revision made in the Thomas copy of the text. Describing his passion for creation, Frankenstein states, “my voice became broken, my trembling hands almost refused to accomplish their task; I became as timid as a love sick girl, and alternate tremor and passionate ardour took the place of wholesome sensation and regulated ambition” (Rieger edition 51). Erotic overtones abound in the description of the Creature finding Victor asleep in bed. “He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me” (35). As Veeder states, “the monster’s first conscious act is straight out of seduction stories” (91).

Nevertheless, it is apparent that what each of these homoerotic relationships has in common is that they are essentially narcissistic in nature. As Veeder puts it, “[a] man can reflect each of [the male characters] better than a woman can. Male love is thus one stage closer to the self-embrace which is the true goal of Prometheans and the chief reason [. . .] for Frankenstein’s creation of the monster” (88). When Walton finds Victor
and describes the potential relationship they might have had, he says Victor might have been “the brother of [his] heart.” What he longs for is someone who is a close approximation to himself; a brother is not only of the same family, but of a similar appearance. Earlier when he described his longing for a male companion, Walton stated that he wanted someone “whose eyes would reply to mine” (10). Like Nathanael staring into the eyes of the automaton Olimpia, he does not want a friend or a lover; he wants someone who can reflect his own image back to him.

Likewise, Victor has no brother his own age, yet sees Clerval as “a friend [. . .] who compensated for this deficiency” (20). Clerval is his substitute brother, who he later admits is “the image of [his] former self” (109). While Victor reflects the image of Walton, Victor sees himself in Clerval. Finally, the notion that Victor and his Creature are reflections of each other is so common in the literary criticism on this text that it seems trite to even mention it. To read the Creature as a double for Victor has become “so pervasive,” as the editor of one collection of essays on the text observed, “that the writers in this volume assume rather than argue it” (Levine 15). I will mention only a few similarities between the two characters here: Frankenstein and the monster both share solitary lives and utter similar words. Like the monster, Frankenstein “wandered like an evil spirit, for [he] had committed deeds of mischief beyond description horrible, and more, much more” (59). Even the Creature reminds Frankenstein of their kinship “my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance” (88). And Frankenstein himself takes responsibility for the monster’s acts of murder: after William’s death, Frankenstein admits “I was the cause!” (52), “the true murderer” (57), it was “my own spirit let loose from the grave and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (49). He greets the dead body of Henry Clerval with a similar exclamation, “Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry of life? Two I have already destroyed; other victims await their destiny” (122). The Creature and Victor share similar psychologies, speak similar words, and claim the fault for each other’s deeds.
As if to accentuate the point, the original myth of Narcissus is reenacted at a central point in the text when the Creature “beheld [his] person reflected in water, or [his] shadow in the moon-shine” (88). What the Creature sees in that reflection, however, is not an image he falls in love with, but rather one that reinforced his status as a “wretched outcast” (88). He sees not beauty but horror. Likewise, when Walton looks in Frankenstein’s eyes, he sees “an expression of madness” (14). Since Victor’s eyes reflect back Walton’s own image, it is not unreasonable and just as likely that the madness Walton sees in Victor’s eyes is his own. This may, in fact, explain the famous scene of the Creature’s vivification. Victor Frankenstein’s change of attitude toward his creation, from seeing it as beautiful to seeing it as horrible, from being obsessed to being repulsed, only takes place when “the dull yellow eye of the creature opens” and he looks into the Creature’s eye. What he sees in that dull yellow eye is his own reflected image. Walton sees himself in Victor’s eyes, Victor sees himself in the Creature’s eyes, and the Creature sees himself in the pond. At one level, the narrative can be read, as does Barbara Johnson, as Mary Shelley’s attempt to “give birth to herself on paper” in order to prove herself worthy of her parents’ legacy (8). But from another lens, one can see in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley’s attempt to portray the Romantic project of autoengenderment as one that leads not to self-definition and pure ego, but to self-obsession and horror. As Margaret Homans writes, “Shelley suggests that romantic desire seeks to do away not only with the mother, but also with all females so as to live finally in a world of mirrors that reflect a comforting illusion of the male self’s independent wholeness” (106). Just as each character is a double for the next, each ultimately sees himself in the eyes of the other. Yet, contrary to Homans, while this reflective gaze is narcissistic, it is not one that delights. In each case the reflection the character sees is horrifying and horrific.
Rape of the Female

In addition to the horrific nature of the reflected gaze, two other significant differences between this text and many other Romantic creation narratives exist: the narrative involves only one creator and the entity created is male rather than female. Victor, like Walton, is a loner, a solitary creator. His creative impulse is directed inward rather than outward. During the two years of his study, he “paid no visit to Geneva, but was engaged, heart and soul, in the pursuit of some discoveries” (29). He was cut off from family and from nature.

The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage; but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time. I knew my silence disquieted them [. . .]. (33)

Victor’s compulsion to create has, ironically, caused him to divorce himself completely from the realm of the feminine, from nature, relationships, and emotion. While divorced from this feminine sphere, Victor exhibits bouts of madness. “Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever and I became nervous to a most painful degree” (33). It is when he is reunited with the feminine realm, with nature and with relationships, that Victor returns to his senses. Clerval brings out the “better feelings of [his] heart,” teaches him to “love the aspect of nature, and the cheerful faces of children” (43). Nature calms and transforms him into a sane and stable individual: “A serene sky and verdant fields filled me with ecstasy” (44).

Furthermore, Victor’s first impulse is to create a male rather than a female body. He only attempts to create a female body after his male creation requests a suitable companion. When Victor finally abandons his attempt to produce a female body, he does not just end the project, he aborts the creation in a most horrific way: “with a sensation of madness” and “trembling with passion” he “tore to pieces the thing on which [he] was engaged” (115). When he reenters the room the following day, Victor remarks that
"remains of the half-finished creature [. . .] lay scattered on the floor” and he acknowledges that he “almost felt as if [he] had mangled the living flesh of a human being” (118). He then dumped “the relics of [his] work,” the fragmented pieces of his female creation, into the sea (118). This scene, arguably more detailed and horrific than the scene of the male Creature’s creation, describes more than the abandonment of a scientific experiment. It describes a violent rape and homicide. Victor may be acting out of homoerotic jealousy, not wanting his male creation to be distracted by a female partner. However, the scene can also be explained as a female parody, a dark comedy, of the Romantic process of autoengenderment. Rape, the violation and desecration of the feminine, is a central theme of this text. As Anne Mellor notes, “[a]t every level, Victor Frankenstein is engaged upon a rape of nature, a violent penetration and usurpation of the female’s ‘hiding places,’ of the womb” (122). Mellor sees the Creature’s killing of Elizabeth as “the instrument of [Victor’s] potent desire: to usurp female reproductive power so that only men may rule” (122). The text recognizes that for male artists who assume the creative powers normally associated with the feminine, to create is to destroy, to give birth is to kill, to produce is to rape.

Mary Shelley—who admitted in her 1831 introduction that after meeting Percy “traveling, and cares of a family occupied her time”—knew all too well that the female body was not a primary concern of the Romantic male poet. Her life of relative comfort in Godwin’s home was turned upside down after running away with Percy. Her grief was much greater than any man’s, as she suffered emotionally while Percy had close relationships with other women, as she suffered physically during pregnancy while Percy carried on his daily routine unconcerned, as she bore children and buried children, while Percy remained relatively indifferent. Mary Shelley recognized that the Romantic project of autoengenderment is not only homoerotic and narcissistic, but misogynistic. The mother is mourned in Frankenstein because the male poet has, through usurping her powers, reversed nature and, like the Creature, created destruction.
However, as Mellor also notes, that feminine force of nature is not passive or inert. It takes vengeance on all who usurp her powers. Nature pursues Victor, as lightning, thunder, and rain torment him. Rain “patter[s] dismally against the panes” the night Victor creates his monster. It is “a flash of lightning” that illuminates the Creature the next time Victor encounters him (48). When Victor attempts to contain his creation by pursuing him into the north, nature is harsh and cruel. As Mellor states, “[t]he atmospheric effects of the novel, which most readers have dismissed as little more than the traditional trappings of Gothic fiction, in fact manifest the power of nature to punish those who transgress her boundaries” (123). Thus, just as nature enacts vengeance on Victor for usurping the female powers of creation, Mary Shelley enacts vengeance upon the male poet by creating a parody of his process of poetic production, and, in so doing, warns of the consequences of his unnatural creation.

Monstrous Body and Monstrous Text

The unnatural and fragmented formation of the monster is mirrored in the unnatural and fragmented formation of the novel. At the beginning of the text, when Victor Frankenstein noticed that Walton was taking notes as he listened to Victor’s story, he “asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places.” Walton assures us that the changes primarily “augmented” his own account. “Since you have preserved my narration,” Victor tells Walton, “I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity” (146). Despite Victor’s desire that his story not be “mutilated,” the text of Frankenstein is every bit as “mutilated,” that is, disfigured and pieced together from divergent parts, as is Frankenstein’s Creature. The parallels between Shelley’s creation (her text) and Frankenstein’s creation (the monster) are plentiful. Both are cobbled together from fragments and are separated from others by their inimitable form. Within the pages of the text appears a fragmented assortment of documentary evidence. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have compared the novel to a “literary jigsaw
puzzle” containing “a collection of apparently random documents from whose juxtaposition the scholar-detective must infer a meaning” (224). This jigsaw puzzle is composed of multiple letters (three letters to Victor, two from Elizabeth and one from his father) and references to other letters (Victor’s letters of introduction to the school at Ingolstadt and to the natural philosophers in London, his father’s letters to him concerning Victor’s silence, Henry’s letters to Elizabeth, the letters of Safie and Felix, a letter from a person in Scotland who Victor had met in Geneva, a letter from Clerval, several letters found by Mr. Kirwin, a letter from Elizabeth’s uncle, and a letter from Victor to Elizabeth). The text refers to the journal Victor kept “of the four months that preceded [the Creature’s] creation” (87), the journal which Clerval kept of Geneva in which he “observed the scenery with an eye of feeling and delight” (106), as well as Walton’s journal “concerning the stranger” Victor (15). It is composed of allusions from and references to other texts, including those by Milton, Plutarch, Shakespeare, Charles Lamb, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, Dante, Oliver Goldsmith, Byron, Goethe, Novalis, Leigh Hunt, 1001 Nights, and the books of Genesis and Job.\footnote{In addition to noting the more commonly mentioned sources alluded to in the text—works by Rousseau, Milton, and Godwin, Burton Pollin shows allusions from “unnoticed sources” in \textit{Frankenstein}, including Genlis’s \textit{Pygmalion et Galatée} and works by Diderot and Locke. While Pollin’s assumptions about the nature of texts are quite dated, his demonstration of the similarities and points of contact between \textit{Frankenstein} and these other texts is quite informative.} It is also composed of multiple narrations and multiple narrators. The text, like the Creature, is fragmented, stitched together in a barely manageable way. VanWinkle sees the text as created “not out of the void but from a chaos of pre-existing texts” (par. 3). Mary Shelley confirmed this idea in the preface to her 1831 third edition, where she wrote:

Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. In all matters of discovery and invention, even those that appertain to the imagination, we are continually reminded of the story of Columbus and his egg. Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on
the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning
ideas suggested to it. (171)

Mary Shelley recognized that her novel was created in a chaotic and fragmentary way, by
molding and shaping a textual body out of the fragments bequeathed her by her literary
forbearers.

The process of composing *Frankenstein* was every bit as fragmented. Mary
Shelley claimed in her 1831 introduction that she “did not owe the suggestion of one
incident, not scarcely of one train of feeling, to [her] husband, and yet but for his
incitement, it would never have taken the form in which it was presented to the world”
(172). Nevertheless, the debate about Percy’s role in the creation of *Frankenstein* will
never be settled. Mary gave Percy the manuscript to edit, but Percy’s changes were quite
substantial, leading some critics to argue he deserves coauthor status. James Rieger, in his
introduction to the reissued 1818 edition, argued that Percy’s “assistance at every point in
the book’s manufacture was so extensive that one hardly knows whether to regard him as
editor or minor collaborator” (xviii). After his examination of the two manuscripts of
*Frankenstein* housed at the Bodleian Library, E.B. Murray concluded that Percy’s “hand
was well into his wife’s major work even before she gave him ‘carte blanche’ to correct
it further in proof” (50). Anne Mellor has noted the numerous revisions Percy made to the
text, but argues they both improved and detracted from the completed novel.

Percy genuinely helped his wife’s manuscript in many small ways. He
corrected three minor factual errors, eliminated a few obvious grammatical
mistakes, occasionally clarified the text, and frequently substituted more
precise technical terms for Mary Shelley’s cruder ones. He occasionally
improved the narrative continuity and coherence of the text, smoothed out
some of his wife’s paragraph transitions, and enriched the thematic
resonance of certain passages. He emphasized the psychological
complexity of the monster in a few places and underlined Victor
Frankenstein’s responsibility for his creature. (59)

On the other hand, Mellor notes that some of Percy’s changes detracted from the novel,
mostly by shifting Mary’s “simple Anglo-Saxon diction and straightforward or colloquial
sentence structures” to a “more refined, complex, and Latinate equivalents.” Percy is thus
“responsible for the stilted, ornate, putatively Ciceronian prose style about which many
readers have complained” (60). His changes likely damaged as much as repaired Mary Shelley’s original text.

Marie-Hélène Huet has demonstrated that examining the handwriting on the original manuscripts is an insufficient way to deduce what parts can be attributed to Percy versus Mary. Percy not only made “annotations, marginal corrections, syntactic changes, semantic choices” to the text, but his contributions were likely more extensive. She notes that “some of the keywords of the novel” appear in Percy’s correspondence rather than in Mary’s and that some of the philosophical texts with which the text appears to engage were known by Percy but not by Mary until after the novel was completed. She concludes that “with the exception of the 1831 preface and the changes made by Mary Shelley for the third edition, it is impossible to assign with absolute certainty either to Percy or to Mary Shelley complete creative responsibility for any part of the novel” (155). Likewise, Jacqueline Foertsch notes that on the manuscripts “Percy’s hand is almost impossible to distinguish from Mary’s,” and that “all readers of these original documents would have to agree that they are a disorienting mess” (707). Foertsch further points out that “Mary and Percy kept a joint diary throughout their years as lovers and spouses, so the idea of their writing together must have seemed as natural as any other daily occurrence” (703). In sum, it is obvious that the novel was stitched together from ideas and language contributed by both Percy and Mary Shelley; how much came from the each will likely never be settled. The bottom line, however, is that this creation had two parents and the creation, like the Creature, was anything but seamless.

Framing and containing the disorderly array of documents, allusions, narrators, and narrations that compose this fragmented text are three concentric rings of narrative: Walton’s letters act as the frame containing Victor Frankenstein’s narration to Walton, which, in turn, contains the Creature’s speech to Frankenstein. Additional frames can be

49 Mellor discusses many of these changes in her book. See especially pages 60-61 where she illustrates Percy’s revisions.
discerned within each of these frames. Within the narratives of Walton, Frankenstein, and the Creature, appear other “miniature narratives” as Gilbert and Gubar call them (225), the stories of Frankenstein’s mother, Elizabeth Lavenza, Justine, Felix and Agatha, Safie, and others. The text has a Russian-doll structure, each frame containing another frame; from Walton to Victor to the Creature, each actor in one narrative becomes the listener in the next, and each character sees his double in the eyes of the next. As Marc Rubenstein has noted, each new level of narration has “an enclosing, even womb-like, container in which a story is, variously, developed, preserved, and passed on. Story telling becomes a vicarious pregnancy” (173). The multiple frames for this novel barely contain the fragmented material within. Finally one thing does escape the frames: the last words of the book tell us that the Creature is “borne away by the waves, and lost in the darkness and distance” (156). The text symbolically gives birth to the Creature.

