CREATING A MODERN PROMETHEUS: RELIGIOUS SECULARIZATION AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

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INTRODUCTION

As a story of creation, *Frankenstein* has strong connotations in the biblical account of the origin of life. Shelley's book tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, a devoted student of science who becomes consumed with seeking power over the forces of life and death. He embarks on an experiment to give life to a gigantic human creature that he has fashioned from the parts of corpses. Victor's success in bringing a rational human being to life goes against the biblical account of creation by suggesting that man could possess the power of God. The horror of *Frankenstein*, then, comes not only from the story unfolding but also from the discomfort of the suggestion that God, as defined by Christian thought, does not exist. Rather than preserving the Christian image of man's subordination to a supernatural, supreme deity, Shelley secularizes the image of the Christian God by demonstrating the god-like power of man himself. Although Shelley's story of creation gone awry is popularly interpreted by modern readers as a warning against man's desire to overreach his station, when considered in the historical context of the tradition of secularization and its primary influences, William Godwin's philosophy and Romantic tradition, the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* can in fact be interpreted as an atheistic vision of man's potential.

The transfer of God's power to man can be viewed as symbolic representation of Shelley's political belief in the power of the individual opposed to centralized institutions of authority. Throughout British history, religion often served as a significant point of consideration for political reform. This perception of the need for mutual religious and governmental reform evolved as a direct response to the historical intertwining of the power

of the church and state in England. Calls for political reform increasingly viewed the church and its religious ideology as enablers, if not originators, of society's problems because of their close connection to government. As a result, each successive reform movement from the Reformation forward introduced progressively secularized religious beliefs to draw attention to the causes and potential solutions for society's problems. This process of secularization came to play an important role in the representation of religious ideas during the literary Romantic Movement, particularly in Mary Shelley's 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*. By the late eighteenth century, philosophical and literary works often incorporated atheistic or alternative systems of religious beliefs as means of addressing political concerns. In Shelley's novel, man substitutes for God, and the freedom of individual choice is advocated as man's only hope for happiness and progress. Furthermore, the text suggests that religious institutions serve as a source of evil and deception which contribute to man's downfall by distracting him from reality.

Contemporary critics often attacked the Romantics for what they perceived to be heretical beliefs; however, modern assessments of the Romantics' use of religion in their writing present a more judicious assessment of the poets' intentions. M. H. Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* stands as the definitive study of the influence of religion on Romanticism.[1] In his book, Abrams demonstrates how the Romantics used Christian themes and icons as a basis for the formation of their own perceptions. Using traditional Christian beliefs as a familiar jumping off point, they explored, illustrated, and proclaimed their own radical beliefs by secularizing and adapting religious ideas. Abrams further claims that the extent to which the Christian elements in a work are secularized depends largely on the religious beliefs of the poet and that it was not their intention to advocate the total abdication of

religion but rather to redefine it under more intellectually acceptable terms. Romantic ideology, then, becomes a substitute for religious beliefs. Ultimately, Abrams claims, the Romantics used religious ideas and imagery as a means of exploring man's condition in the world, writing what Anne Mellor terms "the epic autobiography of the common man."[2]

Beginning in the early 1990s, scholarship has shown a renewed interest in the influence of religion on Romantic ideology. Further exploring Abrams' ideas, these new interpretations attempt to identify the Romantics' manipulation of religious imagery in relation to larger social and political movements of their day. Robert Ryan's *Romantic Reformation* and Martin Priestman's *Romantic Atheism* in particular encourage the reader to consider an interpretation of the religious element within Romantic works in context with the social and political movements of their day.[3] Rather than accepting the traditional view of Romantic writers as disengaged from social and political reality, recent scholarship proposes an understanding of the Romantics' participation in public discourse through religion. Ryan, in particular, links the Romantics' political activism to their exploration of basic questions of religion and the British government's tradition of mingling political and religious interests. This recent approach to interpreting the religious elements in the works of the Romantics suggests the need for a re-evaluation of our understanding of the authors' intentions within the texts. Currently standing as one of the most prominent Romantic works, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* begs a second glance.

Pamela Clemit and Emily Sunstein have pointed out that modern criticism of the 1818 text tends to be too heavily influenced by the self-revelations in the Introduction to the 1831 edition.[4] Shelley claims in the Introduction that the inspiration for her story was a nightmarish dream, giving no indication of the significance of the novel's philosophical and

political intentions. However, a closer comparison of the text's treatment of religion to its major influences, William Godwin's philosophy and Romantic tradition, reveals the novel to be much more than a ghost story, but a purposefully crafted philosophical statement on the nature of man and politics.

In an attempt to better understand Shelley's intended message in the 1818 edition, this study will focus on exploring the roles of religious secularization and political philosophy in the novel. Chapters one through three lay the foundation for the analysis of the relationship between Shelley's use of religious secularization and political philosophy in *Frankenstein.* The first chapter provides an overview of the longstanding connection between religion and political activism in British history from which *Frankenstein* evolved. The following two chapters look specifically at the two ideologies from this tradition which served as Shelley's major influences, William Godwin's political philosophy and Romanticism. Chapter two outlines the base elements of Godwin's philosophy which become the central themes of the novel, while chapter three overviews the trend of religious secularization within the Romantic Movement in which Shelley participates. The final two chapters analyze the way in which Godwin's philosophy and Romantic religious secularization are thoughtfully integrated into the text to direct the reader toward a particular interpretation of the novel. Chapter four looks specifically at the ways in which religion is secularized within the text, and particularly how Shelley's use of atheism follows common trends in Romanticism. Finally, chapter five explores how Shelley incorporates an atheistic outlook in *Frankenstein* to support her Godwinian message.

Like her father, Shelley believed in the power of knowledge to transform individuals and society, and her own writing reflects her consciousness of literature's deeper purpose to

encourage the development of the mind. Literature, according to Godwin, served as the best means for conveying and acquiring knowledge. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley shows readers a critical interpretation of the condition of humanity based on her father's moral philosophy. Shelley assumes an atheistic point of view in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* to prove Godwin's argument that just societies can not be created through institutional authority, but can only exist through the conscious efforts of rational and moral individuals.

I. ENGLAND'S TRADITION OF RELIGIOUS SECULARIZATION IN POLITICAL REFORM

Historically, Christian belief has played an underlying role in structuring England's political systems, and as such, its changing interpretation has served as one of the most pivotal and contentious forces in the country's history. From the first establishment of Christianity in England, moments of political conflict were often accompanied by efforts to change the predominant interpretation of religion. Because of the Church's close ties to government, political reformers, in many instances, saw the Church and its interpretation of Christian belief as supporting agents of the state systems they were fighting to change. Therefore, public calls for political reform often brought attention to the necessity of changing common religious perceptions to accomplish their goals. The Pope, the Catholic Church, the Church of England, and eventually God himself all at one point or another represented entities of religious authority targeted by political reform. The strong connection between the affairs of the religious community and the state throughout English history resulted in what could be considered a traditional co-dependence of religious and political reforms.

A closer look at this tradition reveals an increasing secularization of Christian beliefs in conjunction with the evolution of political reform. Henry VIII's conversion of the Church of England to Protestantism in the 1530s effectively subjected the power of the Church to the authority of the state, secularizing the Church as an institution of the state. However, interpreting Christianity as a system of belief became a political hot point, and arguments

over the extent of the government's interference in issues of faith and religious practice often served as significant points of consideration during movements for political reform. Christian beliefs were often reinterpreted by reformers to resist the control of the state-operated Church and to support their own political agendas. These reinterpretations often resulted in significant changes in the perception of man's role and relationship to God and the world. As England's political climate progressed from monarchal to democratic power, Christianity as a belief system became increasingly adapted to support, or justify, the actions and desires of man. As people struggled to gain a voice in the government of their lives, evolving interpretations of Christianity increased man's power in his relationship with God and in his ability to create his own destiny.

Religion proved to be a powerful force in shaping the country's political climate and future as increasingly secularized interpretations of Christianity accompanied each successive wave of political reform. During the Reformation, the rise of Protestantism in England initiated the secularization process by emphasizing the powerful role of the individual and his choices in determining his eternal destiny without the intercession of a priest or Church. This focus on the power of the individual also played an important part in igniting a change in the public's perception of the role and authority of both the Church and monarchy, and by the seventeenth century, the beliefs of Dissenting Protestant factions integrated with secular law to form a basis for the overthrow of the monarchy. However, the following Restoration marked another shift of power, with the state tightening its grip on the regulation of Christian practice. Following the Restoration period, popular opinion became increasingly hostile toward centralized religious authority as more egalitarian perspectives arose with the philosophy of the Enlightenment. This period also marked a major phase of

religious secularization which targeted the validity of Christian theology. It is from this wave of change that Romanticism emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century. Though not a strictly religious or political movement, the Romantic Movement capitalized on secularizing Christian beliefs to support political agendas. For many Romantics, particularly Mary Shelley and those who most influenced her beliefs, the institution of the Church and all Christian belief systems were considered corruptive forces politically and socially. This negative perception of Christianity led many Romantics, like Shelley, to create their own alternative interpretations of spiritual experience which often drew attention to the power of man's choices.