**Literary Orphan**

The birth of the Creature has one other parallel with the birth of the novel: Neither had a parent to claim the creation. When *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, as Marie-Hélène Huet states, “both Percy and Mary Shelley skirted the question of the authorship of *Frankenstein*” (156). Many people initially assumed Percy was the author of the anonymously published text. However, Percy was only too happy to distance himself from the text. On the other hand, after her father’s friend Walter Scott wrote a positive review of the novel in June 1818, Mary Shelley coyly took credit:

Sir,

Having received from the publisher of *Frankenstein* the notice taken of that work in Blackwood’s magazine [sic.], and intelligence at the same time that it was to your kindness that I owed this favourable notice I hasten to return my acknowledgements and thanks, and at the same time to express the pleasure I receive from the approbation of so high a value as yours. Mr Shelley soon after its publication took the liberty of sending you a copy but as both he and I thought in a manner which would prevent you from supposing that he was the author we were surprised therefore to see him mentioned in the notice as the probable author,—I am anxious to prevent your continuing in the mistake of supposing Mr Shelley guilty of a
juvenile attempt of mine; to which—from its being written at an early age, I abstained from putting my name—and from respect to those persons from whom I bear it. I have therefore kept it concealed except from a few friends. I beg you will pardon the intrusion of this explanation. (qtd. in Bennett and Robinson 391-92)

Mary Shelley’s reticent admission of ownership of the text in 1818 is quite different from her celebratory declaration of authorship in the 1831 preface. This literary orphan has yet another thing in common with the Creature it depicts: Both are locked in a symbolic battle with their creators. When Victor confronts his Creature on the summit of Montanvert, he resolves to “close with him in mortal combat”

50 Mary Shelley’s insecurity as an author, dependence on Percy for editorial and creative assistance, anxiety to live up to her heritage, as well as her husband’s desire to be associated with her and to be dissociated with the text can all be explained using Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of cultural production. For Bourdieu, the production, dissemination, and consumption of printed texts involves literary players competing among themselves for four types of capital: economic capital, social capital (connections), cultural capital (credentials and knowledge), and symbolic capital (legitimation). Each form of currency functions within a distinct economy of practice, yet one form of capital may be exchanged for another. As Leon Jackson summarizes Bourdieu’s formulation: “Authorship [...] is about status as well as money; publication is effected by connections as well as knowledge; canonization is achieved through money as well as legitimation” (5-6). While the passionate nature of Mary’s relationship to Percy cannot be underemphasized, Percy’s initial attraction to Mary was in no small measure due to the symbolic capital she offered as the daughter of “two persons of distinguished literary celebrity” (169), as Mary Shelley wrote in her 1831 preface. In turn, Percy offered Mary the cultural and social capital she lacked. Mary states that Percy urged her “from the first” to “prove [herself] worthy of [her] parentage” (170). Percy was conscious of Mary’s prestigious parents and wanted her to achieve acclaim of her own. Surely the reflected glow of Mary’s success would help his own status as a poet. Percy, who had the social capital necessary to access the capital (funds) necessary for publication, guided Frankenstein through the publication process. He worked out the publishing agreements and saw the text through to production. When the book appeared in print and began to receive negative reviews, Percy distanced himself from its production in order to retain the symbolic capital he maintained at that point in his career. When Walter Scott’s review came out, Mary Shelley wanted to gain both the social capital of his acceptance and the symbolic capital of his praise. By the time the 1831 edition of the novel was released, Mary Shelley had established herself as a respected writer. She could exult that the text was all hers since she had the necessary capital to back up the claim. Bourdieu’s most important essays on cultural production are collected in The Field of Cultural Production. See also Peter McDonald’s essay “Implicit Structures and Explicit Interactions: Pierre Bourdieu and the History of the Book.”

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Having just observed and knowing all too well that the Creature has “superhuman speed,” superhuman size, and superhuman strength and agility, Victor responds in a less than rational way. In a fight to the death, Victor could hardly pose much of a threat to his Creature. Instead, Victor attempts to “overwhelm” the Creature with words:

Devil! [. . .] do you dare approach me? and do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! or rather stay, that I may trample you to dust! and, oh, that I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered! (65)

Likewise, the Creature takes up Victor’s game and responds with more words:

I expected this reception [. . .]. All men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends. (65)

The mortal combat of words in which Victor and his Creature find themselves engaged reenacts Hegel’s master-slave dialectic.51 Victor Frankenstein, as the creator, initially assumes the role of master in his life-death struggle with his creation. Yet if this struggle

51 According to Hegel’s “Phenomenology of Spirit,” the self becomes conscious of its self as a self only by engaging with something who is not itself. Confrontation with the limits, with the not-self, allows one to identify what is self. This consciousness of selfhood comes as two selves become engaged in a life-death struggle to define themselves as subjects. It becomes a struggle because each participant would prefer to guarantee continued recognition from the other without extending that recognition in return. This imbalance forces each participant to choose a role as the master or as the slave. These positions may alternate as each participant battles it out for self identity. The loser of this battle becomes the slave and grants recognition to the master, choosing a life of servitude over death. Although the master wins the life-death struggle, the victory is hollow since that recognition is not freely granted but coerced and comes from one not perceive to be an equal. By obliterating the slave’s independence, the master has removed any “other” who could help him or her attain selfhood. He or she loses the possibility of self identity. The slave, on the other hand, dissolves into a fluidity that allows him or her to see the master as a subject. The slave is then able to externalize his or her self through work. It is through creation that the self comes into being. A selection from Hegel’s “Phenomenology of Spirit” is reproduced in Leitch, 630-36.
is a struggle for self-attainment, it is the Creature’s self-creation and self-education that is emphasized in the novel. Victor loses his self-identity even as the Creature gains one. The Creature becomes the master of Victor as it begins to kill Victor’s family. It does literally “create [through] desolation” (97); it creates its self by creating death. “You are my creator, but I am your master,” the Creature tells Victor (116). However, they seem to trade roles in this continual battle. When Victor decides not to create a partner for his Creature, to disobey the Creature’s orders, he becomes master of the Creature. He separates his will from the will of his Creature and, in turn, gains selfhood.

This battle for selfhood enacted in *Frankenstein* is, above all, a battle of words. Victor’s challenge and the Creature’s response are both literary endeavors. Likewise, Victor Frankenstein’s relentless pursuit of his creation across the frozen wastelands of the north is a form of literary production. The chase, as Margaret Homans has shown, is written as a battle between author and text, as the Creature’s dark “tracks” on a white background become emblematic of the act of writing itself. Frankenstein “ever followed in [the Creature’s] track,” while the Creature “who feared that if [Victor] lost all trace [he] should despair and die, often left some mark to guide [him]” (141). The Creature, a prototypical Romantic creation literally writes on nature, as it “left marks in writing on the barks of the trees, or cut in stone” (142). In a deliberate act of misreading, Victor misinterprets the guidance and provision the Creature leaves for him, ascribing them to “spirits that [he] had invoked to aid [him]” (141). As Margaret Homans notes:

> Frankenstein [. . .] reads as figuratively as possible, putting as great a distance as possible between what he actually reads and what he interprets. His reading furthermore puts a distance between himself and the object of his quest, which he still cannot desire to attain; figurative reading would extend indefinitely the pleasure of the quest itself by forever putting off the moment of capture. (110)

Just as the Creature continually evades its maker, the maker unconsciously avoids his creation. The Creature remains, as Homans puts it, “a ‘dark speck,’ a mark on the white page of the snow, his signification forever deferred” (111). Michele Turner Sharp argues
that, "Shelley places creator and creature in a bind that is simultaneously ephemeral and absolutely too close for comfort. The hugely monstrous work is always close at hand, yet handily eludes his maker's grasp" (70). Sharp believes that Shelley had to know that the "same power that allows her to rewrite Paradise Lost will give her readers the power to rewrite her book" (79). Shelley symbolically enacts the elusive battle between author and the reception of the author's text. This episode also demonstrates the way technology has created an environment in which a work of art can be reproduced, endlessly reenacting the "original" to the point where the notion of an original is forever called into question.

But if this novel eludes its maker's grasp, it also eludes ours. As fragmentary as it is, its fragmentary nature eludes our critical eye. Despite the fact that this fragmented text repeatedly calls our attention to its own fragmentary status, we read it earnestly, as a seamless whole. Shelley reminds us not to read this narrative too naively, too earnestly, by making naïve, too-earnest reading one of the central themes of the novel. Walton, Victor, and the Creature all read the wrong things to educate themselves and they all read too earnestly. Walton "read with ardour the accounts of the various voyages which have been made in the prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole" (8), but these accounts were full of more fancy than fact and he has read them uncritically. Frankenstein has read the works of alchemists and read them earnestly, without critical foresight and ethical concern. Similarly, the Creature has based his understanding of humanity on his reading of Paradise Lost, Plutarch's Lives, and the Sorrows of Werter (86). Each character arguably has failed as a direct result of reading the wrong things and reading them too literally, too earnestly.

It is noteworthy that Victor's younger sibling is named Ernest, perhaps a pun on "earnest," and that Victor is given the task of teaching his brothers, Ernest being his "principal pupil" (23). Significantly, Ernest, a boy "afflicted with ill health from his infancy" (23), improves while Victor is away at school in Ingolstadt. It is only when he is relieved from Victor's tutoring that Ernest finds his health. It is also significant that
Elizabeth and Alphonse wanted Ernest to become a farmer, "a very healthy happy life; and the least hurtful or rather the most beneficial profession of any" (39). In her 1831 revised edition, Shelley describes Ernest as "full of activity and spirit" and "desirous to be a true Swiss and enter into the foreign service" (49). That he would be identified as a "true Swiss" living as a farmer in nature calls to mind Rousseau. Without Victor to instruct him, Ernest gets a Rousseauian education, with a minimal emphasis on books, a focus on emotions prior to and above reason, and an emphasis on learning by experience. Significantly, Ernest is the only Frankenstein to survive the novel. Shelley inscribes in her text an alternate program for reading, one that educates the emotions, teaches through experience, and moves readers toward understanding rather than taming nature.

Mary Shelley was also engaged in a battle to tame her creation, the novel. She hoped to establish her own selfhood, to live up to the heritage of her parents, by "giving birth to herself on paper" (Johnson 8). She also feared that attempt might prove a failure, so she remained an anonymous author, hoping to hide the wrath of critics but to emerge into the glory of their praises. By 1831, she seems to have found her identity as an author. "I wrote this!" she exults in her preface to the revised text. Despite her success as an author, upon her death, her obituary praised only Frankenstein unreservedly, maintaining that in that book she had achieved "a wild originality unknown in English fiction" (qtd. in Seymour 539). Nevertheless, criticism on that one novel appears unable to divorce itself from Mary Shelley’s life; few critics resist the temptation to discuss the life of the text’s author. Mary Shelley lives on through her literary progeny. The Creature, like the novel, went on to live a life independent of its creator. It first became the “all-purpose bogeyman” in cartoons of English politics, used to represent Russia during the Crimean War, rebellious Ireland during the uprisings, and the working-class man during labor crises (Seymour 547). In 1910, Thomas Edison would create the first Frankenstein film (557), and the Creature would assume a new life in the motion picture industry with such films as Frankenstein, Bride of Frankenstein, Son of Frankenstein, Ghost of
Frankenstein, and House of Frankenstein. If Shelley gained self-definition by creating Frankenstein, it was limited to that one creative act. Few of her other novels are read today. Her name and life story, however, have been preserved through her novel. However, her creation and its Creature have achieved a status well beyond that of Shelley. They have become pure Geist, part of the world’s universal consciousness.
CHAPTER 3

VILLIERS DE L’ISLE-ADAM’S L’ÈVE FUTURE

AND THE ANXIETY OF REPRODUCTION

L’Ève Future, or Tomorrow’s Eve as it is known in its English translation, was published in 1886 by the French symbolist author Jean Marie Mathias Philippe Auguste de Villiers de l’Isle-Adam (1838-1889). A highly allusive text, it is informed by and expands on the traditions of the fantastic of German writers like Goethe, Hoffmann, and Tieck; American writers like Hawthorne and Poe; as well as French writers like Nerval, Gautier, and Maupassant. L’Ève future marks a significant evolutionary moment in genre between the gothic and science fiction (Rashkin 64). It directly influenced the seminal 1927 Fritz Lang film Metropolis (Lathers, Aesthetics 57).52 It is also, as Marie Lathers maintains, a “significant ‘crossover’ text” with its modernist views of gender, the artificial and the machine, and provocative postmodernist themes with its “seemingly infinite mise en abîme of representation, gender, and the very question of what it means to be a ‘natural’ body in a world overrun by simulation” (24).

Many critics have noted a parallel between the creation of the artificial woman Hadaly and the text. Jean-Louis Schefer appears to have been the first to point out this parallel and has read the novel as “un corps métaphorique” (88); Deborah Conyngham has noted that Hadaly “est L’Ève future ” (14); Michelle Bloom likewise has pointed out

52 Fritz Lang’s film was based on the novel by his wife Thea von Harbou. Harbou had read L’Ève future and the influence of text on the film is quite evident, most especially in the manner in which the android Maria is created, but also the dance macabre of the “false Maria” is quite similar to the dance macabre of Evelyn Habal. In 1932, Harbou joined the Nazi Party, while Lang opposed the Nazis. Lang left her and emigrated to America and eventually secured a divorce.
that “Hadaly is [. . .] *L’Ève future*, itself” (302); Marie Lathers has perceived something peculiarly feminine about the text since it mirrors the body of Hadaly (*Aesthetics* 22); Kai Mikkonen has read “Edison and his machine-woman pronouncedly as metaphors for the relationship between the artist and his work as well as between the text and its reader” (25); and Annette Michelson has observed that Edison’s words as found in the novel compose a body. “If [. . .] Miss Clary is but an empty vessel,” Michelson argues, “Edison’s text, whose complex articulations, fine tolerances, and inscriptions will fill that vessel, vivifies the statue’s body, fragmenting, analyzing, then restoring, through inscription, this body” (18). With each section of the android’s body constituting a chapter of the novel, the creation of the android is only achieved through the creation of the text. The android and the text are inseparably linked.

In this chapter I will discuss four central issues: First, the text employs a poetics of confusion, calling into question the differences between genuine and artifice, beauty and ugliness, illusion and reality, fantastic and fact, life and death, shadow and light, in and out, up and down, truth and lie. Second, the novel is preoccupied with the production of art—sculpture, photography, film, and literature—in a period of technological innovation. The text anticipates and illustrates Benjamin’s commentary about the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction. It also occupies a moment of literary production that witnessed a shift to a new discourse network. Third, as a pivotal text in the evolution from Romanticism to modernism, *L’Ève future* represents one of the final critiques of the Romantic project of autoengenderment. Finally, *L’Ève future* shares with Romanticism a fixation on the fragment. Mirroring each other, the text and the android, Hadaly, are both highly fragmented, while bodics, both artificial and real, are dissected, morselized, even pulverized within the text.
The Reception of *L’Ève future*

The setting of *L’Ève future* is Menlo Park, New Jersey, where a fictional Thomas Edison, the man who “made a prisoner of the echo” (7), sits in his study lamenting his late arrival to the “ranks of humanity” (9). If only he had been able to record the words of Adam and Eve in the Garden! The trumpets of Jerico! The archangel announcing the birth of Jesus! The voice of God! “What’s left on earth for me to put on the phonograph?” asks Edison (13). Disrupting his musings, a telegraph announces the arrival of a life-long friend, Lord Celian Ewald. When Ewald arrives at Menlo Park, he confesses to Edison that a romance is bringing him to the brink of suicide. Ewald is in love with a woman named Alicia Clary who, in a strange case of life imitating art, is the very image of the Venus Victorious, or Venus de Milo. Rather than his love not being reciprocated, Lord Ewald’s problem is that his lover’s looks are completely at odds with her soul. “Between the body and the soul of Miss Alicia, it wasn’t just a disproportion which distressed and upset my understanding; it was an absolute disparity” (31). The disparity is so great, Ewald imagines that “this woman had somehow strayed by accident into this body, which did not belong to her at all” (31). Unable to reconcile the “animated dualism who both repels and attracts” him (46), Ewald has resolved to kill himself.

While Marie-Hélène Huet contends that the statue that Alicia resembles is “fictitious” and probably a composite of “several antique models of classical beauty” (303, footnote 2), it is rather clear that the armless statue in the Louvre Villiers describes is the Venus de Milo. (Marie Lathers has shown the importance of this statue to nineteenth-century culture in her essay “The Decadent Goddess: *L’Ève future* and the Venus de Milo.”) Edison explains Alicia Clary’s resemblance to the Venus as “a sickness, that must be the result of some envious strain [literally an *envie*] injected long ago in her bizarre family” (181; 289 Folio). An *envie*, according to ancient folk belief, is the “visible imprint of a mother’s unsatisfied desire” while pregnant (Huet 223). The belief holds that the child’s physical looks or psychological attributes can be determined by the mother’s imagination while she is pregnant. The theme is very common in literature, for example in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “Mademoiselle de Scudery” Cardillac’s obsession with gems is attributed to his mother’s obsession with a diamond necklace while she was pregnant. Huet’s *Monstrous Imagination* gives a fine summary of the long history surrounding this folk belief (see especially the introduction and chapter one).
Edison listens to his friend's story, and then offers his latest invention—an android (Villiers coined the word), an ideal woman—as a possible cure. Edison takes Ewald to his underground laboratory, a garden where his invention resides. Shrouded in a veil, a "vision [...] compounded of shadows" (57), this new Eve lacks only a specific physical body. And Edison proposes to take the pattern for her physical features from the classical form of Alicia Clary through a process known as photosculpture. Thus, the machine is modeled after a human who has an uncanny resemblance to a work of art. This new Eve is named Hadaly, a name the text claims is Persian for "Ideal." A technological marvel, Hadaly is animated by one part science and one part spiritism. While gears and hydraulics operate her every function, she is inhabited by a spiritual presence known as "Sowana."

It is later revealed that "Sowana" is the spiritual persona of a woman named Any Anderson, who is kept in a hypnotic state on a bed in Edison's studio. Anderson's plight appears to be the motivation for Edison's desire to construct this new Eve. Years before, her husband, Edward, had fallen for a dancer named Evelyn Habal. Evelyn (the name is significant for she is the first Eve of our narrative) brings about the fall of Edward Anderson. He had an affair with the dancer, left his wife and children, succumbed to an opium addiction, went bankrupt, and finally committed suicide. His wife, overcome with grief, now can only exist in the vegetative/hypnotized state preserved in Edison's study. Hadaly, the name strikingly similar to Habal, is the new-Eve, the first of a new race of ideal women that Edison hopes to construct.

Despite his amazement with Hadaly, Ewald is skeptical that he could fall in love with an automaton, but finally accepts Edison's offer. Weeks later when Alicia Clary comes to Menlo Park, Ewald has a change of heart. He sees anew the charms of his lover and renounces his desire for the "black monstrosity of the Android" Edison has promised him (192). He discovers again Alicia's sublime beauty; their conversation seems deeper than before, her eyes more suggestive. It is then that he discovers that he has been
seduced by the android Hadaly, not by Alicia. He is terrified at first, but overcomes his fears with the "sensuous illusion" of Hadaly's charms. Ewald sails with Hadaly back home to Scotland, but when a fire breaks out on the ship, Hadaly, who must travel in a casket, is not saved with the rest of the passengers. The novel ends with Edison discovering that Any Anderson has stopped breathing, and Ewald telegramming Edison to announce he cannot go on without Hadaly and intends to kill himself.

While some very important critics have examined the novel, the reception of Villiers's work has been varied. Villiers received little recognition throughout the majority of his life. In his latter years, he gained a small following of young French writers who regarded him as the master of the nascent Symbolist movement. However, following his death in 1889, Villiers' oeuvre slipped back into relative obscurity and onto the margins of literary scholarship, kept alive by a "literary underground," as John Anzalone has called it, in which "his important works" were "passed along by previous initiates in whatever out-of-print editions could be had" ("Foreword" 9). The 1986 publication by Pléiade of Villiers's complete works, followed by several inexpensive paperback collections published in the early 1990s, have created a revival of scholarly interest, much of it focusing on L'Ève Future. Prior to the 1980s, only a handful of studies on the text had been published. Prominent among these were Jean-Louis Schefer's article which appeared in Tel Quel, the influential avant-garde literary journal, and Deborah Conyngham's book-length attempt to examine the novel's "profonde unité philosophique et structurale" (13). Another important event in Villiers scholarship was the 1981 publication of A.W. Raitt's biography of Villiers by Oxford University Press. Since the 1980s, scholarship on L'Ève future has flourished.

In his 1983 article, Rodolphe Gasché argued that Villiers's novel enters into a debate with Romantics authors like E.T.A. Hoffmann, Achim von Arnim, Schopenhauer, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel on the problematics of the copy, calling into question the Romantic ideal of "transcendental poetry." In her 1984 article, film scholar Annette
Michelson remarked on the relationship between the novel and the birth of cinema. In 1987, Linn B. Konrad read the novel as “a work of art intended to be an act of revenge on a woman,” which ultimately “produced a new kind of discourse, expressing authentic feminine desire and thus suggesting a future Eve, who in the twentieth century is attempting to create, to formulate herself” (154). Carol de Dobay Rifelj wrote in her 1992 article about Villiers’ use of fragmented characters, seeing them as an attempt to call into question the essence of selfhood itself. Also in 1992, Jeffrey Wallen called attention to the way the text destabilized binary oppositions from which interpretation is ordinarily made, yet noted “one mark of difference [...] that seemingly continues to operate most strongly in the text is that of sexual difference” (39). In her 1993 book Monstrous Imagination, in which she analyzed the historical tradition of regarding monstrous births as a product of the female imagination, Marie-Hélène Huet saw Edison’s need to produce Hadaly in L’Ève future as “linked to the general fear of sterility that haunts the creative artist” (236). Marie Lathers has produced several articles on L’Ève future, culminating in her 1996 book-length study The Aesthetics of Artifice, where she considered the novel in light of the nineteenth-century discourse on photosculpture, sculpture, photography, and psychoanalysis. That same year, John Anzalone compiled a volume of essays entitled Jeering Dreamers: Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s L’Ève future at our fin de siècle: A Collection of Essays, bringing together a diverse collection of scholarship.

Seeing the “dismantlings and the assembling of the woman’s body [...] as an allegory for the metonymic development of the plot,” Kai Mikkonen’s 1998 article read the narrative as a metamorphized electric current (25-26). Jennifer Forrest has published two important articles on the text. In her 1996 article “The Lord of Hadaly’s Rings: Regulating the Female Body in Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s L’Ève future,” Forrest situated the creation of Hadaly within the context of nineteenth-century medical and scientific discourse that sought to control and mechanize the female body. Forrest’s follow-up article in 1999, “Scripting the Female Voice: The Phonograph, the Cinematograph,
the Ideal Woman,” compared *L’Ève future* with Jules Verne’s *Le Chateau des Carpathes* and explored ways the texts “fetishize” the female body while stripping or scripting the female voice by means of emerging communication technologies. In 2000, two important studies appeared: Michelle Bloom set the novel within the context of the Pygmalion myth and argued that cinema becomes the favored medium of the nineteenth-century fantastic, and, in a book-length study, Gwenhaël Ponnau saw *L’Ève future* as a means of interrogating God, calling into question the creation and the silence of the creator.

The fact that *L’Ève future* continues to generate much critical interest likely results from the fact that the text comes from a pivotal time in literary history, on the eve of a future we now recognize as the present. It reflects the dynamic world of changing technologies, aesthetics, and epistemologies that existed at the end of the nineteenth century, a time that was as fantastic as it was confusing.

**Poetics of Confusion**

Reflecting the confusion of the period, *L’Ève future* is constructed using a poetics of confusion, calling into question and destabilizing binary oppositions. As Jean-Louis Schefer puts it, the text is “*la révélation de la ‘confusion’ comme ordre*” (85). One principal way Villiers confuses his readers is by combining history with fiction, or rather by turning history, through legend, into fiction. By employing Edison as a character, Villiers immediately calls into question the genre of his text: Is *L’Ève future* fiction or history? Villiers precedes the novel with an *avis au lecture*, warning readers that “[i]t seems proper to forestall a possible confusion regarding the principal hero of this book,” reminding them of Edison’s status as a “distinguished American inventor,” and pointing out that a “legend has thus sprung up in the popular mind” which has “conferred on [Edison] a kind of mystique” with accompanying titles like “the Magician of the Century,” “The Sorcerer of Menlo Park,” and the “Papa of the Phonograph.” Villiers tells his readers that he is concerned with the legend rather than reality in this novel:
Henceforth, doesn’t the personage of this legend—even while the man is still alive who inspired it—belong to the world of literature? For example, if Doctor Johan Faust had been living in the age of Goethe and had given rise to his symbolic legend at that time, wouldn’t the writing of Faust, even then, have been a perfectly legitimate undertaking? Thus, the Edison of the present work, his character, his dwelling, his language, and his theories, are and ought to be at least somewhat distinct from anything existing in reality. Let it be understood, then, that I interpret a modern legend to the best advantage of the work of Art-metaphysics that I have conceived; and that in a word, the hero of this book is above all “The Sorcerer of Menlo Park,” and so forth—and not the engineer, Mr. Edison, our contemporary. (3)

Despite this warning, readers and critics cannot help but note similarities between the real Edison and Villiers’ fictional character and are left confused as to where history ends and fiction begins.

Likewise, the way Villiers has employed myth in the narrative creates more confusion. The title of the book alerts the reader that this novel is a retelling of the Adam and Eve narrative. Throughout its pages, Milton and the Bible are directly quoted and alluded to numerous times, and the idea that Hadaly will be a new Eve is explicitly stated throughout the conversation between Edison and Ewald. The underground laboratory where Hadaly lives is specifically called “an underground Eden” (89), she is referred to as a “scientific Eve” (164), and, when Alicia Clary poses for the sculptor who will create the form Hadaly will assume, she is told she is posing as Eve, “the most distinguished pose of all” as Edison puts it. “No other artist, I dare say, will dare to take the role or sing the part, after you’ve made it yours, of Tomorrow’s Eve” (177). Villiers makes as explicit as possible the fact L’Ève future is a retelling of the Adam and Eve narrative.

However, like Shelley, Villiers confuses the myth by dividing the mythic roles among the characters. As the creator of Hadaly, Edison is obviously the God figure of the narrative. However, he shares this creative power with Lord Ewald: he tells Ewald that “I promise to you in advance, that I absolutely have this power—I promise to raise from the

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54 Villiers specifically employs selections from *Paradise Lost* as epigrams to two chapters in the novel: a paraphrase of the invocation to Book III of *Paradise Lost* is used as the epigram to Book III, chapter 3; and a quote from the same section of *Paradise Lost* is used as the epigram to Book III, chapter 5.
clay of Human Science as it now exists, a Being made in our image, and who, accordingly, will be to us what we are to God" (64). If Edison creates Hadaly, it is Ewald’s imagination that will fully bring her to life. When Ewald asks Edison whether Hadaly will have self-awareness, Edison replies “No doubt about it!” but then adds “this depends on you.” He continues, “[a] single one of those still-divine sparks, drawn from your own soul, with which you have tried so often (but always vainly) to inspire the blank mind of your present mistress, will serve to give life to the shadow” (67).

Like Victor Frankenstein before him, Edison’s usurping God’s power makes him not only the text’s God but also its Satan. It is Edison who tempts Ewald with the creation of Hadaly, who is associated with the fires of electricity, and who disregards conventional ethical conduct in his experiments. Lord Ewald remarks that underneath Edison’s scientific and analytical surface lies a deeply troubled soul:

He felt that beneath this strident, scientific demonstration two things were hidden in the lecturer’s infinite range of severely controlled secret thoughts. The first was love of humanity. The second was one of the most violent shrieks of despair—the coldest, the most intense, the most far-reaching, even to the Heavens, perhaps!—that was ever emitted by a living being. (143)

On an emotional level, Edison has more in common with Milton’s Satan than with his God. Furthermore, Edison specifically reverses God’s command in the biblical creation. Instead of stating “let there be light,” Edison states “[l]et there be Shadow!” (181).

Likewise, Ewald occupies two roles within the narrative. If he shares with Edison the role of God in creating Hadaly’s identity, he is also the novel’s Adam. It is Ewald who has “fallen” because of Alicia Clary’s divided self; it is for Ewald that Hadaly will be created; and it is, in the end, Ewald who will be cast out of Edison’s garden with his new Eve. However, the role of Adam is likewise shared; another Adam haunts this text: Edward Anderson. His first name is strikingly similar to Ewald, and his last name is derived from the Greek word for Adam, or human.55 Anderson “fell” as a result of the

55 Anderson literally means son of Anders, a Scandinavian derivative of Andrew,
temptations of another Eve, Evelyn Habal. This is the primal fall that Edison seeks to repair.

If there are two Adams in the narrative, there are a multitude of Eves. Alicia Clary is described as having “divine beauty” (31), beauty enough to tempt Ewald and beauty enough “to pose as Eve” (177) and be the photosculpture of Hadaly’s outward appearance. Evelyn Habal’s very name includes Eve. She is the prototypical temptress and the archetypal deceiver. Hadaly (whose name plays on Habal) is the first woman created in an “artificial garden” (92) specifically for a man. She is “Tomorrow’s Eve.” However, there are many more “Eves” in this text. All women are referred to as “creatures of man’s second fall” (111). In a decidedly misogynistic passage, Edison compares all women to the original Eve:

Eve, simple-minded Eve, whose love—it was fatal, no doubt, but still love—dragged her toward the Temptation that she thought would raise her companion in Paradise to the station of a god. This was a deliberate assailant, avid with a secret and instinctive lust to drag down—almost in spite of herself—into the most sordid spheres of instinct, into the most abject darkness of the spirit, the soul of a man from whom she wanted nothing except one day to be able to contemplate with idiot satisfaction his destruction, his despair, his death. (112)

Edison then adds, “Yes, that’s what these women are: trifling playthings for the passing playboy, but deadly to men of more depth.” They offer something small, “like an insignificant apple, the taste of an unknown pleasure,” but eventually, “the demon of their evil nature constrains them [. . .] to furnish the man with nothing but poison.” Edison then adds, “Only a god can save [men]; and only by a miracle” (112).

Within this textual confusion of mythic roles are other myths and legends, and like the Adam and Eve myth the roles are shared by multiple characters. Principal among these are the myths of Prometheus and Pygmalion, as well as the Faust legend. Edison is clearly identified with Prometheus as the keeper of the spark of life, which he claims is

and ultimately comes from the Greek word Andreas, derived from aner “human” (genitive andros “of a human”).
“on loan from Prometheus” (130). However, when Edison suggests that it will be Ewald who animates Hadaly with self-awareness, Ewald responds, “[m]y name is not Prometheus.” With characteristic wit, Edison replies that “[e]very man bears the name of Prometheus without knowing it—and none escapes the beak of the vulture” (67). Likewise, the myth of Pygmalion “is explicit,” as Michelle Bloom has argued (301). Hadaly is described as “the statue awaiting Pygmalion its creator” (151) Obviously, the creator Pygmalion referred to here is Ewald, nevertheless, the phrase “actually has two referents” as Bloom notes (301). Ewald’s dream can only take form with Edison’s technology; Edison’s technological marvel can only be animated by Ewald’s love. Both act as Pygmalionesque creators.

The Faust legend is also explicit in the text. Villiers specifically invites the comparison when he asks in the avis au lecteur “if Doctor Johan Faust had been living in the age of Goethe and had given rise to his symbolic legend at that time, woudn’t the writing of Faust, even then, have been a perfectly legitimate undertaking?” (3). Furthermore, Villiers uses two quotes from Goethe’s Faust, part II as epigrams to chapters in the text, one of which adds to the poetic confusion of the text; the line belongs to Mephistopheles who states, “Up or down, it’s all the same” (91). The parallels with Faust are just as evident, yet, again, the roles of the Faust legend are divided among characters. It is easy to see Edison as the Mephistopheles of the text and Ewald as the Faust. It is Edison who tempts Ewald with the new knowledge of Hadaly. “I want to fulfill your dream in its entirety!” says Edison and then reminds Ewald that “in accomplishing your dark desire, I yield . . . only to Necessity” (49). When they descend to Hadaly’s underground garden, Ewald remarks that “on the flower-crowded slopes there began a kind of witch’s Sabbath” of squawking birds (94). Edison’s proposal to

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56 The first quote, cited above, comes from Faust II (Act I, lines 166-69) and appears as the epigram to Book III, chapter 1. The second quote comes from Faust II (Act V, lines 551-53) and appears as the epigram to Book IV, chapter 16.
create a new Eve for Ewald is found in a chapter called “A Pact” (51). Ewald is the guest who accompanies Edison into his world of confusion and who receives a sensual education. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the novel, it is Edison, like Faust, who sits in his laboratory and laments that, despite his great accomplishments, he still knows nothing. It is also during Edison’s soliloquy that Sowana, the supernatural voice of Any Anderson, appears. The scene is strikingly reminiscent of the first act of Faust.57

To heighten the confusion of the mythic structure of the text, the characters’ names are confusingly similar. As Kai Mikonen has noted:


Not only do the characters occupy similar mythic functions with roles that overlap and interweave, they have names that blur and confuse their separate identities. In fact, each character’s identity is confusedly embedded in another character’s identity. As Deborah Harter points out, “each body is inscribed in someone else’s narration”:

The narrator, in his “Advice to the Reader” [ . . . ], tells us of Edison, while Lord Ewald tells Edison of Alicia Clary. Alicia Clary, within Ewald’s narration, tells him of herself, and then Edison tells Ewald of Edward Anderson. Following this, Edison tells Ewald of Hadaly, of Evelyn Habal, and of Mistress Anderson, and how, in his sessions with the last of these, Sowana told him of herself. The consequence of this circulation is a symphony of deception that only further confuses the confusion of bodies with objects already present within each character. (45)

The text blurs and confuses the characters’ mythic functions, names, and identities.

Another source for confusion in this text is the way Villiers mixes science and the fantastic. Truly this text is an important bridge for what we today call science fiction.

57 A.W. Raitt notes that the parallels with Faust were even stronger in the serialized version of the narrative which was initially published in L’Etoile française of 1880-81. In that version “so much stress had been laid on the idea of a Faustian revolt against God” which “is consistently and deliberately attenuated in the 1885-6 text.” In the later version, “a large number of the references to earlier versions of the Faust legend are excised, the most violent expressions of rebellion against the divine world-order are toned down” (294).
Villiers draws on the science of his day—even anticipating cinema, which Edison had not yet invented—to create a fantastic world made possible by technology unknown at the time. Robert Martin Adams, translator of the text into English, writes in his introduction that Villiers “knew nothing of science and cared less; even in terms of the science of the 1880s, much technical jargon in the book is mere mumbo jumbo” (xvii). Nevertheless, Villiers drew inferences about the applications of science that have since been realized:

Yet he imagined things about the future of science and of scientific applications that have since come true. When he wrote, the telephone was limited in its range to a few hundred yards; he foresaw its power to traverse in an instant almost limitless distances. When the phonograph was a scratchy contrivance for recording “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” Villiers saw that it could bring an entire opera into a closet. The developments of electric lighting and flash photography that he describes in Tomorrow’s Eve are far in advance of what was possible when he wrote. The spark which races out into infinite space to recapture sights and sounds that long ago vanished from earth is still waiting to be developed, but to conceive of it in the 1880s was an act of imagination beyond Jules Verne. Our radio telescopes and planetary probes, though altogether different in principle, are not much less amazing than his imaginings—as the central Cylinder which controls Hadaly is simply an embryonic computer. (xv-xvi)

Despite his ignorance of technology, Villiers’s text predicted one other future invention besides cinema that the real Edison would create: the talking doll.