The goal of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive outline of the significant historical events which demonstrate the correlation between religious and political reform, but rather to show how these events, when considered collectively, make up a tradition of progressively increasing secularization of Christianity fueled by political and philosophical interests. Specifically, this study will show how England's increasing secularization after the Reformation played a major role in the development of the literary Romantic movement of the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries and consequently played an important role in shaping the portrayal of religion in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

From Popery to Protestantism

England's tradition of intertwining religious dissent and political conflict conceivably could be traced all the way back to Christianity's beginning in the country. To the early Britons, Christianity represented an unwanted intrusion by the English into their way of life, and their resistance to this new religion signified their defiance of outside control. In *A*

History of the English Church and People, Bede writes of the relationship between the emerging Catholic Church in England and the native Britons in AD 731: "The Britons for the most part have a national hatred for the English, and uphold their own bad customs against the true Easter of the Catholic Church; however, they are opposed by the power of God and man alike, and are powerless to obtain what they want."[5] Thus, even from its earliest history, the practice of religion in England was directly connected to government.

Eight hundred years later, Britain again found itself entangled in a politically charged religious conflict. This time it was not an invading force threatening the country but the authority of the Pope as dictated by their Catholic faith. England had remained Catholic through the medieval age and acknowledged the authority of the Pope until the power of the Church came into direct conflict with the power of a particularly willful Henry VIII. Mario Rosa notes that during the sixteenth century Rome acted as a political theater in Europe where rivalries and conflicts were played out or mediated and alliances formed.[6] Therefore, the monarch's ability to negotiate and maintain power in Rome was "of vital importance" to his political agenda.[7] The papacy was a key player in managing the ambitions and conflicts which continuously arose among England, Spain, and France, and as a Catholic state, England was obliged to honor the authority of the Pope even if his decisions were not favorable to the monarch's interests. The power struggle between the monarchy and papacy ultimately culminated in England's separation from the Catholic Church.

England's initial conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism attests to the mutually influential connection between religion and the country's political affairs. The conflict of authority between the monarch and pope further escalated in England when Pope Clement VII's refused to grant Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Desperate to escape a

marriage which had failed to produce an heir, Henry VIII began his efforts to separate his authority and country from papal authority for purely political, not theological, reasons.[8] The greatest indication of Rome's powerful presence in the early administration of Henry's court was Cardinal Wolsey's position as the king's chief political advisor and negotiator. The 1534 Supremacy Act declared Henry the "supreme head" of the Church of England and was closely followed by the Treasons Act which made denial of the king's authority over the Church an act of treason punishable by death.[9]

While the strong anti-Catholic sentiments of Protestant reformer Martin Luther were taking root elsewhere in continental Europe, Christopher Haigh notes that Protestant heretics were actually a small minority in England in the 1530s.[10] Furthermore, Haigh claims that their "real significance has been exaggerated because of their own rejection of Catholicism was, much later and for accidental political reasons, to triumph nationally."[11] Due to the minimal presence of Protestantism in England in the 1530s, it can be assumed that any change in the country's religious affiliation at this time would necessarily be largely politically rather than publicly motivated. Even after the takeover of the Church by the state, its theology and religious practice remained largely unchanged from Catholic tradition under Henry, who remained essentially Catholic and rejected Protestant theology.[12] The Church's true shift to Protestant theology did not occur until his children, Edward VI and later Elizabeth I, assumed the throne.[13]

During the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, Protestantism experienced a period of rapid growth that was made possible in part by the continued spread of the ideas of church reformers like Martin Luther and later John Calvin but also largely due to the support of the monarchy. At this phase of the Reformation, political influence succeeded not only in

effecting the institution of the Church but also played an important role in facilitating the transformation of Christian belief in England. The Uniformity Act of 1559 mandated that citizens attend a church service approved by the state on a weekly basis; furthermore, hearing Roman Mass and reconciling to Rome were prohibited and made punishable offences.[14] This is not to say that Catholicism had been completely abandoned when, in fact, at the local level Catholic resistance remained strong in many areas throughout Elizabeth's reign.[15] However, the English public's increasingly negative change of perception toward Catholicism was evidenced by the failed attempt by Mary, who reigned between Edward and Elizabeth, to restore Catholicism in the Church of England.[16] John Sommerville suggests that, in contrast to her intentions, Mary's attempts to restore the power of the Catholic Church after decades of forced Protestant conformity actually served to further secularize religious practice because "she made the old religion seem foreign."[17] A fanatical Catholic, Mary remained loyal to the Pope, and her extreme efforts to return England to papal authority led many to associate Catholicism with the control of a foreign power rather than an English identity.

The rise of Protestantism played an important role politically because it emphasized the importance and power of individual choice. The Reformation opened the door to the public discussion of new theological ideas, but it also made it possible for the emergence of greater philosophical debate on the function and nature of religion in society as well as its relationship to government. The intertwining of politics and religion hailed from a longstanding medieval Catholic tradition that ensured the power of the aristocracy through the belief in the Divine Right of Kings. A turning point for religious reform, the Protestant Reformation ignited a public movement against the authority and perceived corruption of the Catholic Church. Catholicism dictated the strict institutionalization of religious practice,

centralizing power with the Church and monarchs who believed themselves to be God's chosen rulers. This system of adjoined Church and government severely limited the rights and voice of common citizens through religion. Denied the right to practice religion outside of the Church's established regulations as well as the ability to participate in government, the average citizen was left little control over his own life. Protestantism, and especially Puritanism, sought to free the individual from the religious control of the Catholic Church by claiming a right to a personal, direct relationship to God without the interference of state-controlled clergy or Church-influenced law.

England's formal break from the authority of the Pope and dogmas of Catholicism created an opportunity for new religious interpretations and practices to emerge, and a variety of Protestant denominations gained popularity after the Reformation. McGrath and Darren claim that the Protestants were collectively united in their basic theological belief in Christ as the sole mediator between God and man, observance of biblical scripture, salvation through faith alone, salvation as the gift of God, and God alone as worthy of devotion; however, it is in their understanding of the application of each of these principles that the Protestants were denominationally divided.[18] Protestantism continued to evolve in post-Reformation England through the formation and separation of smaller, more radical sub-sects within these divisions.

After the Reformation, Christian belief continued to evolve in conjunction with political affairs. State-supported Protestantism in England assumed the form of what is now referred to as Anglicanism, and by the end of the sixteenth century, Anglicanism formed a religious middle ground, combining some principles of Protestantism with the ritualistic tradition of Catholicism. Under the reign of Elizabeth, Protestantism experienced its greatest

growth in England, and followers on its extreme end became less tolerant of what they considered the idolatry of Catholicism.[19] The growth of Dissenting Protestant factions, specifically the Puritans, would play a significant role in determining the future course of British government and inspiring movements for political reform. Believing in a strict adherence to Scripture, the Puritans were unsatisfied by the compromise with Catholic tradition that transformed the theological basis of the Church of England under Elizabeth I to reformed Catholicism. They continued to push for further reform in doctrine and ritual throughout the reigns of James I and Charles I and, consequently, laid the foundation for the further secularization of religious belief by connecting democratic ideals with Christianity.[20]

By the seventeenth century, the anti-Catholic ideas of the growing Puritan movement in England came into direct conflict with the hierarchal power of the monarchy, and the relationship between the Church and government became an important point of consideration during the trial of Charles I in 1649. For the Puritans, the Reformation brought greater focus to the necessity of separating the authority of the Church from the power of the state. During this time, Puritan reformers directly connected religious theology with political actions. Religious tensions came to a head during the Civil War, as Puritans accused Charles I and his advisor Archbishop Laud of re-introducing Catholicism through their push for High Anglicanism in the Church of England.[21] For Dissenting Protestants, the state-controlled Church of England, heavily saturated with Catholic ritualistic tradition, served as a substitute for the institution of Catholicism which they initially fought to dispel in the Reformation. They identified the church of Charles I with the corrupting influence of state power over religion.

Furthermore, Charles I's power struggle with Parliament on the basis of his belief in

the Divine Right of Kings only reinforced the Puritans' suspicions about the state's manipulation of religion as a means of obtaining absolute power. The deposing and eventual execution of Charles I marked a significant movement toward the secularization of religious belief by connecting Christianity with the idea of republican government. No longer could any individual claim to be excused from adherence to secular law through God. Instead, the enactment of God's will was beginning to be equated with the practice of the democratic process, a view that would grow considerably during the coming Enlightenment. The formal charges against Charles I read at his trial accuse him of "a wicked design to erect and uphold in himself an unlimited and tyrannical power to rule according to his will, and to overthrow the rights and liberties of the people."[22] When the king demanded that Parliament justify their right to authority over him and that kings answered only to God, Lord President John Bradshaw replied: "We [High Court of Justice] are satisfied with our authority, and it is upon God's authority and the kingdom's."[23] The House of Commons saw the office of king as an obsolete function of government that should be replaced with a more representative body of the people. The new government that they proposed would replace the monarchy and current Parliament with a Parliament of elected officials representing each county.[24] This type of government structure, they believed, would better serve the needs of the country because the people would be able to choose and hold their leaders accountable. However, internal conflicts within the governing Parliament prevented this ambitious transformation from being fully realized and led instead to the restoration of the monarchy, though under Parliamentary control, in 1660.

The trial of Charles I revealed a growing desire within the British population for freedom to practice Christianity without the interference of the government or fear of

persecution; however, their efforts would end with quite the opposite result. Clause 9 of "An Agreement of the People of England" presented to the House of Commons during the trial of Charles I on January 19, 1649 outlines an agenda of limited religious toleration:

> That such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ (however differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly held forth, as aforesaid) shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in, the profession of their faith and exercise of religion according to their consciences in any place...Nevertheless, it is not intended to be hereby provided that this liberty shall necessarily extend to Popery or Prelacy.[25]

However, this program of toleration ended with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 when Charles II restored the Church of England and enacted punitive laws that restricted the rights of religious groups who refused to conform to the Church.[26] Sommerville claims that by the time of the Restoration, religion had been secularized to the point that it "was no longer a power in English government; rather it was a subject of politics. Power over religion was the issue."[27] Rather than freeing religious practice from its entanglement with political affairs as the Puritans had hoped, the interests of the Church ended up more strictly regulated by the restored monarchy.