Soon after perfecting the phonograph, which he called his “baby” and which he introduced speaking the children’s words “Mary had a little lamb,” Edison began work on a doll, to give a body to his virtual baby. Edison expended a great deal of financial and intellectual investment in his “talking dolls,” which were never widely accepted by the public because of their large size and weight; at twenty-two inches and four pounds, the dolls were bulky for a small child to handle. They were also expensive; the cost of ten dollars was more than a week’s wages for most people at the time. Made with a metal torso, “a mannish piece of muscular armour,” the dolls had a perforated chest for sound to escape, a door in the back for the phonograph to be adjusted or replaced, and a handle sticking out of the spine for cranking to make the doll talk. Made in Germany, the heads had painted features, while the wooden limbs and composition hands and feet were made
in the United States. It is impossible to know whether Villiers was prescient or if he was aware of Edison’s plans to make the dolls. While the dolls began production in 1889, the year Villiers died, Edison’s first doll patent was issued in February 1878, before Villiers began writing this novel (Wood 111-63; see Figures 3 and 4).\(^{58}\)

Villiers is one of the first writers to fully exploit science as a means for creating a fantastic world, and by so doing he confuses his readers, present and past, by blurring the limits of technology with the fantastic.

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\(^{58}\) There is no record of Edison’s reaction to *L’Éve future*; however, Wood notes that the Villiers de l’Isle-Adam “committee” sent a letter to Edison in 1910 thanking him for his $25 contribution to help finance a statue of Villiers (Wood 145).
Figure 4. Manufacture of Edison's Doll, *Scientific American*, 26 Apr. 1890
Likewise Hadaly’s living quarters are confusing. After revealing his new creation to Ewald, Edison takes him down an elevator to an underground laboratory where his ideal creation is kept out of reach of “every Tom, Dick, and Harry” (88). Under his house, Edison has discovered, “at a depth of several hundred feet, two enormous caves, formerly the burial grounds of the aboriginal Algonquin tribes who in ancient ages used to inhabit this area” (88). Edison has stored “with all reverence, the mummified bodies and powdery bones of our sachems” and sealed off this graveyard, converting it into an underground laboratory. To descend to this ancient burial ground, Edison and Ewald take an elevator that is described as an “artificial tombstone” (91). Edison has thus chosen a graveyard as the birthplace for his new Eve.

This underground garden is designed to be a new Eden, with tropical vines, Oriental roses, and Polynesian flowers waving in the “imaginary breeze” (92). Artificial lights imitate stars and planets, creating “the very image of Heaven as it appears, black and threatening, from far outside the atmosphere of our planet” (92). Artificial birds sing with life-like beauty, but with “human voices and human laughter instead of the old-fashioned, meaningless song of the normal bird—it seemed to [Edison] more in harmony with the Spirit of Progress” (93). In this laboratory, up is down, in is out, artificial is real, animal is human, human is machine, and the grave has become the place of creation.

Later, when Ewald returns to the “real world” and is courting Hadaly as Alicia, he remarks that the real sky “seemed artificial” (187), and as he falls in love with an artificial woman he states that “it’s the living girl who is the phantom!” (204). Hadaly calls herself “the sacred offspring of living creatures” and states that she is “more than human beings were before a Titan stole fire out of heaven and bestowed it on these ingrates!” (202). Nevertheless, when she travels with Ewald to Europe, Hadaly must travel in a coffin. The novel confuses the artificial with the real, just as it confuses life with death.
It is in his underground Eden that Edison performs two “dissections,” confusing the distinctions between medical doctor and engineer, human body and machine. With the first dissection, performed by a showing a series of moving images of Evelyn Habal—first with and then without her makeup, accoutrements, and creams—Edison reveals her deceptive beauty. With the second dissection, Edison reveals the beautiful inner workings of his ideal creation, the four levels of Hadaly’s anatomy: First, “the living system of the interior,” which includes her “equilibrium, walking, talking, gestures, senses [. . . ] or, to put it more simply, ‘the soul’”; second, “the plastic mediator,” a “sort of armor with flexible articulations,” which “isolates the inner spaces from the epidermis and the flesh”; third, the “artificial flesh” which is “penetrated by the animating fluid” and “forms the traits and contours of the imitated body”; and, fourth, “the epidermis or human skin” which includes the “marks of expression,” “exact lip movements,” and the eye, teeth, and mouth systems (129).

After his dissection of Evelyn Habal, Edison escorts Ewald to a drawer which contained “the spoils of this charmer [. . . ] the devices of this seductive creature” (119). In the drawer are Evelyn’s makeup, hair, dentures, lotions, powders, and creams. Without her accoutrements, Evelyn is nothing but “a little bloodless creature, vaguely female of gender, with dwarfish limbs, hollow cheeks, toothless jaws with practically no lips, and almost bald skull, with dim and squinting eyes, flabby lids, and wrinkled features, all dark and skinny” (118). The beauty of a real woman is shown to be artificial and manipulative, “the Artificial giving an illusion of life” (122). Later, a band of spies anxious to know what is going on in Edison’s factory, apprehend a box of supplies and discover in the box a blue silk dress, a pair of shoes, stockings, perfumed gloves, an ebony fan, pieces of black lace, a girdle, vials of perfume, in short, “a complete feminine wardrobe” (184). The contents of the box hearken back to the contents of the drawer: Hadaly’s wardrobe and accoutrements are metonymically linked with those of Evelyn Habal. The box’s contents, the “corpus delicti,” are clearly just as deceptive as those
belonging to Evelyn Habal in the drawer. In fact, any woman, reasons Edison, "is more or less an Android, either morally or physically—in that case, one artifice for another, why not have the Android herself?" (123). In a sort of Nietzschean paradox, Hadaly will be a more honest form of deception because of the very fact that Ewald will know she is deceiving. Edison argues for the supremacy of the artificial beauty of Hadaly over the real beauty of Alicia Clary. The distinctions between real and artificial are blurred even as the nature of desire is confused.

Likewise, Edison argues that normal conversations between lovers are insincere, filled with commonplaces, full of repetition, in short, "vanity piled on lies, illusions on unconsciousness, maladies heaped atop mirages" (136). Conversations with Hadaly are created from some "twenty hours of recorded conversation, complex and captivating," which are engraved on her golden phonographic lungs (132). As Kai Mikkonen states, "all that Hadaly can say is in a profound way already said and written" (30). "It will be up to you to create the depth and beauty of her response in your own question," advises Edison. "The word that comes will always be the expected word; and its beauty will depend entirely on your own suggestive powers!" Hadaly's words "will always be just as sublime . . . as your own inspiration knows how to make them" (133). In this sense, a conversation with Hadaly will be to take "a single hour of love, the most beautiful of all" and "stop time at that moment, fix it, define it, make that spirit fresh and that first vow eternal" (136). As Edison sums up, "perfect repetition is no flaw in love" (137). Thus the "natural" conversation between lovers is the ultimate in artificiality, while the artificial conversation between Ewald and Hadaly will be the pinnacle of bliss eternalized.

Throughout the text, differences between genuine and artifice, beauty and ugliness, illusion and reality, fantastic and fact, life and death, shadow and light, in and

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59 See Nietzsche’s “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” in Leitch 874-84. A more precise translation of the original German would be “extra-moral” rather than “non-moral.” Nietzsche is describing a condition “above” or “beyond” morals rather than without morals.
out, up and down, truth and lie, are all called into question. This, I believe, is necessary to
Villiers’s larger project, that of thematizing the production of art in a new era.

Production of Art in a Technological Age

*L’Ève future* is profoundly concerned with the creation of art—sculpture, photography, film, and literature—in a technological age. As Kai Mikkonen has noted, the network of Edison-Hadaly-Ewald can be read as “an allegory of the triangle drama between artist, art work and audience” (35). Not only does the text enact this interplay, it reflects the print culture, technology, and aesthetic moment of the late 1800s. It also anticipates a new epistemological paradigm, a shift from the discourse network of 1800 to that of 1900.

Like *Frankenstein*, *L’Ève future* allegorizes the skilled craftsmen as artist. Edison is portrayed as a technician of reproduction, preoccupied with one concern: representing the unrepresentable. In the beginning of the novel, Edison muses about how he might capture sounds that have already passed in time, how to create a “little spark” that will allow him to:

> give sounds a start of fifty centuries and yet chase them down in the gulfs of outer space, ancient refugees from the earth! But on what wire, along what trail, could [he] send it? How teach it to bring sounds back, once it has tracked them down? How redirect them to the ear of the investigator? This time, at least, the problem seems unsoluble. (10)

Edison is concerned with reproduction in a very literal way, to re-present or to make present that which has already past. He is likewise concerned with how something is always lost in the process of reproduction. Edison is troubled by the fact that even if he could capture the sounds of the past, they would be experienced in our present sense of reality that preconditions our understanding:

> What matter the sound of the voice, the mouth which speaks, the age or the moment when a particular idea was revealed, since throughout the centuries every idea has existed only in terms of the mind that reflected it? [..] To hear the sound is nothing, but the inner essence, which creates these mere vibrations, these veils—that’s the crucial thing. (14)
The historical context of a work of art cannot be reproduced. Edison is frustrated that "neither then nor nowadays could [he] possibly record exactly sounds whose significance and whose reality depends on the hearer" (14). As Kai Mikkonen puts it, Edison "both critiques representation for not capturing the real and shows his skepticism towards that what is regarded as real" (28). His ruminations are essentially questions of aesthetics.

Edison is not only concerned with aesthetics, he is also a technician of artifice, an artist. His goal in creating Hadaly is supremely aesthetic: to make artifice as real as reality and ultimately more desirable. Furthermore, as Rodolphe Gasché has noted, Edison’s constant witty banter makes him a quintessential Romantic type:

Like the romantic genius, [Edison] possesses the creative and artistic gift of *Witz*. *Witz* or *ingenium* consists of the perceptions of similarities between heterogeneous things. In stressing the unity of what is dissimilar, the *Witz* is a creative faculty that leads to the discovery of new things. In his jokes by which Edison links together hitherto seemingly exclusive things and thoughts, he appears to exercise that godlike gift of synthesis and creation. (301)

Highlighting the idea that we should see Edison as an artist, the text specifically notes the similar features between Edison and a nineteenth-century French artist:

Edison is forty-two years old. A few years ago his features recalled in a striking manner those of a famous Frenchman, Gustave Doré. It was very nearly the face of an artist translated into the features of a scholar. The same natural talents, differently applied; mysterious twins. (7)

The scientist not only looks like the artist, but Edison is to the sciences what Doré is to art: a master of representation.

If Edison is the artist in this text, Ewald is the appreciative audience; if Edison is author of Hadaly, Ewald is the one who will read this text. In the characters of Edison and Ewald, Villiers inscribes both himself as an author and his readers into the text in an attempt to control the reception of that text by the reading public. The author/reader relationship is dramatized as Ewald listens intently to Edison’s words, questioning him, challenging him, and encouraging him to continue his narrative. Ewald enacts and directs the role of the good reader. Kai Mikkonen notes how Ewald’s resistance to Edison’s
arguments and his hesitation about Hadaly create the suspense necessary for the narrative:

Ewald’s adamant opposition to Edison’s creature lasts almost until the end of the narrative and keeps the reader in suspense; Ewald’s refusals postpone the fulfillment of desire—or perhaps rather the fear of the “perfect” woman—and the closing of her story. The determent and deferment of the male character’s desire produces narrative tension and carries the reading forward. This effect is also accentuated in the gradual revealing of the motivation to build an android and in the slow dismantling of the various parts and elements that make Hadaly. [...] The self-reflexive progression of discourse and plot and the concealment of certain motivations (why did Edison build an android in the first place?) and developments (the final forging of Alicia’s facial features on the android) anticipates the reader’s desire to read and know the whole body of the story. (40)

Ewald, like Frankenstein’s Walton and Nathanael’s Lothar and Clara, serves as the conduit through which readers encounter this text. In referring to Ewald as a Pygmalionesque creator, Villiers reminds readers that it is they who will animate the text and bring it to life. Texts are created not only by authors, but by readers’ imaginations. As Ross Chambers points out, “c’est le lecteur qui est chargé de vivifier la création de l’auteur [...] pour Hadaly Pygmalion est un être double, [...] la création résulte ici de la collaboration de l’auteur et du lecteur” (“L’Ange et l’Automate” 44-45).

Finally, to consider Edison as the author and Ewald as the reader requires us to think of Hadaly as the text, and we must recognize that this text is created explicitly through technology: it is a production of machines. The novel certainly anticipates Benjamin’s argument that mass production would dissipate the “aura” of a unique work of art by devaluing the notion of an “original.”60 Hadaly is a “soulless” copy of an original; however, Villiers blurs this distinction. Alicia Clary, the “original” is defective precisely because, as Ewald explains, she is soulless. Alicia is described as being like puppets, objects that seem “to have souls only metaphorically, as we speak of the soul of

60 See Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in Leitch 1166-86.
a violin.—Well, that’s the sort of soul Miss Alicia has!” (41). In contrast, Hadaly, the soulless android, is inhabited by the supernatural presence of Sowana, a presence that is more unknown and mysterious than any real person. As Edison points out,

in place of this soul which repels you in the living woman, I shall infuse another sort of soul, less aware of itself perhaps (but about this sort of thing, who can tell? And what does it matter?), a soul capable of impressions a thousand times more lovely, more lofty, more noble—that is they will be robed in that character of eternity without which our mortal life can be no more than a shabby comedy. (63-64)

Edison later confides that Sowana’s presence in Hadaly is as mysterious as any real soul, “one could say we are on the outer limits of a field of human experience verging on the fantastic” (210).

_L’Ève future_ problematizes the very notion of an “original,” a problem that is only created in a world of technology. As Lathers maintains, “Villiers questions accepted notions of originality and reproduction” (54). Alicia Clary is the “natural” model for Hadaly, yet she is the very image of the Venus de Milo, whose “original” model is unrecoverable in ancient history. But more importantly, Hadaly is not meant to be a solitary production; she is the prototype of an entire race of women—not to replace women but to supplement women. Edison proposes to manufacture “thousands and thousands of marvelous and completely innocent facsimiles, who will render wholly superfluous all those beautiful mistresses” (164). Real women will still be necessary, as Edison affirms, “to perpetuate the race (at least till a new order of things comes in)” (164). In this new world, husbands will remain faithful to their wives precisely because they will have artificial lovers. Again this calls into question the notion of an “original.” Is the real wife more original than the artificial wife, particularly if the artificial wife is more desirable? “This blurring of boundaries between copy and original results from technology taking over the divine role of creation,” argues Michelle Bloom. “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction is multiple rather than singular, as Hadaly’s potential yet unrealized reproduction suggests” (302).
As these boundaries are called into question, the “aura” of an original is lost, since the very notion of an original is lost. At the same time the entire enterprise of reproduction is called into question. “The replacement of the model by a perfect duplicate undoes the very function of representation,” as Marie-Hélène Huet writes. “The original—the living—and the represented—the artifice—are joined in dangerous proximity. That naturalness should lose its role as model and origin is yet another aspect of the deceptive violence that accompanies the making of artifice” (226). Producing art in a mechanical age is particularly treacherous because it undoes the natural orders of original/reproduction, as well as creator/created.

The notion that technology is the cause of this deceptive violence is further problematized in the text. Was there ever an “original”? The text suggests that even without technology the notion of “original” does not exist. The fact that, as Villiers points out, the historical figure of Thomas Edison bears an uncanny resemblance with another artist, Gustave Doré, is beyond technology. Both exist in the same historical moment, yet one appears to be the copy of the other. Furthermore, like Alicia Clary, they both appear to be copies of a reproduction from a further unrecoverable historical past. The novel suggests that “when one compares the features of Edison with those on ancient coins, they offer a speaking likeness to those medals of Syracuse which show the features of Archimedes” (7). Edison reproduces the appearance of Doré, but they both reproduce the appearance of a reproduction of Archimedes that appears on a coin (see Figure 5). Like his creation, Hadaly, Edison appears to be part of a long line of reproductions irretrievable in the ancient past and potentially reappearing into the eternities.
Hadaly is clearly a synthesis of technology and art, a hybrid created through the use of photography and sculpture. Her success as a work of art, however, is undercut by her success as a forgery; the technological triumphing over the artistic. Any frame surrounding this image that might make us aware of the deceptive nature of art—the lie that is for Nietzsche most true—is missing from Hadaly. She first deceives Ewald into thinking she is Alicia, but then convinces him that the false Alicia is superior to the real one. As Ewald remarks, “[t]he false Alicia thus seemed far more natural than the true one” (194). The dual nature of Alicia is “repaired” by Hadaly. But in so doing, Hadaly also erases her creator; no artist exists if no reproduction can be detected.

Ewald only discovers the deception thrust upon him when he smells a “vague scent of amber and roses” on Hadaly’s breath and notices the rings on her fingers that control her functions (192). It is not Hadaly’s artificiality that reveals the deception; rather it is her “natural” traits—rings and fresh breath—that reveal the deception, and

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61 Photosculpture, as Marie Lathers notes, was a real technology of the nineteenth century used to reproduce small sculptures with varying accounts of its success (*Aesthetics* 51-55).
Ewald would not have noticed these had it not been for Edison revealing them to him earlier during Hadaly’s dissection. Hadaly is thus an objet d’art transformed into a sujet d’art, object into subject. On the other hand, Evelyn Habal is a subject who creates of herself an objet d’art. As the text calls into question the separation between original and reproduction, real and artificial, a deep anxiety emerges from this confusion. For within this “symphony of deception,” as Deborah Harter has called it, where objet d’art becomes sujet d’art, the concept of “artist” disappears.

The disappearance of the artist can be seen as a sign of a broader cultural shift from one period to another. Indeed, Friedrich Kittler sees L’Ève future as pivotal in the passage from Romanticism to modernity, a moment when the “technological recording of the real entered into competition with the symbolic registration of the Symbolic”(229-30). “The wonderfully super-elevated Edison whom Philippe Villiers de l’Isle-Adam made the hero of his Tomorrow’s Eve concisely formulated the new development” (230). Kittler argues that a new discourse network emerged circa 1900, “[w]hen the one Mother gave way to a plurality of women, when the alphabetization-made-flesh gave way to technological media, and when philosophy gave way to psychophysical or psychoanalytic decomposition of language” (178). This new discourse network was brought about by certain epistemic and technological changes. Kittler specifically mentions the influence of Nietzsche and Freud on the nature of language. After Nietzsche’s “Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense,” Kittler argues, “language is no longer the translation of prelinguistic meanings, but rather one medium among others” (186). Kittler summarizes the transformation:

Whereas in the discourse network of 1800 an organic continuum extended from the inarticulate minimal signified to the meanings of factual languages, there is now a break. Language (as its plural suggests) is not the truth and consequently not any truth at all. (187)

Likewise, Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams, which was published in 1900, transformed the epistemological understanding of language. It laid to rest “the philosopher’s prejudice
[. . .] that dreams are without objective, reasonable connection and are unworthy of interpretation” (273), creating in its wake “separate subsystems of signifiers, in which the parts of the rebus must be tentatively placed until they fit in a subsystem” (274). As Kittler summarizes, “things can be used like words and words like things” (274). Philology also contributed to the new discourse network as linguists and psychologists claimed that children were born with a “universal language.” Mothers do not teach children to speak, they only teach them their language. As Kittler puts it, “there is no Mother’s Mouth at the origin of human speech and masculine writing” (186).

The transformation of technology added to these epistemological changes. “The ability to record sense data technologically shifted the entire discourse network of 1900. For the first time in history, writing ceased to be synonymous with the serial storage of data” (229). Now color, sound, light, and voice had separate and competing technologies to record and store their data (267). The typewriter, in particular, created a revolution in the workplace, with women entering into the office.

Woman circa 1900 were no longer the Woman, who, without writing herself, made men speak, and they were no longer feminine consumers, who at best wrote down the fruits of their reading. A new wisdom gave them the word, even if it was for the dictation of a master’s discourse. (199)

Women began to be emancipated with the word, according to Kittler, even as the role of writer disappeared. “Makers of words thereby lose the authority that had once made them authors,” writes Kittler. “Ever since there has been only deathly stillness and white noise in the writing room; no woman or muse offers her kiss” (186).

L’Ève future marks for Kittler this transition from the discourse network of 1800 to that of 1900. First, in this novel, writing is aware of the competing technologies available to preserve the word. The very fact that Villiers’s protagonist is Edison—the “papa of the phonograph” (3), as he was then known and as Villiers emphasizes—signals the passage into a new discourse network. Reinforcing this passage is the fact that Edison’s preoccupation is with capturing the sounds—rather than just the words,
something “neither the Bible nor the primer can record”—of the past and preserving them on “sonorous archives of copper” (230). Moreover, the novel itself, as Felicia Miller-Frank observes, is “haunted by disembodied voices” (142), many of which communicate through technology. The reverberations of Sowana’s disembodied voice are “carried by electricity” through an electrical apparatus to “a sounding box” (11); Edison’s assistant Martin speaks to him from distant New York City through a “telegraphic receiver” (16); even the voice of Edison’s son “Dash” is only heard from “the speaker of a machine hidden behind the drapes” (17). Furthermore, the entire text is composed of spoken words which foreground the phonograph as the technological and social innovation that it was. As Miller-Frank states, “[i]n a novel whose protagonist is a fictional version of the inventor of the phonograph, it is not surprising that the human voice should be privileged” (149). Second, L’Ève future is aware of a different status for language. No longer does discourse contain truth; it is a mere convention. Just like conversations between Ewald and Hadaly, we arrive at our own truths in oft-repeated lines of dialogue. Kittler likewise contrasts Hadaly’s “golden lungs” which record “a phonographic vocabulary of 2 x 7 hours playing time” to “human lungs and so-called linguistic competence” (272). Language has been hollowed out of meaning in this novel, just as it has in the new discourse network of 1900. The WOMAN of Kittler’s discourse network of 1800 is now Women of 1900. Alicia Clary is precisely not an idealized WOMAN. Her speech reflects her own concerns, her own world.

Hadaly, on the other hand, is the idealized woman. As Jennifer Forrest notes, Alicia represents:

[i]the imperfect female souls in which these extraordinary voices are housed [which] are fundamentally incapable of authoring the quality scripts of sublime art. The new souls with which each of these voices is endowed must, therefore, come from elsewhere. (“Scripting,” par. 20)

To become the ideal, the woman must be scripted with men’s words, in this case, recording men’s thoughts on golden lungs. As Kittler points out, “Whereas women in
plurality [...] say things entirely different from what men would like to hear, the Woman
pleases with each of her automatic words” (348). So that when Hadaly disappears into the
sea at the end of the novel, Kittler is able to say that “only women in plurality remain
after Edison’s experiment, as discarded experimental material, to be sure, but nonetheless
real” (348). Finally, a new discourse network is apparent since Villiers understands that
in this new technological world the notion of “author” is destabilized. Villiers is well
aware that, as Kittler puts it, “makers of words are not authors and [...] words are not
ideas” (185).

Male Desire as a Search for the Self

If L’Ève future represents a new discourse network, a pivotal text in the evolution
from Romanticism to modernism, then it is, perhaps, a final critique of the Romantic
project of autoengenderment. In L’Ève future, the male creators, Edison and Ewald,
produce a female body, inscribing that female body as both text and the locus of male
desire. Woman is postulated as the inspiration for and source of male creativity, and
clearly female beauty inspires the chain of male creative production in this text. The
statue, not of a mortal woman but of a goddess, of the Venus Victorious represents the
ideal of sublime beauty; the statue is imperfectly imitated by Alicia Clary; and Alicia is
rendered more perfect by Hadaly. Yet within the text, actual living and breathing women
are noticeably absent and female bodies are subjected to objectification of the most
egregious type: they are quite literally taken apart. As Anne Greenfeld has noted:

Alicia Clary, the only living and fully human woman in the novel, appears
in person before the reader’s eyes on very few of the novel’s hundreds of
pages. [...] The fictional universe of Villiers’s L’Ève future [...] doesn’t
allow the presence of a woman who is the autonomous subject of her own
desires. (67)

Many commentators have likewise noted the violence done to female bodies in L’Ève
future. John Anzalone has noted that, “no serious reader of L’Ève future can remain
indifferent to the extensive, astonishing dissection of the robot Hadaly [...] with its many
attendant and subversive suggestions on how to improve on the original female body when constructing its replica” (“Foreword” 10). Hadaly first appears as a faceless machine, her face covered by:

a dark veil which obscured the entire lower part of her head. A coat of armor, shaped as for a woman out of silver plates, glowed with a soft radiance. Closely molded to the figure, with a thousand perfect nuances, it suggested elegant and virginal forms. (57)

However, Villiers first establishes Hadaly’s essential subjectivity before he proceeds to allow Edison to dissect her. Upon meeting Ewald, Hadaly gives him a “symbolic golden flower” and blows him a kiss (58-59). After descending to her underground garden, Ewald discovers that Hadaly is capable of poetic lyricism, as when she urges Ewald not to seek to understand how her bird’s voice is created. Hadaly states, “you must admire it; but don’t try to understand how it is produced” for if you do “God would withdraw from the song!” (95). Hadaly is no ordinary machine. She is personable, nearly a person. The artificial is made real, the object rendered subject, before Edison begins to take apart the android.

When the dissection begins, Edison attaches Hadaly’s body to a table, “lying on it like a corpse on the dissection table in an amphitheater” (125), and then he touches one of her rings, which opens up her “feminine armor” to reveal her mechanical workings. It is significant that Ewald “shuddered and grew very pale” as Edison begins to explore the four levels of Hadaly’s mechanics and to demonstrate how the mechanical being works. One does not “shudder” when one opens up a machine; clearly Ewald has been lured into thinking of Hadaly as a person. As the dissection comes to a close, Ewald remarks that, “you would have said that she was looking out on them from behind the shadows that veiled her features.” Then Edison “touched one of the rings on Hadaly’s silver-gloved hand” and the “Android quivered from head to foot; she became once more an apparition, an animate phantom” (147). Reemphasizing the android’s subjectivity, Hadaly immediately speaks with “a dreamlike voice” and then, in an act of ultimate subjectivity,
collects money from the men for a charity which she alone has decided to take up for Mrs. Anderson “the wife of that wretched man who killed himself for love” (148). What could have been a technological display of no ethical consequence is transformed into a morally suspect dissection as Villiers at once subjectifies the object and objectifies the subject. Hadaly is rendered human even as she is shown to be machine.

Ironically, few commentators seem as disturbed by Edison’s dissection of Evelyn Habal as they do by his dissection of Hadaly, ironic since Edison performs this dissection on a “real” woman. Ewald is first introduced to Evelyn when Edison displays her image projected from “a long strip of transparent plastic encrusted with bits of tinted glass” which moves “laterally along two steel tracks before the luminous cone of the astral lamp” (117). While Hadaly’s dissection occurs in a medical theater, Evelyn’s occurs in a movie theater, a venue that did not even exist at the time this text was written. The projector displays “a life-size figure of a very pretty and quite youthful blonde girl” who dances the fandango, complete with the “gestures, glances, and lip movements” as well as “the wrigglings of the hips, the winking of the eyes, the thin suggestion of a smile.” Ewald stares at the “vision in silent surprise” (117). Then Ewald concludes, “if sensual pleasure was what attracted your friend, this young lady must have appeared to him extremely desirable” (118). Then Edison shows Ewald a “second heliochromic band” of film that displays the “real” Evelyn. “On the screen appeared a little bloodless creature, vaguely female of gender with dwarfish limbs, hollow cheeks, toothless jaws with practically no lips and almost bald skull, with dim and squinting eyes, flabby lids, and wrinkled features, all dark and skinny.” The figure “continued to dance just like the previous image, with the same tambourine and the same castanets.” Edison announces: “Ecce puella! Here is the radiant Evelyn Habal, stripped like a tree of its caterpillars, of all her alluring devices!” (118). The dissection of Evelyn Habal, as Deborah Harter has noted, “betrays both misogyny and naïve idealism” (44). Harter continues:
Edison is shocked by her artifice, and uses it to describe the deception of which a woman is capable, all the while creating, himself, an android whose deceptive origins make of her, he thinks, the positive pinnacle of art and of science. [. . . ] Edison enjoys viewing Hadaly’s impressive mechanical organs with the same relish with which he mocks Evelyn Habal’s stunted, “anemic” being. (44)

Both of these dissections are morally troubling. In the case of Evelyn Habal, we have a subject that is objectified in the text, while in the case of Hadaly, we have an object that is subjectivized. Either way, it is deeply disturbing to see a female body dissected. In both cases the female body is fragmented and desecrated.

The fragmentation and desecration of female bodies combined with the ubiquitous misogynistic discourse in this text masks an underlying homoerotic aesthetic. Like other nineteenth-century texts, it appears that the real locus of male libidinal interest is not the female body, but the male body. First, it is significant that this narrative describes both Edison and Ewald as Hadaly’s creators (e.g., 147); Edison “represent[s] science and the omnipotence of its delusions” while Ewald is “the one who is to awaken Hadaly” (19) and represents “Humanity with its paradise lost” (71). It takes both men to create Hadaly. What this story enacts is two male subjects—Edison as the creator, Ewald as the animator; the former a Pygmalion, the latter the Venus of the novel—creating a woman.

A homoerotic tension between Edison and Ewald is pervasive throughout the text. Certainly the two are more than good friends. When Edison receives the telegram announcing Ewald’s arrival, he remarks that the “admirable young man [. . . ] saved [his] life” (16). Edison owes his life and his good fortune to Ewald. When Ewald arrives, the text lingers on his physical appearance. He is described as “a young man of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years, tall of stature, and extraordinarily handsome.”

He was dressed with such impeccable elegance that it would have been impossible to say of what it consisted. The lines of his build indicated a frame of exceptional solidity, such as is molded by the rugby games and regattas of Oxford or Cambridge. His features were, perhaps, a little cold, but at the moment lit up by a gracious and sympathetic smile, tinged with that sort of lofty melancholy which reveals the aristocracy of a character. Though the lines of his face were perfectly regular, the quality of their chiseling suggested supreme energy of decision. Masses of fine hair and a light blond moustache shadowed the whiteness of his youthful
complexion. His large eyes, pale blue under almost straight brows, and supremely calm, were fixed on his interlocutor. [...] His appearance was such that one would expect most women to feel in his presence the breath of an enchanting divinity; he was so good looking that his very nature seemed to bestow a grace upon one with whom he conversed. At first glance one might have thought him a Don Juan with the cold carelessness of the type. But a second glance would reveal in the expression of his eyes that grave and lofty melancholy the shadow of which never fails to signal despair. (25)

The erotic language used to describe Ewald reveals Edison’s attraction to Ewald. Furthermore, that desire is shared. When Edison thanks Ewald for saving his life, Ewald responds that “I came to thank you for the fact that I found you on the road near Boston” (25). The bond between these two men is stronger than mere friendship and the conversation registers a high degree of erotic tension. Edison and Ewald delicately negotiate within that “invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line” that Eve Sedgwick has observed existing between homosocial practices and homosexual behavior (Sedgwick 89). Especially as Edison performs his two dissections of female bodies, noting the deficiencies of Evelyn Habal and how her weaknesses are corrected in Hadaly, the closeness of the two men is particularly evident.

The text not only reveals a homoerotic tension between Edison and Ewald, it also reveals their misogynistic attitudes. They talk a great deal about the “ideal woman,” but that ideal betrays a deep hatred for women. The very duality of Alicia Clary that so disturbs Ewald is that her body is disproportionate to her speech. “Her words seemed constrained and out of place in her mouth” (31). What is troubling to Ewald is that, as Anne Greenfeld point out, “she has her own identity and will” (69). Indeed, Edison concedes, “almost all women—while they are beautiful, which isn’t for long—give one similar sensations” (31). To correct this, Edison has recorded men’s words onto the “virgin gold phonographs inside Hadaly, from “the greatest poets, the most subtle metaphysicians, the most profound novelists of this country—geniuses to whom I applied, and who granted me, at extravagant cost, these hitherto unpublished marvels of their thought” (131). As Kai Mikkonen has argued, Hadaly is the “prototype of the
perfect interlocutor who is thankful for anything... the perfect [companion] for someone who cannot tolerate criticism or expose himself to reciprocal discussion” (37). In short, Hadaly can interact with Edison and Ewald like one of the guys.

Ultimately, the real locus of male libidinal interest in this text is neither heterosexual nor homosexual, but narcissistic. Edison mater-of-factly states that what Ewald seeks in Alicia is only an “objectified projection of [his] own soul [. . .] nothing but your own soul reduplicated in her” (68). Ewald wants his own statue, a personal Venus. Ewald explains to Edison the statue’s only words:

From [the statue] comes this word: “I am Beauty, complete and alone. I speak only through the spirit of him who looks at me. In my absolute simplicity all thought defeats itself since it loses its limits. All thoughts sink together in me, confused, indistinct, identical, like ripples on rivers as they enter the sea. For him who reflects me, I am the deeper character he assigns me.” (41)

What Ewald wants, as Anne Greenfeld has written, is a mistress who will “be like the statue of Venus whose thoughts would reflect only those of the man looking at her” (69). When Ewald is ultimately seduced while peering into Hadaly’s eyes, he notes that they were the “very same eyes” as Alicia’s, “only her expression was sublime” (193). Indeed, Edison describes “the solemnity of these eyes” as giving one “the sense of a soul behind them” (159). Ironically, Hadaly’s glass eyes reflect for these men more soul than real human eyes, because what they find staring back at them in these glass eyes is ultimately their own reflection. The scene of Ewald staring into the vacant eyes of Hadaly imitates the story of Narcissus, peering into the pond. Indeed, Hadaly tells Ewald that he will “recognize in [her] veiled eyes [his] own pale light” (202). What Lord Ewald finds sublime in Hadaly is that she is more like him because she is a reflection of him. Hadaly is Ewald’s personal Venus, a living sculpture. She tells Ewald that she is “[a] creature of dream, who lives half-awake in your thoughts” (198), a reflection of his own will:

My being in this low world depends, for you at least, only on your free will. Attribute a being to me, affirm that I am! Reinforce me with your self. And then suddenly I will come to life under your eyes, to precisely
the extent that your creative Good Will has penetrated me. Like a true woman, I will be for you only as you desire me. (199)

Anne Greenfeld sums up this simulacrum as mirror: "Hadaly is thus not only Miss Alicia Clary's mirror image, but she also represents a feminine image of Lord Ewald. Looking into Hadaly's eyes, Ewald sees himself staring back" (72). Hadaly is thus simultaneously a simulation of Alicia Clary/the Venus Victorius and a reflection of Lord Ewald himself.