Dissenting Protestantism & the Rise of Methodism

The authority of the restored monarch could not quash the growth of Protestant ideology, but further fueled reform movements within Dissenting Protestant communities to seek greater power and visibility. Submitting to the Church of England was the only way for an individual to be allowed the full civil rights of an English citizen, and for Dissenting

Protestants the state's infringement of citizens' rights on the basis of religion constituted the greatest affront to social justice.[28] At the time, Dissenting Protestants were allowed to worship how they pleased under the Act of Toleration enacted after the Revolution of 1688, but they were still officially recognized as second-class citizens and limited by a set of discriminatory laws and punishments. Among the restrictions placed on Dissenting Protestants were limitations on their participation in government, the inability to pursue degrees at Oxford and Cambridge, and denial of the right to have legally recognized marriages and burials performed by their own ministers.[29]

Because of the connection between the operations of the Church and state, many of these Dissenting groups found themselves necessarily engaging issues of political reform as well. The growing number of Dissenting denominations rallied in opposition to the government's interference in matters of religion and the rampant corruption of the Church of England which had followed as a result.[30] As Robert Ryan notes, "Their ultimate aim— to change the religious character of the nation by breaking the legal monopoly of the Church— involved a dual effort to free religion from institutional control and to bring it into accord with a broadly liberal political program."[31] Dissenting Protestantism thus added its followers to the ranks of reformers by serving as a catalyst for action in vigorously challenging Parliament to end the government's repression of citizens' civil rights on the basis of religion.

By the early eighteenth century, Dissenting Protestantism in England began to take on a new form as some members of the Church of England shifted from ritualistic Anglicanism to evangelical Methodism. Protestantism, and particularly Calvinism, had appealed largely to Europe's lower classes because of its emphasis on the idea of reward for personal effort

instead of tradition or family ties.[32] Unsatisfied by what they perceived to be the spiritual deficiency of the Church, many members turned to Methodism in search of strong spiritual leadership on which to anchor their lives amidst the uncertainties of the outside world.[33] The original intent of the Methodist evangelical movement, as initiated by John Wesley in the 1730s, was to revive the spiritual center of the Church of England from the inside out.[34] Wesley's hope was that the renewed spirituality of church members would lead to the revival of the institution. As Frederick Dreyer points out, Methodism was not intended to function as a part of the Church but rather as a grassroots revival aimed at revitalization of the traditional institution, an effort propelled largely by its appeal to the disenfranchised middle and lower classes.[35] Eventually, though, the Methodists' difference in theological interpretation resulted in their formal break from the Church.

Politically the separation of the Methodists from the Church of England signified an important milestone in the Dissenting Protestants' fight for religious freedom from the authority of the state; however, theologically Methodism advocated spiritual reformation and served as a significant counterweight to the secularization of religious belief. Advocating an Arminian rather than Anglican-based religious doctrine,[36] the most distinguishing characteristic of Methodism is its emphasis on evangelical conversion.[37] They believed that man was born into sin as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience of God, the original sin; therefore, man was innately wicked and in need of salvation that could only be gained through the grace of God, not "earned by the merits of our works or by the efficacy of the sacraments."[38] The Methodists saw the inherent evil of human nature as the source of the social problems plaguing mankind, and only through faith in God, as outlined in the Bible, could salvation be found. The expression of this faith would be recognizable through the

good works of the individual, including his active effort to bring others to God's salvation. The Methodists' focus on spiritual fervor often led to their association with the term "enthusiasm," though Wesley himself objected to its negative connotation and struggled to disassociate the movement from this label.[39] Frederick Gill points out that the term enthusiasm often implied "a sort of religious madness, a false imagination of being inspired by God"; however, Wesley preferred a less fanatical definition of Methodist enthusiasm as "the perception through faith of spiritual realities."[40] According to Gill, Wesley believed that faith was an emotional experience but that it remained grounded in reason and scripture.[41]

The Methodists believed that increasing the spirituality and outreach of the Church was the answer to man's problems; therefore, they set out to actively reform the world through spiritual revival. They advocated rigorous adherence to the Bible, which they considered to be the authentic instruction of God. Faith in the power of God and commitment to living according to biblical principles would guide the individual toward a life of benevolence, opposing the base evil of human nature. According to the Methodists, the Bible, through God, motivates human compassion and serves as the foundation for social improvement. Personal reflection on biblical teachings causes the individual to recognize his own errors, shame, and their consequences. The result of this personal insight is the compulsion to pay retribution through good deeds, and when applied to the collective public, this compulsive force gains the power to substantially change the character of the nation. Once people overcame their natural inclination for evil through God, society's problems would improve because individuals would be compelled to treat each other better. Christianity, then, was seen by the Methodists as the only means of transforming society because God alone, by request of the individual's free will, could truly change the nature and

behavior of man.

Skeptics and Non-Believers

While the Methodists were working to reform the world through increased religious faith, the secularization of religious belief and practice in England was further encouraged and illustrated in the years following the Civil War by the philosophical works of the Enlightenment. The open rebellion of the Dissenting Protestants opened the door for more radical, non-believing individuals to find their voice in the public debate, and the issue of religion became an important point of consideration in many works of literature which addressed social and political concerns. Further influencing the growth of skepticism was the development of radical philosophies on the Continent which were beginning to further secularize religion by making it subject to, rather than above, rules of logic. In this way, Christian theology itself came under fire as an object of philosophical concern. In the early seventeenth century, Sir Frances Bacon and Thomas Hobbes had proclaimed the potential of scientific process and knowledge to reveal the secrets of nature for human understanding. Many other philosophers attempted to carry this scientific approach one step farther by using rational thinking to not only explain the natural world but the spiritual world as well. Descartes and Pascal in France, Spinoza in Holland, and Locke in England all approached religious beliefs with the need for justification instead of accepting them blindly as true. This view served as the foundation for much of Enlightenment consideration of religion, particularly influencing Hegel, Hume, Voltaire, and Rousseau. During the Enlightenment, emerging interpretations of religion began to shift from considering the most appropriate way of worshipping God to determining how man could know that God actually exists and, if he

does, why evil also exists. These interpretations often concentrated on man, not God, as the primary focus.

Though denial of the Trinity and other specific dissenting beliefs were illegal and punishable offenses under the Blasphemy Act of 1689, many politically active religious dissenters in the late eighteenth century, encouraged by the language and spirit of the French Revolution, began publishing their beliefs "under a decent veneer of orthodoxy."[42] Among these emerging positions of skepticism, ideas of deism (belief that God created the world and then left it to its own devices) and atheism (belief that God does not exist) in particular increased in print circulation. Both deist and atheist writers followed in the Dissenters' tradition of challenging the authority of the government; however, their rejection of traditional Christian beliefs, Anglican or Protestant, forged a new path for political reform in which not only the Church but also religious theology itself was seen as a tool for state control.

Deism supported the idea of the existence of God; however, the deist God was not the God of traditional Christianity. Deists like Thomas Paine, Matthew Tindal, Voltaire, and Rousseau rejected all claims to the supernatural revelation of God to man, believing instead that God was uninvolved in the affairs of the world. Drawing from the argument of natural theology, deists acknowledged a natural order or law governing the universe. This order, they surmised, was the direct design of God; therefore, because God created this system through his perfect knowledge and power, then He would have no need to intervene in its operation.[43] The individual, then, should not look for divine intercession for the answer to his problems but to the resources of his own reason. Furthermore, the institutions and clergy of organized religion were considered unnecessary because authority of God was already at

work through nature.

Similarly, atheists like d'Holbach and Helvétius rejected Christianity's assertions of a guiding, supernatural presence in the universe in favor of the self-sufficient power of human reason and natural law. Unlike deists, atheists did not recognize natural law as proof or representative of the existence of God. Because they completely denied the possibility of God's existence, they looked to define a supreme system of order within the natural rather than spiritual world; therefore, not just the church but religion itself was viewed as irrational and unnecessary.

The emphasis on the irrelevance of religious institutions by deists and atheists turned their arguments against religion to one of political critique. The widespread movement of reform in France ushered in with the Revolution provided a stimulus for debate on the causes of political injustice in England as well, and religion became a major point of concern for many reformers in both countries because of the government's traditional use of Christian theology to sustain its power. For many Enlightenment philosophers, a rational evaluation of the conditions created by the merging of the interests of religion and government revealed a system of injustice and oppression and served as proof of the absence of a caring God. In Système de la nature, French philosophe d'Holbach claims that "many incredulous beings, many theists, are to be met with in those countries where freedom of opinion reigns;... atheists, as they are termed, will be found in those countries where superstition, backed by the sovereign authority, most enforces the ponderosity of its yoke."[44] In this statement d'Holbach claims that when allowed the free exercise of reason, the individual's mind naturally gravitates toward skepticism, but subjected to the oppressive system of an irrational government, the discerning mind loses all faith in the possibility of finding truth in the

existence of God.