As a critique of the Romantic project of autoengenderment, it is significant that the novel ends with Hadaly being lost at sea, a victim of her own perfection. As Edison puts it, "in order not to humiliate, by her calm, fellow travelers whose organisms are more defective than hers, she can make her sea voyages after the fashion of the dead" (76). Thus, Edison has designed a coffin for Hadaly in which she remains during the journey to Europe. Since Hadaly travels in the cargo section of the ship, when fire breaks out, she is not saved. With his mirror image gone, Ewald hints he will finally kill himself; he telegrams Edison that he is "inconsolable—I grieve only for that shade" (219). Edison had just discovered that Any Anderson, who has animated Hadaly as Sowana, has also died, "her pulse no longer beat; her heart had stopped" (217). The novel ends with Edison shivering "in utter silence" (219). L'Ève future critiques the Romantic project of "autoengenderment"—in which the male subject writes himself as a woman child bearer who produces his own self—to the point of parody. Edison, the ultimate creator, is in the end a destroyer. Creation ultimately becomes annihilation and L'Ève future signals the end of Romantic poetic production.

**Fragmented Bodies Fragmented Text**

If L'Ève future marks a turning point towards modernity, it shares with Romantic texts a fixation on the fragment. Fragmented bodies abound in this decidedly fragmented text. Early in the novel, Villiers describes how Edison had discovered the secret to "stopping short, without the least inconvenience" two locomotives that were heading toward each other at full speed. It is a discovery that has the potential to save lives, but
the test of this invention resulted in the trains colliding and “several hundred victims were scattered across the landscape, helter-skelter in every direction. People were crushed, burned, and ground to bits, men, women, and children, both the engineers, and the firemen, of whom it wasn’t possible to discover even a trace” (18). Like the scene of this train wreck, fragmented bodies are scattered throughout L’Ève future.

Alicia Clary is said to look like the Venus Victorious, a statue that has no arms. Yet Alicia is fragmented herself, her body and mind are, as Edison puts it, not only out of proportion, but in absolute disparity. Any Anderson is divided between her physical presence which lies on a couch in Edison’s laboratory and her spiritual presence as Sowana. Edison is a divided character who has separated his scientific and aesthetic self from his ethical self. Ewald is divided between the ideal love for Alicia’s physical self and his supposed despair over her lack of soul (in actuality, his yearning for a reflection that would ensoul himself). Perhaps the most divided human character in the novel is Evelyn Habal. With her cache of makeup and polish, belts and corsets, false teeth and false hair, wardrobe and scarves, Evelyn Habal is the ultimate in fragmented characters. “‘Made up’ or nude,” as Deborah Harter has noted, “Evelyn Habal adds to the novel her own special fund of floating parts and divided identity, parts that seem bound to circulate. [. . .] Evelyn Habal ‘puts on’ and ‘takes off’ her parts according to whim” (44).

If Evelyn Habal is the most fragmented human character, the creation designed to make her obsolete, the android Hadaly, is, in essence, composed of fragments. Her body is fragmented, made up of four different systems, each of multiple gears, components, wires, and parts; Hadaly is a machine disguised as a human. Her speech is fragmented: each utterance comes from the twenty hours of recorded phrases from philosophers, metaphysicians, and novelists. Her identity is fragmented. She is the image of Alicia Clary photosculpted “with the total fidelity of a mirror” (152) who in turn replicates the Venus Victorious. She is also inhabited by Sowana, “in this way she who was the victim of the Artificial has at last redeemed the Artificial” (216). Hadaly herself states that she
"has so many women in [her], no harem could contain them all. Desire them and they will exist!" (199). Despite her fragmented nature, Hadaly is a totality, the amalgamation of fragments as a work of art.

Like the android it helps create, the text of L'Ève future is equally fragmented. As Deborah Harter has stated, "[d]ivided into six books, each split into ten to twenty separately titled two-to-three page sections, L'Ève future unfolds like a series of prose poems" (41). Additionally, each chapter is preceded by an epigram from another text and within each chapter Villiers alludes to numerous other texts. The totality of the novel is literally created out of a chaotic vortex of fragments. Swimming in this vortex are works by E.T.A. Hoffmann, Balzac, Byron, Goethe, Schiller, Milton, Flaubert, Poe, Hugo, Baudelaire, Horace, Lamartine, Voltaire, Musset, Shakespeare, and the Bible, among others.

If the text is fragmented, its production and publication was equally fragmented. At some point (no one knows when), Villiers had published a short story entitled "Miss Hadaly Habal" about a female automaton that was superior to real women.62 In 1878, Villiers decided to turn the idea into a full-scale novel which he initially titled L'Andréide paradoxale d'Edison (Raitt 188). Villiers worked on the novel constantly throughout the winter of 1878-79, often under destitute conditions. Villiers’s friend, Gustave Guiches, described Villiers writing “in the icy horror of a room in the rue de Maubeuge, which had been emptied of its furniture, lying on the floor flat on his stomach and diluting in water his last drops of ink” (qtd. in Raitt 188). Villiers himself described the period as “a descent into Hell” (qtd. in Raitt 189). By February 1879, he wrote to Jean Marras, proclaiming the novel a success:

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62 Raitt notes that the evidence for this story comes from its title appearing on a list of sales Villiers had published up to around 1878. He further speculates that it could not have appeared before the spring of 1878 since it was only after that point in time that Edison became famous in France as a result of his inventing the phonograph (Raitt 404, footnote 9).
It’s a work whose publication will, I believe, create something of a sensation, since, for the first time in my life, I am in earnest... Here, listen: it is an avenging and brilliant book, which will chill the blood and storm all the citadels of dreams! Never, never would I have believed myself capable of so much perseverance in the analyses!—of so much homogeneity in the composition, of so much astounding imagination, things, the new and magnificent evocation of which no one before me, do you hear, has dared to attempt. You can take my word for it, it is an exciting thing, a winner. (qtd. in Raitt 189)

In reality Villiers could not have been as close to finished as he claimed. However, by September 1880, he had reached an agreement to publish the novel, now titled *L’Eve nouvelle*, serially in *Le Gaulois*, a Parisian daily put out by Arthur Meyer (Raitt 198). In a letter Villiers wrote to Marras, he stated that he had received a 500-franc advance for the novel and expressed his exhaustion at rewriting the text as it was to appear. However, after the installment of 18 September, *Le Gaulois* suspended publication of the novel, after only fourteen installments, without any explanation (Raitt 199; 206).

Villiers soon found another venue for his novel. When the first issue of the republican periodical *L’Étoile française* appeared, Villiers’s novel was chosen to inaugurate its serials (Raitt 206). The first installment appeared on 14 December 1880. Additionally, *L’Étoile* published reproductions of eight poems and tales by Villiers as well as a piece of his journalism (206-207). *L’Étoile* was an unlikely place to find a work by the staunchly royalist Villiers, so it is no surprise that their ways eventually parted. By 4 February 1881, *L’Étoile* had published forty-six installments, bringing the novel to within three chapters of the conclusion. On 5 February, however, a notice announced that:

> Pressure on space compels us to postpone until tomorrow the end of the interesting novel of our colleague VILLIERS DE L’ISLE-ADAM: *L’EVE NOUVELLE*, that powerful and dramatic work which has had such a great and deserved success with our readers. (qtd. in Raitt 207)

The following day, however, no new installment appeared and the paper never mentioned the novel again. Allan Raitt speculates that it may have been discontinued for one of two reasons: a growing political conflict between the paper and Villiers or Villiers simply not being able to conclude the novel. Either way, it remained incomplete.
Despite the setbacks, Villiers did not give up on the novel. In 1884, he attempted to publish it in Belgium with Albert Lacroix but was unsuccessful (Raitt 278). Then, on 1 February 1885, a new daily entitled Le Succès, founded by Emmanuel Arène, announced that it was going to publish L'Ève future: “The fields covered by this vast and powerful conception, the ideas it contains, expressed in a masterly style, are of such an extraordinary nature that we want to leave them to surprise the readers” (qtd. in Raitt 282). By 4 February, however, the paper announced that it was not going to run the novel because of the author's delays (Raitt 282). Villiers had a habit of making last-minute corrections which may have caused the paper to give up on publication; however, it is also likely that Villiers dallied because he had received a better offer for his novel elsewhere. It was not long after that Villiers sold all rights to the novel to appear in the illustrated weekly La Vie moderne. The contract stipulated that it would subsequently appear in book form. Villiers received 600 francs for the serial and a 250-franc advance for the book (Raitt 282-83). The novel began to appear on 18 July 1885, with significant gaps as Villiers made changes and fought a bad case of bronchitis (Raitt 289). Finally, in May 1886, six weeks after it had concluded in La Vie moderne, L'Ève future appeared as a book (303). With over eight years of creation and multiple revisions, L'Ève future is a novel whose assembly is as complicated as the assembly of Hadaly. It is a fragmented text that was created by a fragmentary process.

The fragmented nature of this text makes interpretation of that text problematic. Noting the text’s “non-unitary textual structure,” Rodolphe Gasché has called the text “a machine of readings, of interpretive totalizations” and argued that that any reading of the text is incomplete:

*L'Ève future* contains a number of “novels” in the same way that the android is said to contain a number of women. These “novels” are those of the critics, and coincide with their idealizing interpretations of *L'Ève future*. Rooted in one or several of the text’s narrative possibilities, these interpretations are all accurate to the extent that they explore thematic possibilities inherent in the text. Yet they cannot ultimately be justified since the narrational undecidablity of *L'Ève future* makes all these
interpretations plausible and simultaneously invalidates them as fixed
determinations of its meaning. (301)

Jeffrey Wallen has taken Gasché’s “machine of reading” metaphor and linked it with
Paul de Man’s discussion on allegories of reading. De Man contrasts the allegory of “text
as machine” with the more traditional allegory of “text as body”:

Barely concealed by its peripheral function, the text here stages the textual
machine of its own constitution and performance, its own textual allegory.
The threatening element in these incidents then becomes more apparent.
The text as body, with all its implications of substitutive tropes ultimately
always retraceable to metaphor, is displaced by the text as machine and, in
the process, it suffers the loss of the illusion of meaning. The
deconstruction of the figural dimension is a process that takes place
independently of any desire; as such it is not unconscious but mechanical,
systematic in its performance but arbitrary in its principle, like a grammar.
This threatens the autobiographical subject not as the loss of something
that once was present and that is once possessed, but as the radical
estrangement between the meaning and the performance of any text. (qtd.
in Wallen 38)

Wallen summarizes de Man’s allegorical reading of the “text as machine” over and
against the “text as body” as inflicting this “loss of the illusion of meaning” through a
radical deconstruction which differs from but does not destroy the “text as body.” Then
Wallen asks, “what happens when the machine is indistinguishable from the body?” (38).
With L’Ève future, we confront a machine as body and body as machine in the android
Hadaly, and she, in turn, serves as a metaphor for the text. As Wallen continues, “[w]hen
the machine becomes the body, can we be sure that ‘the loss of the illusion of meaning’ is
not instead the ‘illusion of the loss of meaning?’” (38). He notes that in this text “marks
of difference are not effaced, but destabilized” as the “simulacrum haunts every body and
every voice, making unreliable the smooth functioning of any oppositional or differential
schema” (39). In L’Ève future, the body is a machine is a work of art. Each individual is
fragmented and each fragment is a totality, a deeply Romantic notion which,
nevertheless, anticipates the postmodern condition.

The novel, like Edison’s experiment, is a metaphorical train wreck, fragments
scattered, bodies pulverized, identities lost in the smoke and ashes. Even more disturbing
perhaps than the image of Edison’s train wreck is that of the severed arm Edison

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It was a human arm lying on a cushion of violet silk. The blood seemed to have clotted at the shoulder joint; only a few purple blotches on a chiffon scarf nearby gave evidence of a recent operation. It was the arm and right hand of a young woman. The delicate wrist was encircled by a viper of enameled gold; on the ring finger of the pale hand glittered a circlet of sapphires. The slender fingers still held a pearl-colored glove, worn several times no doubt. The flesh still retained an appearance so vital, the surface of the skin was so pure and satiny, that its appearance was as cruel as it was fantastic. (17)

The arm is fantastic because it is not real; it is another of Edison’s creations.

When we first consider the arm as real, we find it horrific precisely because we wonder, as the text suggests, “what unknown danger could have necessitated such a perilous amputation?” (17). It is disturbing because it is a gruesome part severed from a whole body. It is a sign of pain, horror, perhaps death. However, as a work of science, the arm is a wonder, a life-like technological creation. Nevertheless, it is incomplete, useless without the android it will be attached to. However, as a work of art, it is sublime; it is whole. Villiers reminds us that, in the final analysis, art triumphs over both reality and science. For only art can be simultaneously fragmented and whole, artificial and real, horrific and sublime.
CONCLUSION

SCIENCE AND THE SUBLIME

Despite the common perception, both in the nineteenth-century and today, that Der Sandmann, Frankenstein, and L’Ève future are transgressive, boundary-defying, and radical, in two central areas—in their attitudes toward both science and the sublime—they are ultimately profoundly conservative. Like many other literary texts from this period, all three of these narratives betray a deep suspicion toward what Leo Marx has called “the rhetoric of the technological sublime”—the grandiloquent discourse of awe and reverence toward scientific progress which was ubiquitous throughout the nineteenth century. That Romantic texts should be suspicious of the concrete materialism of the Enlightenment is not surprising since Romanticism itself was a response and reaction to that Enlightenment. It is, however, simply astounding that these texts foresaw the ethical implications, so obvious today, of pursuing science without limits. Simultaneously, these texts participate in and reinforce the nineteenth-century discourse on the sublime as theorized by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. They confront and preserve the obscurity and immateriality within the Burkean and Kantian notions of the sublime. In both cases these texts are concerned with boundaries: with a recognition of the importance of creating and maintaining boundaries for science and with a cautionary response to any desire to explore and transgress the boundaries established by theorists of the sublime. Ethically, these texts share an abiding concern about the dangers of pursuing the limits of science. Aesthetically, they share a concern about the dangers of

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63 See particularly pages 195-215 of Marx’s Machine in the Garden as well as his more recent appraisal in “Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept.”
transgressing the boundaries that separate the concrete materiality of the tangible world from the obscurity and immateriality of the sublime.

**Critique of Science**

Often called an age of progress, the nineteenth century was alive with a fervent rhetoric that the scientific discoveries and technological advances of the age would lead, ultimately, to a new utopian era. The philosophies of Hegel and John Stuart Mill both supported this notion. While not speaking specifically about technology, Hegel believed that history, guided by Geist, “Pure Spirit” or “Mind,” would continually progress as contradictions in thought and practice would ultimately be overcome. Likewise, Mill believed that free individuals who represent the “wisdom of society” coupled with the progress of science would overcome the social ills of the times. Mill admitted in his *Principles of Political Economy*, which was published in 1848, that “it is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day’s toil of any human being.” Nevertheless, he anticipated that these inventions would eventually bring about “great changes in human destiny which it is in their nature and in their futurity to accomplish” (692). Karl Marx was deeply suspicious of technology since it displaced and devalued workers, and he believed workers would eventually revolt against this exploitation of labor created through mechanization. As Rosenbloom summarizes, for Marx, “the modern factory was a cooperative system of machines, just as earlier enterprises had been based on a cooperative system of laborers” (501). Nevertheless, Edward Bellamy’s Marxian utopian novel *Looking Backward*, the second best-selling work of fiction in the United States in the nineteenth century, predicted human evolution and technology would progress to a state of ultimate perfection (Beilharz 597).

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64 See Donald MacKenzie’s “Marx and the Machine” and Richard Rosenbloom’s “Men and Machines: Some 19th Century Analyses of Mechanization.”

65 The number one best-selling work of fiction in nineteenth-century America was Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin.*
The rhetoric of progress, particularly technological progress, which Leo Marx has called the "rhetoric of the technological sublime," was ubiquitous during the nineteenth century. As Marx states, "the awe and reverence once reserved for the Deity and later bestowed upon the visible landscape is directed toward technology or, rather, the technological conquest of matter" (*Machine* 197). Typical of the period's rhetoric is a speech by Senator Daniel Webster, delivered on 17 November 1847 at the dedication of a new section of the Northern Railroad in Lebanon, New Hampshire:

> It is an extraordinary era in which we live. It is altogether new. The world has seen nothing like it before. I will not pretend, no one can pretend, to discern the end; but every body [sic.] knows that the age is remarkable for scientific research into the heavens, the earth, and what is beneath the earth; and perhaps more remarkable still for the application of this scientific research to the pursuits of life. The ancients saw nothing like it. The moderns have seen nothing like it till the present generation. . . . We see the ocean navigated and the solid land traversed by steam power, and intelligence communicated by electricity. Truly this is almost a miraculous era. What is before us no one can say, what is upon us no one can hardly realize. The progress of the age has almost outstripped human belief; the future is known only to Omniscience. (qtd. in Marx, *Machine* 214)

A similar rhetorical flourish is found in an article "On the Utility and Pleasures of Science" from *Scientific American* of 1847:

> The progress of human knowledge has accomplished within a century revolutions in the character and condition of the human race so beautiful and sublime as to excite in every observing mind feelings mingled with the deepest admiration and astonishment. No age has illustrated so strongly as the present the empire of mind over matter—and the ability of man to rise . . . above the obstacles with which nature has surrounded him. (qtd. in Marx, *Machine* 197)

Likewise, in announcing the appearance of a new "haymaker," the same periodical in 1860 wrote, "are not our inventors ushering in the very dawn of a new millennium?" (qtd. in Marx, *Machine* 198). As Leo Marx states, "the overblown, exclamatory tone of so much of this writing arises from an intoxicated feeling of unlimited possibility. History has a meaning, a purpose, and a reachable goal: it is nothing less than [humanity's] acquisition of the absolute truth" (*Machine* 198).
Furthermore, while literary works of the period often compared artists to artisans, scientists, or explorers; newspapers and politicians often compared inventors and scientists to poets. As the speaker at Yale’s commencement of 1831 put it, “inventions are the poetry of physical science, and inventors are the poets,” while others would speak of the “wakeful dreamings of inventors, their abstractions and enthusiastic reveries to create some ballad or produce some epic in machinery” (qtd. in Marx, *Machine* 200). As Marx summarizes, “the idea that machine power is fulfilling an ancient mythic prophecy evokes some of the most exuberant writing” of the nineteenth century (*Machine* 201).