The later eighteenth century's move toward industrialization signaled a shift in England's economic and social landscape which exposed serious political weaknesses for reformers to criticize, particularly through secularization. Economically, the development of new technologies led to increased profits and expanded trade markets for the country; however, these benefits were often afforded only to the upper and middle classes at the expense of the lower classes. Where individuals once had common rights to the use of land, they became hired laborers for the landowner's direct benefit.[45] This created a large population of laborers for hire, but wages were low for industrial and agricultural workers, especially in comparison to the growing wealth of the middle and upper classes.[46] As the gap between the social classes widened, social unrest grew, and the government struggled to find a solution to facilitate economic growth while stifling social dissent, which highlighted its systematic flaws and lack of competence in adjusting to the country's changing needs.[47] Rather than taking action to ease the burdens of the poor, which were compounded by low wages, deplorable working conditions, and largely squalid living conditions, Parliament and King George III issued a series of laws from 1793-1819 which further restricted the rights of workers and censored public outcry for reform. Among the rights denied were the organization of trade unions, habeas corpus, public meetings, freedom of press, and anonymous publication of newspapers; meanwhile, the punishment for the publication of material critical of the government became more severe and the power of bureaucratic institutions to control the lives of citizens increased.[48]

With the French Revolution's outcries for political reform in the background, the combination of public injustice and governmental repression in England during this time

created a fertile breeding ground for philosophical and theological debate. While the Methodists and other evangelical Protestant denominations turned to God, a new generation of writers and philosophers emerged in the late eighteenth century whose religious, social, and political perceptions were inspired largely by the progressive ideas of the Enlightenment. These Romantic writers hoped to bring reform through the power of the human mind rather than God. Modern scholars generally classify the writers and literary works with a strong emphasis on the importance of passions and imagination in addition to reason emerging roughly between the 1780s and 1830s as participating in the Romantic Movement; however, the term was not one which these writers used to refer to themselves or to commonly define their individual literary and intellectual efforts. Valuing reason and human potential, they found inspiration in the spirit of social consciousness prominent during the French Revolution, often founded in the works of Rousseau, Godwin, Paine, Wollstonecraft and others. Intimate with popular political reformers through a close network of intellectual circles, the Romantic poets engaged in the mutual exchange of political, social, and religious ideas.

Romanticism developed in part out of the Enlightenment period in the evolution of religious thought in England, rebelling against not only the institutions and formal practice of religion, but also, for some, the belief in the existence of God himself. For many, the rebellion of the French against the system of repression created by the interconnected interests of the monarchy and the Catholic Church proved man's innate desire to pursue liberty and resist tyranny in any form. For them, Christian institutions and ideology became symbols of an outdated mode of tyranny, and the future progress of mankind depended on developing a free-thinking citizenry rather than the intervention of a supernatural God.

Romanticism, then, embodied the process of secularizing religious belief by transferring the traditional power and authority of the Church and God to man or the natural world, although, as will be seen later, each poet had his own interpretation of this relationship. Frequently in Romantic literature, man is portrayed as his own source of failure or success with little to no intervention by God. The power of individual choice, as opposed to the will of a God figure, is commonly advocated as man's only hope for happiness and progress, and religious institutions typically serve as a source of evil and deception which contribute to man's downfall by distracting him from reality.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* provides an excellent example of the way in which the Romantics manipulated both philosophy and Christian theology to support their political agendas. Although Shelley's story of creation gone awry is popularly interpreted by modern readers as a warning against man's desire to usurp the power of God, a closer inspection of the text through the lens of its primary influences, William Godwin's philosophy and Romantic ideology, reveals a world which denies the existence of God and thrives or fails by the hand of man alone. By presenting an image of the world rife with injustice, Shelley's novel argues for the value of morality, individual choice, and personal relationships over institutions and dogmas.

Conclusion

Religion served as an important component of political reform in England because of the Church's traditional relationship to government. Even after the Church became subject to state authority, the manipulation of Christian belief remained an effective tool for supporting reformist agendas. The interconnected interests of the Church and state made the reform of

one a necessary component in the reform of the other, and the secularization of Christian belief resulted as an attempt to manipulate religion for political reform. As an institution of the state, the Church and its dogmas were seen by advocates of reform as representatives of all that was wrong with the state and served as a popular target for criticism. Christian belief became increasingly secularized by reformers as they focused more on the conditions affecting man's earthly rather than spiritual life. With each successive reform movement, Christian belief progressively strengthened its emphasis on individual rights and power, and by the eighteenth century the emergence of open arguments for atheism signified the public use of fully secularized religious perspectives. Mary Shelley's treatment of religion in her 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* evolves directly from this tradition of secularizing religion to support political reform. The following two chapters will explore the specific lines of thought within England's larger tradition of religious secularization that directly influenced the religious ideas presented in *Frankenstein*, while the final two chapters will consider how these lines of thought are integrated into the text itself.

II. WILLIAM GODWIN'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

William Godwin's philosophy reflects the secularized belief in religion's negative impact on society that emerged with the Enlightenment and, later, with Romanticism. Godwin directly participated in England's tradition of politically motivated religious secularization by opposing government and religious institutions' control over the liberty of the individual. His philosophy advocates the significance of personal choices rooted in an overriding principle of morality because he sees the progress of society as being linked to the unlimited exercise of its individual members. Godwin's emphasis on the necessity of each individual's free and rational exercise of his mind led him to reject any institution or belief system which placed limitations on thoughts and choices, specifically government and religion. However, he carries his argument one step further by questioning not only the reach of the power of government and the Church but also the validity of Christianity itself.

The beginning of the French Revolution provided a congenial atmosphere for the social acceptance of Godwin's progressive, atheistic ideas. In 1793, at the age of 36, Godwin entered the tumultuous public debate on the state of politics and social reform with the publication of *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. His book earned him widespread recognition in intellectual circles, garnering the praise and admiration of the Revolution's supporters and disrepute among its detractors. However, the unfortunate timing of the book's publication contributed more to its negative criticism than popularity. Only a short time before Godwin's publication of *Political Justice*, Louis XVI had been executed and

England and France had declared war on each other.[49] Uneasiness about the spread of revolutionary ideas in Britain began to grow. As the French Revolution spiraled into chaos and terror, activists like Godwin, who had initially been outspoken advocates of the Revolution, not only fell out of vogue in British society but were looked upon by many as revolutionaries themselves or, at least, the instigators of the spread of social instability.[50] His ideas were largely criticized as impractical, and just as quickly as he had rose to fame, Godwin was largely forgotten by all but his most devoted followers. Long after his fall from public favor, Godwin's philosophy retained readership and respect among Romantic circles. While Godwin drew inspiration for his philosophy (and at times borrowed directly) from the ideas of the Enlightenment, his manipulation and application of them influenced the development of many of Romanticism's greatest writers, including P.B. Shelley, Byron, Southey, Coleridge, and especially his daughter Mary Shelley.

Political Justice

The ultimate manifesto of Godwin's moral philosophy is his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. *Political Justice* served not only as a criticism of the government and society in Godwin's day but also as an attempt to provide guidance for the enhancement of mankind. Through this work, he hoped to correct the injustices of society and government by changing the perceptions of individual citizens. Godwin's focus on reform, primarily of the educated classes, through education and culture rather than economic or political resources distinguishes his position from other reformers, like Thomas Paine, who wanted to motivate the lower classes to immediate action.[51] Godwin pinned his assumption of the power of literature on his unyielding belief in the predominance of truth. He claims that

when presented with truth, the reasonable mind will abandon its erroneous beliefs in favor of truth, stating that "if there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind."[52] The practical result would then be to question the nature of the world in which he lives, and the subsequent act of writing thus becomes a mode of social activism. As Godwin claims, "if politics be a science, the investigation of truth must be the means of unfolding it."[53]

For Godwin, literature played an active role in the improvement of society because it allowed the reader to compare his ideas with another's and discover any errors in his judgment. He explains his opinion of the function of literature in *Political Justice*:

> the human mind is strongly infected with prejudice and mistake. The various opinions prevailing in different countries and among different classes of men upon the same subject are almost innumerable; and yet of all these opinions only one can be true. Now the effectual way for extirpating these prejudices and mistakes seems to be literature.[54]

According to Godwin, literature is a tool for developing and expanding the perceptions of the mind not through didactic pedantry but by provoking thought. This became the goal of all of his works, and he hoped to inspire others to think for themselves rather than to blindly accept the views upheld by tradition.

In terms of the larger literary picture, it is difficult to classify Godwin. The distinction between Rationalism and Romanticism in the late eighteenth century is difficult to define, and Godwin's philosophy embraces elements of both without completely conforming to either. The trend in scholarship has been too quick to classify Godwin as an absolute Rationalist. Upon closer examination, Godwin's philosophy reflects a utopian vision

constructed around ideas borrowed from both Enlightenment and Romantic ideologies. He maintains a perception of the world that is distinctly his own and constructs his philosophy by incorporating established ideas that best support his point of view. While his focus on reason is rooted firmly in the Enlightenment, Godwin participates equally in the dialogue of Romantic ideas about the power of the individual.