Leo Marx has written extensively about the anxiety that many, in his case primarily American, authors of the period expressed about the rise of technology and industrialization, and he cites Ezra Pound’s aphorism that “artists are the antennae of the race” (“Afterword” 486). Likewise, in all three of these texts ethical concerns about the potential abuses of science are front and center. In E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* the ethical message takes the form of a joke, but it is a joke with deadly serious implications. As previously noted, the dark ending of the narrative is subverted by the comic relief of the town’s reaction to the discovery that Olimpia is an automaton:

[The minds of many esteemed gentlemen were still not set at rest: the episode of the automaton had struck deep roots into their souls, and there stealthily arose in fact a detectable mistrust of the human form. To be quite convinced they were not in love with a wooden doll, many enamoured young men demanded that their young ladies should sing and dance in a less than perfect manner, that while being read to they should knit, sew, play with their puppy and so on, but above all that they should not merely listen but sometimes speak too, and in such a way that what

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66 While Leo Marx’s focus was on the rhetoric of the technological sublime in the United States and in the response from U.S. literature, he believed that British and European examples could be found (Marx, “Technology” 985, note 3). Since then others have indeed found these examples. For example, see Rosalind H. Williams’s discussion of underground explorations and mining in Europe as a source of images of the technological sublime in *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination*, pages 82–120. Also see Patrice Flichy’s *L’Innovation Technique: Récents développements en sciences sociales, vers une nouvelle théorie de l’innovation*, pages 196-97.
they said gave evidence of some real thinking and feeling behind it. Many
love-bonds grew more firmly tied under this regime; others on the
contrary gently dissolved. "You really cannot tell which way it will go,"
they said. To counter any kind of suspicion, there was an unbelievable
amount of yawning and no sneezing at all at the tea-circles. (122)

Certainly the episode highlights the dangers of artifice in a technologically age. However, it
also highlights a larger issue: that through technology malevolent individuals may be able
to deceive another, control him or her, and cause madness or even death. Technology is
not a benevolent force in Hoffmann's tale. In Der Sandmann, if alchemy is dangerous,
technology is treacherous.

Mary Shelley's character Victor Frankenstein becomes the prototype of the "mad"
scientist whose extensive knowledge and overzealous hubris lead to an experiment that
cannot be controlled. Throughout the novel, Shelley analyzes and critiques the science of
her day. Anne Mellor argues that while Shelley's understanding of the practice of science
was limited (for example, her description of Victor's attic laboratory is both vague and
naïve), she "had a sound grasp of the concepts and implications of some of the most
important scientific work of her day" (90). As Mellor remarks, Shelley explores

the more dangerous implications of the scientific method and its practical
results. Implicitly, she contrasted what she considered to be 'good'
science—the detailed and reverent description of the workings of nature—
to what she considered 'bad' science, the hubristic manipulation of the
 elemental forces of nature to serve [human's] private ends. (89)

Mellor sees Shelley as distinguishing between science that seeks to explore and
understand the workings of the physical world and science that seeks to effect change and
control upon the world. "Implicitly she celebrates the former, which she associates most
closely with the work of Erasmus Darwin, while she calls attention to the dangers
inherent in the latter, found in the work of Davy and Galvani" (90). Both Frankenstein
and Walton represent unsympathetic protagonists who place their work above human
relationships, scientific exploration above natural processes, and hubris above humanity.

Finally, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam critiques the emerging scientific worldview as an
alternate religion, one that requires faith, administers sacraments, and officiates rituals.
Villiers recognizes the rhetoric of the technologically sublime as usurping language that traditionally has been applied to God. Edison regards electricity as a sort of occult knowledge, “spiritualism put in really practical terms” (95), and he is clearly appropriating the role of God. He refers to Hadaly’s creation as a process of “transubstantiation” in which Alicia Clary will be redeemed with the “most sublime level of spirituality” as well as “a sort of immortality” (53-54). He raises his hand and makes “a solemn oath” that he will “raise from the clay of Human Science as it now exists, a Being made in our image, and who, accordingly, will be to us what we are to God” (64). When Edison dissects Evelyn and Hadaly and explains the process of Hadaly’s creation, he does so with deep, reverential, solemnity. Edison is a false God, and the line separating his science from a religious devotion is thin indeed.

Furthermore, for Ewald to give himself over to the illusion of Hadaly requires a belief that can only be compared to religious faith. Hadaly reminds Ewald that it is only through his “free will,” a purposeful choice, that she can “be either living or inanimate” and that it requires “simplicity to believe her” (199). She asks him to “accept [her] mystery just as it appears before [him]” (199). To replace religion with reason is, for Villiers, to lose the magic of life. While religion provides mystery with beauty and meaning, science provides understanding without mystery, uncovering a hideous conglomeration of wires and gears. As Hadaly cautions Ewald about Edison’s singing mechanical birds, “you must admire it; but don’t try to Understand how it is produced,” for “God would withdraw from the song” (95). Clearly Villiers saw the scientific worldview as a threat to religious devotion.

It is evident that Villiers is deeply disturbed by the ethics of this new religion. After Edison’s experiment with train speeds in which “several hundred victims” were “crushed, burned, and ground to bits,” his only regret is that no one would allow him “a second trial, or [. . .] a third if need be” until a successful test was completed (18). The tone of this passage leaves little for the reader to admire about Edison or his scientific
method. L’Ève future is a witty, sarcastic, and ultimately disturbing critique of the emerging scientific worldview of Villiers’s day, a cautionary tale for a technological age.

All of these texts critique the science of the day, calling for boundaries in scientific exploration and technological advances. In an age where our science has led us to technological developments that test our own ethical foundations, these nineteenth-century literary critiques seem almost prescient. While technology has not yet been able to create a mechanical being that can pass for a real human, it has been able to create, for better and for worse, robots that displace humans in the work force. While science has not yet discovered the ability to reanimate a corpse, the discovery of DNA, gene-splitting, extra-uterine fertilization, and cloning, have allowed us to manipulate life forms in ways that challenge our ethics and values. Most frighteningly, science has been harnessed to create new technologies of death, revolutionizing warfare from the sword and cannon of the nineteenth century to the nuclear weapons and intercontinental missiles of the present.

After Frankenstein’s monster was unleashed upon the world, he proclaims:

Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master; —obey! (116)

As we begin the twenty-first century, an era when science and technology have both created and destroyed, healed and demolished, saved lives and taken lives, the words of Frankenstein’s creature are even more profoundly pertinent. These nineteenth-century texts do not accept science and technology with the same starry-eyed devotion of the majority of their contemporaries. They recognize the ethical dilemmas and predict the probable consequences of morally unbounded science in a technological world.

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67 One is reminded of Nathanael Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” where Rappaccini is described as caring “infinitely more for science than for mankind” (192), and is “not restrained by natural affection from offering up his child, in this horrible manner, as the victim of his insane zeal for science” (203).
The Sublime in Romantic Discourse

While these texts critique the nineteenth-century rhetoric of the technological sublime, calling for boundaries to tame science and technology, they simultaneously present a cautionary tale about the artistic tendency to transgress the boundaries set by contemporaneous theories on the sublime. The word “sublime” comes from the Latin sublimis, meaning “on high, uplifted, raised up.” Philosophical discourse on the sublime dates back to a first-century text attributed to Longinus, which defines the sublime as that which uplifts the spirit, creating feelings of astonishment, pride, and noble thoughts. The sublime suggests more than words can convey, and can be found in “great thoughts,” “strong and inspired emotion,” elevated “figures of speech and thought,” “noble diction,” and “dignified and elevated word arrangements” (qtd. in Leitch 140).

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the term also came to suggest “the highest moral, intellectual, or emotional level, as well as great nobility of character” (Leitch 538), and by the end of that century it came to have much the same meaning it does today: a sensation of overwhelming awe, terror, or astonishment in the face of nature or powerful works of literature and art. “The essential claim of the sublime,” according to Thomas Weiskel, is that humans “can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human” (3). What may be encountered beyond normal human experience is a matter of debate. Regardless, during the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, the concept of the sublime emerges as a dominant concern in artistic production.

What is astonishing is that, as Weiskel puts it, “in the history of literary consciousness the sublime revives as God withdraws from an immediate participation” in human experience (3). Weiskel continues:

The Romantic sublime was an attempt to revise the meaning of transcendence precisely when the traditional apparatus of sublimation—spiritual, ontological, and (one gathers) psychological and even perceptual—was failing to be exercised or understood. It was the most

68 A selection from Longinus’s “On Sublimity” can be found in Leitch 135-54.
spectacular response of the literary mind to the dualisms which cut across post-Renaissance thinking and made so much authoritative doctrine suddenly in need of interpretation. (4)

Terryl Givens has suggested that this shift resulted from theological discourse being appropriated into poetic discourse. Givens sees the rhetoric of theory mirroring and embracing the rhetoric of theology, both glorying in the abstract, obscure, and inexpressible. As Givens puts it, “[w]ith the legitimization of the Burkean sublime, religion and rhetoric become complicit” (36). He goes on to argue that, “the theological value of the mysterious, the ineffable—already well-entrenched—is now reinforced by rhetorical models in which obscurity itself has become an object of value” (36). The result is that the theorists of the sublime, like their theological predecessors, end up “glorying in referential inadequacy” (Givens 38).

A translation of Longinus’s text appeared in 1674, setting the stage for the late-eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century’s fixation on the sublime. The two most influential philosophical texts on the subject were Edmund Burke’s “Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful,” which was published in 1757, and Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Judgment, which was published in 1790. For Burke, “terror is in all cases whatsoever . . . the ruling principle of the sublime” (50). Burke continues:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature [...] is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. (49)

In addition to terror, astonishment and horror, Burke connects the sublime with obscurity, vastness, and infinity in contrast to Descartes’ and Locke’s “clear and distinct” ideas. “To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary,” states Burke. “When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes” (50). Burke regards “the obscure idea, when properly conveyed” as “more affecting than the clear” (52). As Maurice Cranston has noted, Burke sees clearness as “in some sense the enemy to all enthusiasm” (49). As
Burke put it, “a clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea” (54). Cranston summarizes Burke’s position: “what is greatest and noblest in art is the infinite, and the infinite, having no bounds, cannot be clear and distinct” (48). Thomas Weiskel agrees: “In poetry and in theory the sublime becomes associated not with the clear and the distinct but with the vague and the obscure” (16). The sublime emerges, Weiskel continues, from “the failure of clear thought” and concerns “matters beyond determinate perception” (17).

Likewise, the focus of Kant’s sublime is the incomprehensible—those sensibilities which the imagination is not able to process as a sensible representation. Kant described the sublime as an encounter with the “absolutely great” (86) which extends the imagination (87) towards the infinite and is only stopped by reason’s claim of “absolute totality” (88). This creates a feeling of pleasure that is “only possible through the medium of pain” (96). The sublime “raise[s] the energies of the soul above their accustomed height” where we “discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature” (100-101). For Kant, there are two forms of the sublime, the mathematical and the dynamical. The former is based on size, an infinite number, while the latter is based on power, an overwhelming force. While the beautiful, for Kant, implies form and boundaries, the sublime implies formlessness and a transgression of boundaries. The sublime allows one to glimpse momentarily that which is beyond our comprehension, to experience the limits of the sensible, physical world, and to feel the accompanying emotions of awe and terror that it generates.

The relationship between the language of religious devotion and that of the aesthetic category of the sublime is evident in both Burke and Kant. As examples of the sublime, Burke twice cites passages from Milton’s Paradise Lost, the text that, as Kvam, Scheering, and Ziegler note, “mediated the biblical story for generations of readers” (287). In one reference, Burke quotes from Milton’s description of Death, which he calls
"astonishing with what a gloomy pomp, with what a significant and expressive uncertainty of strokes and colouring, he has finished the portrait of the king of terrors": —The other shape,
If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable, in member, joint, or limb;
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed;
For each seemed either; black he stood as night;
Fierce as ten furies; terrible as hell;
And shook a deadly dart. What seemed his head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on. (Book II, lines 666-73)
Burke describes this scene as "dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree" (51). Shortly thereafter, Burke cites Milton's description of Satan from Book I as an example of the sublime.

Likewise Kant explicitly links the sublime with religious experience when he gives two concrete examples: "Perhaps there is no sublimier passage in the Jewish law," Kant states, "than the command, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything which is in heaven or in the earth or under the earth'" (115). Buried in a footnote in a later section of his text, he writes, "Perhaps nothing more sublime was ever said and no sublimer thought ever expressed than the famous inscription on the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature): 'I am all that is and all that was and that shall be, and no mortal hath lifted my veil'" (160, note 44). Both of these passages attempt to limit the visible, simultaneously drawing attention to a boundary that can but must not be crossed.

The veiled image of Saïs, which Kant gets from Plutarch's *Moralia*, becomes a favorite trope of Romantics. It is employed extensively in Villiers's *L'Ève future* as I will show later, and may be alluded to in both Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* and Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Schiller discusses the image in his "*Die Sendung Moses*" and in his text "Of the Sublime" he writes:

Everything, that is veiled, everything mysterious, contributes to the terrible, and is therefore capable of sublimity. Of this variety is the legend, that one read at Saïs in Egypt above the temple of Isis. 'I am everything, that is, that has been, and that will be. No mortal man has lifted my veil.' —
Precisely this uncertainty and mysteriousness gives man's conceptions of the future after death something of the dreadful; these feelings are very well expressed in the well-known soliloquy of Hamlet. Schiller employs the symbol again in his poem "Das verschleierte Bild zu Saïs," where he tells of a youth who lifts Isis's veil and dies. Novalis created a fragmentary narrative entitled "Die Lehrlings zu Saïs," in which a young man leaves his love and goes in search of wisdom. When he gets to the temple of Isis, he falls asleep and dreams he lifts the veil; when he does, his love falls into his arms. In a distich to the narrative, when the young man lifts the veil he sees himself. In his Ideas, Schlegel calls for "a morality that might be more than the practical part of philosophy" by urging "It is time to tear away the veil of Isis and reveal the mystery. Whoever cannot endure the sight of the goddess, let him flee or perish" (qtd. in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 64). The image became a favorite of nineteenth-century writers, evoked such authors as Gerard de Nerval in his short story "Isis" from Les Filles du Feu and by Keats in his "Fall of Hyperion."

There are many points of contact between the discourse of the sublime and other foci in this dissertation. First, David Sandner has argued that fantastic literature was a "vital component of the emergent discourse of the sublime" (6). Both the fantastic and the sublime "act through the agency of the imagination" and "claim to thereby reach beyond the imagination to apprehend not only what cannot be 'actually' experienced but what cannot be imagined" (8). Sandner maintains that while not all that is sublime is fantastic, "perhaps every fantastic image contains the possibility of encountering the sublime" (9). Certainly, in fantastic tales, we confront the horror and obscurity of Burke's notion of the sublime. Furthermore, the radical overflowing of the senses and passing beyond the boundaries of our perception described by Kant is very similar to the affect produced by fantastic literature.

The sublime, according to Burke, is also closely tied to confusion. Burke notes this particular connection when he cites the passage of Milton describing Satan:

69 See lines 213-220 of "The Fall of Hyperion."
—He above the rest
  In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a tower; his form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined, and th’ excess
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams; or from behind the moon
In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations; and with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs.— (Book I; lines 589-99)

Burke calls Milton’s description of Satan “a very noble picture” which through its combining dissimilar images, “of a tower, an archangel, the sun rising through mists, or in an eclipse, the ruin of monarchs, and the revolutions of kingdoms,” creates a sublime moment as “the mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused.” Burke concludes, “Separate them, and you lose much of the greatness; and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness” (53). Confusion is particularly important to Burke in attaining a sublime literary moment.

Furthermore, the nineteenth-century’s preoccupation with the sublime likely contributed to the rise in print culture. Burke believed that written texts, since they are ultimately more obscure, should be preferred over painting. Burke argued that “poetry, with all its obscurity, has a more general, as well as more powerful, dominion over the passions than other art” (52). As Maurice Cranston summarizes:

[Burke’s] critique of classicism begins with a refutation of the principle that clarity is an essential quality of great art. On the contrary, Burke argues, what is greatest and noblest in art is the infinite, and the infinite, having no bounds, cannot be clear and distinct. […] Against the then fashionable view of the Abbé du Bos that painting is an art superior to poetry because of the greater clarity that painting achieves in representation, Burke claims that poetry is superior to painting precisely because poetry can better render obscurity and ambiguity: ‘It is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration and chiefly excites our passions.’ Eternity, Burke suggests, is among the most affecting ideas we have, and yet we understand very little about it. (49)

Texts came to be preferred over painting as the means to achieve sublime obscurity.