A false image of Godwin's philosophy as "reason dehumanized" and "cool insanities" has become generally accepted, and only recently have a few scholars taken interest in revaluating his work.[55] D.H. Monro asserts that Godwin "wavered between the two schools of thought" and that the problem of whether morals were based in reason or feeling "worried him a good deal."[56] Following in the tradition of Enlightenment philosophers (particularly d'Holbach, Hume, Rousseau, and Paine), he clings to the belief in the unlimited potential of the human mind; however, he acknowledges that the mind can never be completely isolated from the passions. The second and third revisions to *Political Justice* were made largely to clarify his position on the influence of emotions on man's choices.[57] Scholars generally attribute Godwin's increased emphasis on the affections as a result of his relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft[58] but, as Rodway notes, the core of Godwin's philosophy remains unchanged throughout his career.[59] In the 2nd edition of *Political Justice* published in 1796, Godwin clarifies his view of the relationship between reason and emotion:

> Passion [defined as the determination of mind with which an object is pursued] is so far from being incompatible with reason, that it is inseparable from it. Virtue, sincerity, justice, and all those principles which are begotten and cherished in us by a due exercise of reason, will never be very strenuously

> espoused, till they are ardently loved....In the second sense our passions are ambition, avarice, the love of power, the love of fame, envy, revenge, and innumerable others....all those notions by which we are accustomed to ascribe to any thing a value which it does not really possess, should be eradicated without mercy.[60]

According to Godwin, men cannot escape their feelings, but through the development of their reason, they have the ability to control their emotions in context with both reality and what is morally acceptable.

Rodway claims that few of Godwin's ideas can be considered original because he draws so heavily from the works of other philosophers, including Hume, Rousseau, Spinoza, Paine, and Locke to name a few. Yet, the final doctrine to emerge from his amalgamation of thoughts assumes a distinctive life of its own. The view advocated by Godwin is optimistic about the future but highly critical of the present, celebratory of the individual but insistent on the necessity of social responsibility. While he is most often considered a political activist, recent re-evaluations of his texts have approached him first and foremost as a moralist whose political and social criticism flowed as a natural extension of his beliefs.[61] Monro characterizes Godwin's philosophy: "Like Plato and Rousseau, Godwin is concerned, not with political programme, but with an analysis of society and, above all, of the causes of 'prejudice', or lack of insight. Regarded in this light, his anarchism, though no doubt inadequate, is not obviously absurd or lacking in reality."[62]

Social Origins of Evil

Like other social activists at the end of the eighteenth century, Godwin championed the idea of man's liberty from repressive and tyrannous governments; however, he pushed his argument beyond Paine's rights of man and Rousseau's social contract to a stance of extreme individualism combined with social responsibility. For him the only absolute ruling principle in life is truth, and truth only can be reached through the individual's reason. Godwin claims that man's actions originate in his opinions and are regulated by reason; therefore, the key to lasting social reform was the self-consciousness and control of each individual through the development of reason, without imposed institutional regulation. He firmly believed that man is an innately good and social creature, and it is only through his experiences in society that he becomes evil. At the same time, he stresses that it is man's duty, not a mere responsibility, to always act in support of the greater good. Godwin argues:

> The moral qualities of men are the produce of the impressions made upon them, and that there is no instance of an original propensity to evil. Our virtues and vices may be traced to the incidents which make the history of our lives, and if these incidents could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be extirpated from the world...the man who is anxious for the benefit of his species, will willingly devote a portion of his activity to an enquiry into the mode of effecting this extirpation in whole or in part, an enquiry which promises much, if it do not in reality promise every thing.[63]

Contrary to the teachings of his Calvinist background that man is born in need of salvation, Godwin claims that "we bring into the world with us no innate principles: consequently we are neither virtuous or vicious as we first come into existence."[64] He believes that every perception is learned through experience; therefore, it is through negative forces in society

that man is corrupted. Consequently, the well-being of society hinges on the individual's ability to exercise his reason to make morally responsible decisions rather than his reliance on an imposed set of laws and institutions based on punishment and coercion.

The greatest battle to be won, then, is not for the freedom of man's soul from the grasp of evil spirits but of his mind from prejudice and inactivity. He writes:

> What is it that the society is bound to do for its members? Every thing that it can contribute to their welfare. But the nature of their welfare is defined by the nature of the mind. That will most contribute to it, which enlarges the understanding, supplies incitements to virtue, fills us with a generous consciousness of our independence, and carefully removes whatever can impede our exertions.[65]

Freeing the mind from all bonds limiting the exercise of reason would allow the individual to experience ultimate pleasure and power because it would bring him closer to the discovery of truth. In *Political Justice* Godwin claims, "such would be the unconstrained concord of its members, in a state where every individual within the society, and every neighbour without, was capable of listening with sobriety to the dictates of reason."[66] Godwin disputes the benefit of "positive institutions," such as government, religion, and law, created to "furnish me with an additional motive to the practice of virtue or right, and to inform my understanding as to what actions are right and what actions are wrong."[67] Rather than providing the mind of the individual guidance toward truth and virtue, Godwin claims that these institutions control the mind and actions of the individual through "hope for reward" or "fear of punishment" instead of reason.[68]

While many of his philosophical predecessors had looked to solve man's problems

through the establishment of government and religion, Godwin argues that all such regulatory institutions impede, rather than assist, welfare and progress. However, he does not consider his position an advocation of anarchy, of which he disapproved and equated with chaos. He writes:

> It [government] gives substance and permanence to our errors. It reverses the genuine propensities / of mind, and, instead of suffering us to look forward, teaches us to look backward for perfection. It prompts us to seek the public welfare, not in innovation and improvement, but in a timid reverence for the decisions of our ancestors, as if it were the nature of mind always to degenerate, and never to advance.[69]

According to Godwin, any institution that impedes or prejudices the development of the individual's thoughts must necessarily be viewed as evil and stands in opposition to the general welfare of society. Among these perceived evils, the vilest in Godwin's opinion were the three pillars of British culture: government, law, and especially religion. Unlike the Enlightenment philosophers Montesquieu, Diderot, and Voltaire, Godwin is not content to believe that government in any form, even democratic, is the solution to man's problems. In fact, he believes quite the opposite to be true, that government and religious institutions restrict man's progress because they limit his ability to think for himself. He refutes the logical basis of the claim that government is necessary for the oversight of the population on two counts. First, government lacks the wisdom to guide citizens to truth:

> The acts which go on under the name of the society, are really the acts now of one single person and now of another. The men who by turns usurp the name of the whole, perpetually act under the pressure of incumbrances that deprive

> them of their true energy. They are fettered by the prejudices, the humours, the weakness and the vice of those with whom they act; and, after a thousand sacrifices to these contemptible interests, their project comes out at last distorted in every joint, abortive and monstrous.[70]

According to Godwin, a single or group of individuals can not justly act in place of the whole because each member is flawed with the natural tendencies of human nature. Secondly, he points out that in connection with this lack of wisdom government fails to be useful in "illuminating the understanding," which he believes is the source of all opinions and actions.[71] Institutions function on the premise of generalized guidelines that are applicable to all people and situations, and according to Godwin generalizations are useless because they fail to take into account individual differences of perception and interpretation.

Godwin reserves some of his most scathing criticism for the Church, claiming that "The most malicious enemy of mankind could not have invented a scheme more destructive of their true happiness, than that of hiring at the expence of the state a body of men, whose business it should seem to be to dupe their contemporaries into the practice of virtue."[72] He identifies religion as one of the most injurious forces of society because in following it "men are fettered in the outset by having a code of propositions put into their hands, in a conformity to which all their enquiries must terminate."[73] Religious conformity coerces the individual to adopt a predetermined set of perceptions while negating his individual judgment. In "Of Religion," he goes even further with his criticism, saying that Christianity "so far as it is full of the most dreadful denunciations, it makes men slaves, and it makes them wretched."[74] According to Godwin, an individual's reliance on religious doctrine as the foundation for his decision-making sets him on a path of prejudice because religion stands in

opposition to truth.

Godwin's work focuses on exploring the causes and remedies of the social issues highlighted by the French Revolution, especially reflecting the atheistic belief in the negative impact of religion on society. Godwin tends to follow the trend among atheistic Enlightenment philosophers of questioning not only the reach of the power of government and the Church but also the validity of Christianity itself. In *Political Justice*, Godwin, himself an admitted atheist, claims that religion in any form is a "system of blind submission and abject hypocrisy."[75] He had rebelled against his own religious roots and left behind a career as a Calvinist minister to become a writer.[76] In "Of Religion" he recalls the guiding tenet of his Calvinist past, quoting Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." He points out the lasting imprint that these words left on the formation of his rebellious beliefs, saying, "I was deeply impressed with the complexity of human motive, and the impossibility that a man should know, that evidence alone governed him in his conclusions."[77] To him it was not enough to simply damn the entire human race without first understanding what made men evil. This question led him to a fruitless examination of the basic principles of Christianity for a rational explanation of the nature of man. Unsatisfied by the rationale explained in Christian doctrine, Godwin shifted his focus to philosophy, and it is his study of other radical philosophers, Rousseau, Helvétius, and Baron d'Holbach in particular, which greatly influenced his change of religious perception.[78] He concluded that the miserable condition of man's existence in reality failed to uphold Christianity's idea of an all-powerful, loving God; furthermore, he became convinced that God did not exist, and man was responsible for his own destiny. He maintained his belief that conceptsHe concluded that if God does exist, then he must be cruel

and unjust for creating man to be miserably condemned, or if God does not exist, then man must be responsible for his own destiny. Concepts of good and evil remained central to directing the course of man's life; however, Godwin sought to identify these forces through concrete proofs instead of by a blind faith in the mystical world of Christianity.

Although he had lost his faith in the existence of God, Godwin carried forward some of the perceptions of his Dissenting Protestantism, particularly an aversion to government authority and a belief in the necessity of private judgment.[79] In *Political Justice*, Godwin maps out his perception of the state of society as well as the actions necessary for its improvement. He views man as a social creature whose duty is to be beneficial to his fellow man and sees the redemption of society in its individual members' unlimited exercise of reason. This emphasis on the importance of the individual's ability to make decisions without the interference of government authority directly recalls the Dissenting Protestants' argument for freedom from state control. On a more fundamental level, it invokes a premise that defines Protestantism, that of personal and inner experiences opposed to institutional authority. But unlike the Dissenting Protestants, Godwin places his trust in man rather than God.

Morality as Basis for Social Reform

Because Godwin had rejected the option of an omnipotent God controlling the universe and a religious doctrine that could define good and evil in terms of absolutes, he surmised that the cause and solution to all evil must begin and end with man. At the heart of Godwin's argument is the belief in the necessity of moral conviction as the guide of man's reason. In the 1796 edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin defines morality as

> that system of conduct which is determined by a consideration of the greatest general good: he is entitled to the highest moral approbation whose conduct is, in the greatest number of instances, or in the most momentous instances, governed by views of benevolence, and made subservient to public utility.[80]

Therefore the advancement of society, which depends on the morality of the individual, depends also on the individual's endeavor to always be mindful of the needs of his fellow man. To enact change within society, Godwin claims a change must first take place within the individual that will stimulate the exercise of his reason toward moral and social responsibility.

This emphasis on the necessity of the development of the individual departs from the Enlightenment ideal of a common human nature in favor of the Romantic self. Ian Ward concludes that by the final revision of *Political Justice*, "radicalism, for Godwin, had become radicalism of the heart and of the imagination."[81] Abrams describes Romanticism's focus on the development of individual consciousness: "the history of mankind, as well as the history of the reflective individual, was conceived ... as a process of the self-formation, or self-education, of the mind and moral being of man from the dawn of consciousness to the stage of full maturity."[82] For Godwin in particular, the welfare of the collective society depends entirely on the development of the self-awareness of individuals. True social reform must begin with the education and improvement of each citizen's mind.

Godwin contributes to the Romantic secularization of religion by advocating the moral principles of Christianity as separate and more important than ritual practice. His focus on morality elevates his argument from one of material considerations to one of a deeper consideration of human existence, which Christianity considers the spiritual realm.

For Godwin, man's purpose is not spiritual but rather defined in terms of his moral capacity. He rejects the possibility of an outside force, let alone a mystical being or God, greater than the human mind, essentially "humanizing the divine" by assigning man the traditional power of God.[83] For Godwin, the rational human mind is omnipotent. He remains consistent in his view of the power to influence an individual's destiny as a strictly human, not a supernaturally divine, capability. This point of view completely denies the possibility of a divine will or Calvinistic predestination because it transfers the role of God to man. He reminds the reader that man brings about his own prosperity or destruction as a consequence of the decisions he makes.

Because all decisions must be based on what is morally correct, the factors which contribute to the formation of man's moral convictions, then, serve a significant role in the individual's search for truth. If the foundation of man's morality, or reasoning, is faulty, then truth can not be found. To Godwin, goodness is an innate quality of humanity, while the origin of evil is the acceptance of false perceptions. He asserts in *Political Justice* that the mind of man is highly susceptible to prejudice through the influence of society, and it is through this prejudice that evil begins. He states that "the moral characters of men originate in their perceptions."[84] That is, men base their actions and decisions on their understanding of what is right or wrong, socially acceptable or unacceptable. The problem, Godwin claims, is that more often than not people are too content with accepting the status quo instead of gathering all of the facts in a given situation and fully recognizing and weighing the consequences of each option before them. Godwin identifies three types of decisions: involuntary (actions without foresight or which are contrary to our desires), imperfectly voluntary (habits), and voluntary (motivated by foresight and choice to accept certain

consequences). Of these, a life governed through man's voluntary actions alone represents the highest aspiration of the individual because it fulfills his utmost potential as a creature of reason. Imperfect or incomplete knowledge leads to prejudices which negatively affect man's ability to reason, however, and ultimately leads to his downfall if not corrected.[85] According to Godwin, an individual's happiness depends on his capacity to make the best-informed decisions. Without knowledge of facts and consequences, an individual bases his opinions, and consequently his actions, on prejudice not truth.

Furthermore, Godwin claims that the motive of man's actions is equally important as its outcome in measuring its moral virtue and benefit to society. From a Christian perspective, all actions, good and bad, occur under the control of God; therefore, even bad situations bring about some greater good in the end. Godwin clearly does not agree. Monro notes that "Godwin has no faith in lucky accidents."[86] He admits that on certain occasions evil actions may result in good consequences, but he excuses this as an exception rather than the rule. Even if such a situation should occur, Godwin denies that such an action can be considered virtuous. "Virtue," he claims, "considered as the quality of an intelligent being, depends upon the disposition with which the action is accompanied."[87] Because all human actions originate in the perceptions of the individual, the welfare of society can only be preserved if its individual citizens consciously choose to act on behalf of the greater good. True progress must bring man closer to the attainment of truth, but social changes that result from the wrong intentions impede progress. Here Godwin comes full circle in his philosophy by linking progress of all mankind back with individual morality.

However, Godwin does not advocate self-serving egoism, and in his ideal world it is not enough for an individual to only do what is best for himself. "Society is nothing more

than an aggregation of individuals," Godwin writes. "Its claims and its duties must be the aggregate of their claims and duties, the one no more precarious and arbitrary than the other."[88] He further claims it is the duty of each individual to be a positive contributor toward the general welfare of all mankind, exercising a principle of universal benevolence.[89] The individual's first and greatest moral duty is to preserve the general welfare. According to Godwin, the individual best serves himself when he sets aside his personal feelings in favor of the needs of society. Monro sums up Godwin's point of view:

> Man could only attain to the general happiness by his own efforts: and it was necessary first that he should want to attain it, and secondly, that he should discover and take careful note of the relations between phenomena, including the phenomena of his own mind.[90]

Godwin thus becomes an activist for social reform by encouraging others to become aware of the impact of their decisions on society as a whole, and *Political Justice* serves as his guidebook for humanity. There, he attempts to prove that the free-thinking individual is the foundation of an ideal society, so the development of an entire population of free-thinking individuals should be any state's ultimate goal. At the same time, he reminds the reader that the individual's purpose in life is directly and continuously identified by his participation in society. According to Godwin, an individual can not thrive when isolated from society because he will cease to be useful, a trait he identifies as the individual's utility.

The duty to society emphasized here reflects the foundational principle of Christianity, but Godwin's idea of benevolence is more specific in its application. The universal love recommended by Christianity has no limits to its application; however, Godwin's benevolence only qualifies actions which contribute to the happiness of the

greatest number of people as virtuous. An action which helps only one person would not be considered as desirable as one that would be beneficial to many. Furthermore, Godwin would consider an action to be immoral if, in assisting the one, the greater welfare of society is neglected.

The most widely recognized illustration of the application of Godwin's universal benevolence is the example he gives of the Archbishop Fénelon[91] and the chambermaid in a fire.[92] According to Godwin, it would be better to save the archbishop instead of the chambermaid from the fire, if forced to choose between the two, because ultimately the clergyman had the potential to affect a greater number of people. He claims:

> We are not connected with one or two percipient beings, but with a society, a nation, and in some sense with the whole family of mankind. Of consequence that life ought to be preferred which will be most conducive to the general good. In saving the life of Fenelon...I should be promoting the benefit of thousands....The life of Fenelon was really preferable to that of the chambermaid....It would have been just in the chambermaid to have preferred the archbishop to herself. To have done otherwise would have been a breach of justice. Supposing the chambermaid had been my wife, my mother or my benefactor. This would not alter the truth of the proposition. The life of Fenelon would still be more valuable...and justice, pure, unadulterated justice, would still have preferred that which was most valuable.[93]

Conventional understanding would accept the individual's actions as morally justified as long as he did attempt to save someone; whom he chose to save would be irrelevant in judging the virtue of the action. Godwin rejects such a generalized approach and claims that

specific intentions and consequences are important considerations of morality. "An action, though done with the best intention in the world," Godwin states, "may have nothing in it of the nature of virtue. In reality the most essential part of virtue consists in the incessantly seeking to inform to inform ourselves more accurately upon the subject of utility and right."[94] In the case of this example, the decision to save the archbishop would be the more virtuous choice because it also takes into consideration the interests of society as a whole.

On the surface Godwin's example suggests that personal and social interests, or love and reason, would be in conflict when an individual is expected to sacrifice the life of a relative for a stranger. When faced with the choice, it seems that Godwin claims that the individual should side with the perceived good of society, but it was not his intention to imply that personal feelings or relationships were unimportant. In his revisions to *Political Justice*, Godwin changed mother to father, brother, and valet to help resolve the perceived conflict between love and reason and clarify his meaning in this example.[95] As Monro notes, Godwin does not intend for there to be a simple solution to the fire problem because it is by nature evil: "If you have to choose between the individual and society you may have to choose society; but we cannot remain satisfied with a society that presents us with the choice."[96] Godwin never denies the fact that choosing Fénelon over a loved one would be a difficult and painful choice, nor does he claim that it is a perfect solution. He only suggests that it is the best possible choice out of the options presented in such a terrible situation. To him, the inherent injustice created by this example serves as proof of society's room for reform.