Hoffmann’s Der Sandmann, Shelley’s Frankenstein, and Villiers’s L’Ève future explore the limits of the sublime, but ultimately must be read as cautionary tales about the
dangers of transgressing the boundaries of the sublime. Particularly significant is Hoffmann’s narrator’s desire to express his sublime vision:

Have you ever, kind friend, experienced anything which completely filled your heart and mind and drove everything else out of them? Which made you bubble and boil and drove the blood glowing hot through your veins, so that your cheeks burned red? Which transformed your gaze, as if it were seeking out forms and shapes invisible to other eyes, and dissolved your speech into glowing sighing? (99)

The narrator’s description of a sublime experience resonates with both Burke and Kant. In Kantian terms, the narrator has experienced something that has driven him to the very limits of reason and violated the boundaries of normal sensual experience. In Burkean terms, the narrator’s experience is horrific, obscure, and chaotic.

In both Burke and Kant, the sublime is created from momentary boundary violation and boundary confusion rather than boundary maintenance. Obscurity and boundary violation seem interwoven in Der Sandmann. Boundaries between natural and mechanical, life and death, waking and dreaming, reality and illusion all collapse and mingle. The sublime overwhelms not just the consciousness (which happens to the point of fainting), but the universe itself.

An even more direct connection between the sublime and Der Sandmann can be noted by looking at Hoffmann’s music criticism, specifically in a discussion about Beethoven. Hoffmann states that “Beethoven’s music sets in motion the machinery of awe, of fear, of terror, of pain, and awakens that infinite yearning which is the essence of romanticism. He is therefore a Romantic composer” (qtd. in Charlton 98). Hoffmann maintains that, while Beethoven’s music seems uncontrolled or unorganized, an “inner coherence” marks every composition. Hoffmann calls Beethoven the preeminent composer to display “Besonnenheit,” which can be translated as both “rational awareness” and as “self-possession” (Kumbier 325). Accordingly, Beethoven separates his “controlling self” from the “inner realms of sounds” and rules in “absolute authority.” One passage of Hoffmann’s criticism is particularly resonant with Der Sandmann:
Beethoven's instrumental music unveils before us the realm of the mighty and the immeasurable. Here shining rays of light shoot through the darkness of night and we become aware of giant shadows swaying back and forth, moving ever closer around us and destroying us but not the pain of infinite yearning, in which every desire, leaping up in sounds of exultation, sinks back and disappears. Only in this pain, in which love, hope, and joy are consumed without being destroyed, which threatens to burst our hearts with a full-chorused cry of all the passions, do we live on as ecstatic visionaries. (qtd. in Charlton 97)

Hoffmann goes on to argue that "the proper performance of Beethoven's works" requires that the performer identify with Beethoven—that the individual "penetrates to his inner nature" and "venture[s] boldly into the circle of magical beings that his irresistible spell summons forth." Beethoven must only be performed by the "true artist" who "lives only in the work that he conceives." This hypothetical artist:

disdains to let his own personality intervene in any way; all his endeavors are spent in quickening to vivid life, in a thousand shining colours, all the sublime effects and images the composer's magical authority enclosed within his work, so that they encircle us in bright rings of light, inflaming our imaginings, our innermost soul, and bear us speeding on the wing into the far-off spirit-realm of music. (qtd. in Chambers 103)

Hoffmann obviously sees Beethoven as a composer of the sublime. But what is striking is that the images in the above passages share the same register of images that we find in Der Sandmann. The "darkness of night" and swaying "giant shadows" of Beethoven's music remind one of the "black clouds" of Nathanael's mind which are "impenetrable to any friendly ray of sunlight" (85), the "fearsome apparition" of the sandman (87), the shadowy Copelius, and the smoke-filled alchemical laboratory where eyes appear all around peering out of "hideous black cavities" (91). The "rays of light shooting through darkness" and "a thousand shining colours" of Beethoven's music are reminiscent of Coppola's "eyes blazing out piercingly" (109), the fiery vision of spectacles with the "flaming glances" which "leaped more and more wildly together" (109) and the burning hot eyes "which sprang out like blood-red sparks, singeing and burning, on to Nathanael's breast" (105). Finally, "the bright rings of light" recall the "flaming circle of fire" in Nathanael's poem (105).
Comparing *Der Sandmann* to Hoffmann’s Beethoven criticism allows us to think of Nathanael as being equivalent to a person listening to a Beethoven concert: He is a willing listener transported by sublime content created by a great composer. Nathanael does, in fact, become the willing participant in a sublime drama as he is transported to new emotional heights by the vision of Olimpia, whose figure “hovered before him in the air, and stepped out of the bushes, and peered out at him from the limpid brook with great gleming eyes. [...]; he thought of nothing but Olympia” (112). To emphasize that Olimpia is the epitome of the sublime, Hoffmann appears to reenact the motif from Kant of the veiled image of Sais. As Nathanael peers out of his room through Coppola’s telescope to see his new goddess Olimpia, he is prevented by a veil, a “curtain before the fatal room was tightly drawn and he could not observe Olympia through the door” (111). When the veil is lifted and Nathanael is allowed to look at the goddess, ironically mirroring both versions of Novalis’s tale, she is both Nathanael’s beloved and his self, his one true love and his narcissistic self representation.

However, Hoffmann recognizes the threat posed by the sublime. As Kant warned, without a mechanism to control an encounter with the sublime, a mechanism to call the racing mind back into check, one could become either a fanatic or a lunatic (116). Nathanael is the victim of a composer (in this case two composers, Coppola and Spalanzani) who malevolently prevents him from regaining his composure, and he goes mad. Importantly, Nathanael is atop a tower when he finally loses reason and commits suicide. He is literally “lifted up” in a subliminal frenzy.

Likewise, it is not hard to see both Burke and Kant in the background of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Anne Mellor has noted that Frankenstein’s creation “represents the confrontation of the human mind with an unknowable nature, with the experience that eighteenth-century philosophers called the sublime” (131). Victor, the aspiring “artist” of the novel, has grown weary of the pedestrian science of the enlightenment, “for realities of little worth,” and instead strives, Faust-like, for “chimeras of boundless grandeur”
(27). As Shelley put it in the 1831 edition of the novel, Victor revels in contemplating the "partially unveiled [. . .] face of Nature," whose "immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery" (25). What Victor does not understand, however, is that his sense of wonder is indivisible from the mystery—his sense of awe is completely dependent upon the fact that nature is still partially veiled. For as Burke maintains, the sublime resides not in the clearly defined form, but in the obscure and chaotic. It is significant that Victor initially describes his creature as "beautiful" and with limbs "in proportion" (34). But when the abstraction becomes concrete, when the dream becomes reality, "the beauty of the dream vanished" (34). In this scene where Victor looks in the face of his creation, we may have a retelling of the Apprentice of Saïs as the creature's eye is unveiled and Victor beholds his creation, a creation that leads directly to Victor's descent into madness.

Mellor argues that, "appearances of the creature in the novel are simultaneous with the revelation of the sublime" (131). For example, when Victor sees his creation on a snowy mountain side, it is a sublime image he confronts:

I suddenly beheld the figure of a man at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his stature, also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man. I was troubled; a mist came over my eyes, and I felt a faintness seize me; but I was quickly restored by the cold gale of the mountains. I perceived, as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created. I trembled with rage and horror, [. . .] (65)

Again, it is significant that Victor faces his creation on a mountain; he is literally "lifted up" as he fearfully beholds his superhuman creature.

Mary Shelley "privileges," Mellor believes, the aesthetic ideal of the beautiful, represented by the character of Clerval, over the sublime, represented by the creature. Shelley's aesthetic ideal is rooted in "self-control, moderation, and domestic decorum" (137), focused on community rather than the individual, and associated with the female rather than the male (138). "Clerval's aesthetic of the beautiful is thus grounded in a conscious sympathy between the human mind and a benevolent female nature" (138). But
in another sense, Shelley’s novel is an allegory about the seduction of mystery. It explores the theme of wonder, our awe in the presence of immense power and the hidden forces of life. It also illustrates the cataclysmic consequences of breaking down the barriers between the natural and the supernatural, erasing the distance between the human and the divine, and elevating humanity to the status of God.

Finally, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Ève future* explores the seductive nature of the sublime, but shows how all human attempts to create the sublime are futile and destructive. Throughout the novel, Villiers directly invokes Kant’s image of the veiled image of Saïs. The preeminent sublime object in the text is the statue of the Venus Victorious, a statue of a goddess. The statue, a work of human hands, is deficient, however, in that it has no arms. Alicia Clary is a human embodiment of the statue, but her “almost superhuman beauty” hides “as with a sacred veil that character of dull moderation, that vulgarity of mind, that exclusive and almost feebleminded consideration for nothing but the exterior values attached to Wealth, Faith, Love, and Art—that is, for nothing but what is vain and illusory in them” (43). Alicia has a “native instinct to debase anything which rises above the humblest level of the earth,” while “her sublime features” contrast with “the grimace she makes in her soul” (45). She is, as Lord Ewald puts it, “a bourgeois goddess” (36), a “temple profaned” (43).

Villiers playfully recreates the scene from the Apprentice of Saïs, when Ewald takes Alicia to the Louvre and visits the Venus Victorious. “Miss Alicia raised her veil. She looked at the statue with a certain surprise; then, amazed, she cried aloud childishly: ‘Look, it’s me!’” She adds “but I have arms, and besides I’m more distinguished looking.” Nevertheless, Alicia “shivered; her hand, which had dropped my arm to seek support from a railing, returned, and she said [. . .] ‘These stones . . . these walls . . . It’s

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70 Allusions to the veiled image of Saïs abound in the novel, and a direct quote, “Who lurks behind this veil?,” from Schiller’s “*Das Verschleiertes Bild zu Saïs*” is used as an epigram to Book II, chapter three.
cold here; let’s go away” (46). Lord Ewald’s encounter with the nearly perfect, almost sublime, has left him suicidal. He wants the embodiment of the sublime.

Edison, for his part, is less interested in perfect beauty than in perfect power. He, like Frankenstein, is obsessed with achieving the status of a god. He longs to conquer time, space, and mortality, and his creation is “better than real,” a “direct rebuke to the complacency of ‘Nature’” (60). Furthermore, his experiments with controlling nature, like those of Frankenstein, have disastrous consequences: His experiment to stop trains at a short notice leads to an astounding loss of life and destruction.

Edison’s creation of Hadaly is significantly less horrific—both aesthetically and ethically—than Frankenstein’s creation of his monster. Hadaly represents the ultimate attempt of humanity to create the sublime, her very name means “ideal” (76). Like Alicia and the Venus before her, Hadaly is linked with the image of Saïs, “a dark veil [. . .] obscure[s] the entire lower part of her head” (57), and serves to keep Ewald from having a memory that “might rise up and disturb the vision” Edison will create for him (149).

There is, nevertheless, a real danger involved in creating Hadaly. Edison warns Ewald in language that echoes Kant that they are attempting to “defy two constant dangers: madness and the Deity” (78). Hadaly emphasizes the same danger, a danger the apprentice of Saïs knew well, “the Ideal when violated never pardons, and no man mocks the divinity unscathed” (203).

Edison is successful in creating the sublime; his creation, Hadaly, effects for Ewald the elusive sublime moment he longed for. She has “the power to make him experience the sweet and overpowering instant of passion” that shakes his very soul (194). “Half-goddess, half-woman,” Hadaly is “a sensual illusion” (204). Ewald desires to whisk her off to Europe, as he explains, “I’m in haste to be the prisoner of this sublime mystery” (205). But that sublime mystery requires faith, a willful desire to forget that she is a machine. Furthermore, Hadaly is sublime precisely because she is a mystery. Even Edison confesses that, as a result of the supernatural animating of Hadaly by Sowana, “it
is really an unknown creature,” a fact that he first discovered when Sowana independently moved the android to where Edison was working “without any advance notice.” Like Victor Frankenstein before him, it was a sight that “caused the most terrible shock [Edison] ever felt in his life. The workman was aghast at his own work” (211).

Ironically, it is Hadaly who fully understands the nature of the sublime, that mystery is inseparably linked with awe, that the unknown and obscure create our sense of wonder. Hadaly reminds Ewald that he should not seek to fully understand how the birds work because “God would withdraw from the song!” (95). Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, like E.T.A. Hoffmann and Mary Shelley before him, recognizes that mystery is the very essence of the sublime, and that efforts to bridge the gulf between mystery and understanding, obscurity and clarity, the human and the divine, are not only futile but fraught with danger.

**Conclusion**

As I have demonstrated in the preceding pages of this dissertation, each of these texts, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Ève future* allegorize the birth topos to portray the process of artistic production in an increasingly technological age. In so doing, they are deeply rooted in the philosophical discourse of early Romanticism and reflect the technological and epistemic changes of the period. In particular, we find that confusion abounds in these narratives; we see a reflection of the nineteenth-century print culture and discourse networks; we discover a critique of the Romantic project of autoengenderment; and, ultimately, we discern how the fragmented bodies depicted in the narratives mirror the fragmented nature of the texts. Furthermore, we recognize in each of these seemingly transgressive texts a conservative trend: one that undermines the contemporaneous rhetoric of the technological sublime while at the same time reinforcing the boundaries established by the philosophical discourse on the sublime.
In our increasingly fragmented, increasingly analytical age, it is certainly no coincidence that this type of creation narrative or “poetic fable,” as Ross Chambers has called them (“Queer and Creepy”), has proliferated in the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. Narratives that depict the creation of an artificial human being and employ mythic themes or structures continue into the present. The Adam and Eve myth is still employed in texts like Angela Carter’s *Passion of New Eve* (1977) and Bernard Malmud’s *God’s Grace* (1982) as well as in cinema like Gary Ross’s *Pleasantville* (1998) or Neil LaBute’s *The Shape of Things* (2001). Likewise, automatons and robots abound in texts like Thomas Berger’s *Adventures of the Artificial Woman* (2004), Bioy Casares’s *The Invention of Morel* (2003), Peter Carey’s *My Life as a Fake* (2003). The texts reflect postmodern concerns and technology, but their roots in Romanticism are evident. Furthermore, the genres of science fiction and fantasy have blossomed to allow writers to create whole new worlds within their fiction.

As we become ever more submerged in technology, the question of what separates human life from artificial life becomes ever more problematic. Increasingly, we find ourselves in the position of the townspeople in Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* after Olimpia is revealed to be an automaton: we live with a vague, even unconscious, mistrust of the human form. Hoffmann’s automaton is now dignified by a recognized field of inquiry: robotics has been around since the 1950s. The first full-scale humanoid robot, Wabot-1, was developed at Japan’s Waseda University between 1970 and 1973. Wabot-1 was able to walk, grip and carry objects with its hands, and communicate in Japanese and to measure distances and directions to the objects using external receptors, artificial ears and eyes, and an artificial mouth. In 1984, Waseda produced Wabot-2, a piano-playing robot reminiscent of the Jaquet-Droz automaton (see Figure 6).

In 1995, an anthropomorphic robot was created for the purpose of studying human-robot communication. Significantly, it was given the name “Hadaly” after
Villiers’s novel. Its upgrade, “Hadaly-2,” was introduced in 1997. While the robot is nothing like the ideal human, either aesthetically or intellectually, it recognizes its environment by using vision sensors, is capable of conversation using voice generation and recognition, has mechanical arms and electric wheels (see Figure 7).

More insidious than robotics are the images we confront in the numerous fashion magazines, “models” of the “ideal” woman that would astonish Villiers’s Edison and Ewald. To create these images requires both natural and artificial means. To reshape the “natural” beauty of the models, the fashion industry employs both the plastic surgeon’s scalpel and the artist’s airbrush. Again, the separation between the artificial and the real becomes increasingly difficult to negotiate, and the consequences are sometimes fatal for those who try to recreate themselves in the image of the artificial they are surrounded by.
Humanity has become even more fragmented, and at the same time, we have lost the Idealist belief that art will heal this wound. In his *Aesthetic Education of Man*, Friedrich Schiller spoke of the necessary but tragic fragmentation of humanity brought about by modernity, “a wound” that he believed was “inflicted” upon us by civilization itself:

> Once the increase of empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable, and the increasingly complex machinery of state necessitated a more rigorous
separation of ranks and occupations, then the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance. (33)

Schiller also spoke of the way any attempt to understand beauty ends up partializing, dissecting, and destroying that object. He stated that “the “whole magic” of “the phenomenon we call Beauty” only “resides in its mystery, and in dissolving the essential amalgam of its elements we find we have dissolved its very Being” (5). In words reminiscent of the fragmented bodies encountered in nineteenth-century creation narratives by Hoffmann, Shelley, and Villiers, Schiller describes the process of the intellect encountering beauty:

[The] intellect must first destroy the object of Inner Sense if it would make it its own. Like the analytical chemist, the philosopher can only discover how things are combined by analyzing them, only lay bare the workings of spontaneous nature by subjecting them to the torment of his own techniques. In order to lay hold of the fleeting phenomenon, he must first bind it in the fetters of rule, tear its fair body to pieces by reducing it to concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words. Is it any wonder that natural feeling cannot find itself again in such an image, or that in the account of the analytical thinker truth should appear as paradox? (5)

Authors like Hoffmann, Shelley, and Villiers understood both the essential fragmentation of their age as well as the paradox that we learn by destroying, comprehend by disassembling. Therefore they set out to create chaotic, fragmented texts. They purposively created and employed a morselized aesthetic. Ironically, dissecting such texts reveals not Schiller’s “sorry skeleton of words,” but Schlegel’s “colorful swarm of gods” recreating the “original chaos of human nature” (qtd. in Schulte-Sasse, et al. 187).
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