Although Godwin advocates saving the archbishop rather than a member of his family if the situation were to present itself, his fire example does not imply that Fénelon

possesses any physical quality that makes him superior to the other individual. He simply has the potential to be more useful to society as a whole. Godwin also refutes the assumption of a natural hierarchy within the human race based on physical attributes, as was claimed by the advocates of slavery; instead, he argues for the inherent equality of all men due to their shared ability to reason. In book II of *Political Justice*, he dedicates all of chapter four to rationalizing the equality of men. In this chapter he observes

> We are partakers of a common nature,/ [*sic*] and the same causes that contribute to the benefit of one contribute to the benefit of another. Our senses and faculties are of the same denomination. Our pleasures and pains will therefore be the same. We are all of us endowed with reason, able to compare, to judge and to infer. The improvement therefore which is to be desired for the one is to be desired for the other.[97]

While Godwin recognizes that all men possess fundamental similarities, he does not advocate that everyone deserves to be treated equally. Godwin further elaborates on his position: "The treatment to which men are entitled is to be measured by their merits and their virtues. That country would not be the seat of wisdom and reason, where the benefactor of his species was considered in the same point of view as their enemy."[98] He acknowledges that the social ranking of individuals based on the value of their contribution to the general welfare is in some sense an exception to his statement about the equality of all human beings. Godwin's purpose in mentioning this point, then, is both to acknowledge the reality of humanity's condition as well as suggest that the same potential and opportunity for elevating status in society are available to all individuals.

Human Perfectibility

Godwin's theory of the perfectibility of man outlined in *Political Justice* evolves directly from his idea of the primary role of the mind in the progress of society.[99] "There is no characteristic of man, which seems at present at least so eminently to distinguish him, or to be of so much importance in every branch of moral science, as his perfectibility," he writes.[100] Godwin does not mean that man can achieve perfection, as is commonly misinterpreted, but rather that human beings are capable of continuous improvement through the development of the mind. He draws this conclusion by reflecting on the historical development of civilized society.[101] A comparison of the capabilities of the human race during his lifetime to that of the past, including the developments of language and writing, confirms for Godwin the unlimited potential of the mind to transform society. As long as men have the ability to think, they will be capable of improving their lives.

For Godwin, scientific advancement in particular seemed to prove the unbounded potential that could result from the exercise of the human mind. Unlike Christianity, which Godwin claimed provided only a "pretended solution" to understanding the world, advancements in science allowed man to find verifiable answers to the mysteries of the natural world.[102] Through the cycle of scientific trial and error, Godwin argued, old modes of thinking could be discarded and progress achieved. Greater knowledge of the laws and elements of the natural world would help man to better understand his role in the larger picture and afford him greater control over his life. For Godwin, the evidence of man's progress could be seen all around him. In "Of Religion," he points out the achievements that symbolize the greatness of man's mind:

> our gardens and our fields, our woods and our plantations, our canals, artificial lakes, aqueducts and bridges, our palaces and our cities. All these are the works of man: yet 'What have we, that we have not received?'[103] Enter a mighty library, the Bodleian, or the Vatican: what thoughts, investigations, science, records, patient speculations, and inventions, are laid up upon these shelves. To what wonderful heights has human virtue been carried![104]

According to Godwin, man's increasing knowledge and abilities rendered the Christianity obsolete in the modern age.

Conclusion

Although he no longer experienced widespread popularity by the start of the nineteenth century, Godwin continued writing and publishing until his death in 1836. True to his self-assured (and stubborn) nature, Godwin never second-guessed the importance of his work or acknowledged shortfalls in his career. Throughout his later years, Godwin was frustrated, but undaunted, by his lagging popularity. In his last letter to his daughter Mary before his death, Godwin instructed her to publish his final essay, "The Genius of Christianity Unveiled: In a Series of Essays," projecting that it "might be worth one thousand pounds," even though at the height of his popularity he had never received as much for a single work.[105] In this same letter, he further reflects on his career as a philosopher: "I regard myself, with my view of things, as leaving a most valuable legacy to my species."[106] He maintained a steadfast belief in the power of literature to open the eyes of society to truth, and his perseverance in continuing to publish his work serves as proof of his confidence in

the importance of his ideas. He never recovered the prominence which he enjoyed after the first publication of *Political Justice*, but never lost confidence that his work would have a lasting impact.

While Godwin's own writing fell largely fallen into literary obscurity, his greater and far longer lasting contribution to literature has been his significant influence on a number of prominent poets and authors, particularly Romantic writers and specifically his daughter Mary Shelley. Shelley firmly grounds the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* in the principles of Godwin's philosophy, emphasizing the significant power of morality, individual choice, social responsibility, and even atheism. As one of the most prominent Romantic works in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, *Frankenstein* has ensured the survival of Godwin's ideas over time, but recognition of his ideas and their significance to the overall meaning of the text by modern readers has waned in connection to the philosopher's loss of popularity. Still, the depth of Godwin's influence on Shelley's novel, particularly regarding its portrayal of religion, can not be ignored if readers hope to come close to recognizing the author's intended message.

III. ROMANTICISM AND RELIGION

Mary Shelley's interaction with several Romantic poets, many of whom shared her father's atheistic vision, and their ideas further influenced her treatment of religion in *Frankenstein*. Shelley also drew from the ideas of many first-generation Romantic writers, like Coleridge, Charles and Mary Lamb, and Hazlitt, who were frequent guests of the Godwin house and whose works she became acquainted with during childhood.[107] When she began writing *Frankenstein* in the summer of 1816, Shelley was living with Percy Shelley and was in continuous association with Lord Byron. The conversations between Percy Shelley, Byron, Mary, and the other visitors to their residences on Lake Geneva in 1816 certainly effected the literature produced by all of the writers present during this time. It was no coincidence that during this stay in Switzerland Byron wrote the Shelley-influenced third canto of Childe Harold, and Percy Shelley, in turn, composed "Mont Blanc" with a touch of Byronic darkness. Shelley's claim in the 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein* that she got the idea for her story from a conversation between Byron and Percy concerning the experiments of Erasmus Darwin serves as evidence of the community's influence on her novel, but the depth of *Frankenstein*'s Romantic roots runs much deeper than this.

Shelley's immersion in the interchange of Romantic ideas and viewpoints had a definite impact on the presentation of religious ideas in her novel. In tracing the philosophical interpretations of religion which influenced Mary Shelley's representation of religion in *Frankenstein*, it is important to consider the perceptions of the Romantic generation in which she participated. Many radical Romantics advocate a belief in the power

of the individual, directly inspired by Enlightenment philosophy. Under the influence of revolutionary philosophers like William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and Rousseau, Romanticism assumed an air of social consciousness and the works emerging at this time were often in response to the writers' perceived observance of injustice and oppression caused by the intertwined systems of religion and government. Like Godwin and other revolutionary writers, the Romantics' consideration of the sources of social injustice often leads them to issues of religious practice and belief. Many Romantics advocate atheistic or unorthodox interpretations of religion, secularizing elements of Christian doctrine and tradition, to help illustrate their ideas about political reform. In many instances, the poets' secularization of religion or religious imagery serves as a form of political critique that highlights the government-controlled forces working against the freedom of the individual. The secularization of religion in Romanticism, as in *Frankenstein*, often represents the efforts of the Romantic writers to both criticize the actions (or in some instances inaction) of the government while offering a new vision of human potential.

Religion in Romanticism

While the Romantics in general have been criticized for attempting to escape from the troublesome political and social reality of their day, M.H. Abrams and more recently Robert Ryan have claimed that they in fact actively engage in the public debate on these issues, particularly through their critical approach to religion. Ryan identifies this movement within Romanticism of social activism through religious debate as the "Romantic Reformation." In their secular adaptation of religion, many Romantics reject what they perceive to be Christianity's repressive beliefs and institutions, or in some instances what they perceive to

be false claims in accordance to their individual beliefs. Their criticism is often reflected in their writing through either an openly stated denunciation or more subtly represented by the diminished or complete absence of Christian authority. It is through their selective retention and adaptation of Christian ideology and symbols, Ryan argues, that they engage in the public dialogue on social reform.

The Romantics tend to take their criticism one step further than earlier social critics by exploring not only religion's impact on society but on the introspective world of the individual's conscience and creative power. In doing so, they tend to shift focus from the role of God to the role of man, essentially centering the religious experience on man. Focusing on what they see as the supreme potential and power of the individual, many Romantics elevate man to a god-like status, and for some atheists man even replaces God. Central to the idea of improving the political conditions effecting the individual's life are the questions of man's place and purpose in life. In their writing, the Romantics often attempt to answer these questions by considering man's potential for greatness as well as the cause of his failures. Most frequently, they identify internal flaws within man, which are compounded in part by negative religious and political influences, as the primary reasons for his downfall. Their intention is not to downplay the significance of the impact of these outside forces but rather to demonstrate their power to suppress the individual's reason and imagination. For many of the Romantics, any system which imposes limitations on the mind of the individual, like religion, could be considered oppressive and detrimental not only to the individual but for society as a whole.

For many Romantics, their rebellion against government authority firmly plants them within England's tradition of religious dissent. However, religious dissent within second-

generation Romanticism, in which Mary Shelley participates, often goes beyond criticism of denominational theology to become an attack on the concept of organized religion in general. The goal of the Romantics' efforts to expand or redefine religious belief in many instances is to present alternative versions of religion in which man assumes a more powerful role in controlling his own life than allowed in Christian traditions. However, just as Protestantism took many shapes after the Reformation, it would be impossible to definitively characterize the religious component of the Romantic Movement. Most Romantics share a common belief in the existence of a spiritual or divine power. Nancy Easterlin suggests that within Romanticism "spirituality...is part of a person's dynamic relationship with others and with the material universe, not an end in itself."[108] However, the poets of the Romantic Movement often contrast with each other greatly in defining the nature of divine power and in the degree of their acceptance of Christian beliefs.

Though their personal religious beliefs differ vastly, the Romantics are largely unified in their rejection of the narrow boundaries of institutionalized religious practice and in their goal to broaden the perspective of what constitutes a spiritual experience set forth by both the Church of England and Christianity in general. In *Natural Supernaturalism*, M.H. Abrams theorizes that it was not the aim of the Romantics to erase Christian thought but rather to reinterpret it in a secularized way, giving up the dogmatic understructure of Christianity but selectively retaining its experiential relevance and values.[109] As a whole, they largely support the idea of devotional experience and spirituality; however, many of the Romantics disagreed with the Church and Christianity in defining what qualifies the experience and, even more so, the source of inspiration for the individual's spiritual awakening as divine.

Disregarding Christianity's emphasis on dogma, a major goal of many Romantics is

to find a way to broaden the limits of Christian concepts while preserving their ability to invoke deeper self-reflection. Abrams notes that within their manipulation of religious elements, the Romantics "undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being."[110] Romanticism in general could be considered a movement based in exploring the nature and depth of the individual's consciousness and emotion. Therefore, the idea of accepting a set of religious beliefs at face value without deeper consideration would have been contrary to the value which many of the poets attached to the concept of personal experience. Often times, as Abrams points out, the result of the Romantics' attempts to reconcile their faith with their world view is a secularized form of religion.

Concurrent with Romanticism's emergence in England, the institutions of the country's most prominent forms of Christianity set strict regulations through their doctrine and traditions to designate specific objects and experiences alone as worthy of devotion. The most widely accepted Christian concept of the divine was embodied by the God figure, a message reinforced by the biblical scriptures at the core of Christian belief. Concerning the practice of religious beliefs, the *Book of Common Prayer* used by the Church of England provided the guidelines and language for acceptable public worship, justifying the need for conformity by claiming "our minds will be kept from wandering by the words before us, and our real needs will not be lost sight of in the urgency of the moment."[111] At the same time, the evangelical Protestant ideology which was spreading throughout England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries typically defined the only thing or being capable of

inspiring or deserving of worship as their strict, scripture-based perception of God.

However, the view of the Bible commonly held throughout the religious community served as a necessary point of contention in Romantic religious dissent. After the Reformation, interest in more secularized views of biblical text began to grow as Catholics and Protestants alike attempted to more concretely define the relationship between man, God, and scripture.[112] In terms of the evolution of religious thought in England, one important result of the Reformation was the spread of views of the Bible which tended to move away from the traditional concept of scripture as "mechanically 'dictated' by God"[113] to consider man's role in both the formation and interpretation of scripture.[114] Some of the main points of consideration at the heart of these debates, even into the nineteenth century, were 1. inspiration (the extent to which God serves as the muse behind the ideas of scripture written by man); 2. revelation (the extent to which God revealed scripture directly to man); and 3. inerrancy (the extent to which the Bible can be considered an infallible text).[115] By the time of the emergence of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century, a variety of beliefs had come to the forefront of the theological and philosophical debate of man's relationship to the Bible, ranging from a traditional belief in the Bible as the absolute and infallible word of God to rationalist Enlightenment interpretations of the scriptures as secular, literary text. In terms of the Romantic movement in general, the public debate on the role of God in the formation of biblical text was significant not in relation to any one line of thought but because it created a breeding ground for the consideration of new perspectives on religious belief and practice outside of the boundaries of tradition. Specific lines of thought become more significant when considering the beliefs and agendas of the Romantic poets individually.

The Bible retains its significance for many Romantics not as a product of divine

intercession but for the value of its moral guidance in the individual's quest for greater truth or self-consciousness. The degree to which the Romantics adopt a secularized view of biblical text depends largely on their personal religious beliefs. Coleridge, for instance, a self-defined Christian, believed the Bible undoubtedly to be inspired by God; however, he did not believe that every part of the Bible was revealed by God or immune from human error.[116] Conversely, the atheist Percy Shelley admired the moralistic message of the Bible as a literary text but rejected the belief that it could be the direct result of a divine deity, inspired or revealed. For the more skeptical and atheistic poets, the stories of the Bible reveal significant insight into human nature but function more like myth than absolute truth. As shall be seen later, Mary Shelley's adaptation of the stories of the creation and the fall of man in *Frankenstein* follows in this trend of looking at the Bible as mythologized literary text.

Consequently, one of the aims of Romantic thought is to suggest the possibility of other sources of divine inspiration beyond God not commonly acknowledged, or possibly viewed as heretical, by the established religious community. The Romantic poets' treatment of the God figure often provides the reader with great insight into their critical perspective of Christian theology. Abrams further claims

> The tendency in innovative Romantic thought (manifested in proportion as the thinker is or is not a Christian theist) is greatly to diminish, and at the extreme to eliminate, the role of God, leaving as the prime agencies man and the world, mind and nature, the ego and the non-ego, the self and the not-self, spirit and the other or (in the favorite antithesis of post-Kantian philosophers) subject and object.[117]

For those Romantic poets who considered themselves Christian, God remained a powerful (but often not the only) representation of the divine; however, for poets who were more skeptical of God's existence, the God figure became more thoroughly integrated into a human or worldly form. One common effort among many Romantics is an attempt to make the divine accessible to, and in some cases a part of, man. Some also portray ordinary events and objects, particularly in nature, as inspiration for a spiritual experience. Emphasizing the awe-inspiring faculties of nature and man himself, the Romantics look for new ways to experience spirituality by identifying worldly embodiments or substitutes for the Christian God.

Works of the canonical poets alone reveal the range of religious beliefs as well as the common thread of rebellion against institutionalized religion that underlie Romanticism. Many Romantics considered themselves theists and generally accepted the traditional elements of Christianity as a foundation for further development of their personal beliefs. It is in this way that Blake serves as both an excellent example of the foundational use of Christian belief in Romanticism and also something of an anomaly within Romanticism because of his radical reworking of these beliefs. Others, like Coleridge and Wordsworth, similarly retain Christian beliefs as the basis of their own religious perspectives but offer a new vision of Christianity integrated with elements of pantheistic belief. In the case of some Romantics, particularly of the second-generation like Mary Shelley, traditional religious beliefs are often completely rejected or viewed as highly questionable. Martin Priestman has suggested that most of the Romantics, even devout Christians, experienced periods of unorthodox belief during which elements of their writing could be considered atheistic.[118] Looking at the works of Percy Shelley and Byron as prime examples of the restructuring of

religious belief under the influence of atheism, one can see that the appearance of atheistic thought in Romanticism often results in the manifestation of god-like attributes in man and the natural world. Other poets like Keats largely avoid use of religious imagery and reference, favoring instead a focus on secular concepts such as beauty.[119] Clearly each poet offers his own distinct perspective on the nature and function of religion and, more specifically, elements of Christian belief. However, they largely take a similar path in their approach to religion, and establish what could be considered a trend within Romanticism, through their effort to consider facets of spirituality beyond established religious belief and practice.

Pantheism

Many Romantics adopt a modified form of Christianity which incorporates elements of pantheistic belief in the divine presence inherent in the natural world and even in man, himself a part of the natural world. Thomas McFarland traces the source of Romantic pantheistic thought back to the philosophy of Spinoza, whom he identifies not as the "originator of the system of thought known as pantheism" but rather the "codifier and the purifier of all previous pantheistic views."[120] According to Spinoza, "God is the immanent, not the transcendent, cause of all things,"[121] or as McFarland clarifies, "he is not the creator of things but rather the things themselves."[122] Spinoza identifies God as all things and all things as God; therefore, any object from a tree to a speck of dust could be considered divine.

Many of Wordsworth and Coleridge's works represent the trend in Romanticism of integrating elements of pantheistic belief with Christianity. While Wordsworth and Coleridge accommodate pantheistic belief to differing degrees, they both attempt to look

beyond traditional Christian belief in understanding man's place and purpose. They both believed that the divinity of God could be experienced through nature and used their poetry to explore the ways in which the Holy Spirit, in Trinitarian terms[123], and at times even God himself existed within nature. They illustrate these ideas through their association of personal spiritual experiences with images of nature. For instance, even seemingly insignificant actions such as the killing of an albatross in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" or witnessing the first signs of spring in Wordsworth's "Lines Written in Early Spring" show the individual's connection and ability to experience deep spiritual reflection through nature.

Wordsworth in particular closely adheres to Spinoza's idea of the unity of God and nature, believing that man's closest encounter with the divine or God is through his interaction with nature. The poet's belief in the existence of God is unquestionable. He demonstrates this belief clearly in his writing; for example, in "Ode: Imitations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" he claims that "But trailing clouds of glory do we come/ From God, who is our home:/ Heaven lies about us in our infancy."[124] What Wordsworth questions is Christianity's image of God confined to a heavenly realm separate from earth. In her study of Wordsworth's relationship to "Romantic Religion," Nancy Easterlin claims that the word "God loses its traditional determinate status in Wordsworth's poetry because, first, it is sparsely used, and second, it essentially competes with other words awarded honorific status that are used with similar if not greater frequency: *nature*, *mind*, and *human life*, for example."[125] As a result, the concept of God in Wordsworth's poetry often becomes integrated with elements of the natural world. For

instance, in "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth writes of the spiritual transcendence resulting from his connection to nature:

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.[126]

Wordsworth believed strongly in the spiritual connection between the mind and the natural world. Nature's spirit moves the senses, which in turn adds to the knowledge of the individual and the growth of his mind. Consequently, the knowledge gained from the experience of nature directly shapes the moral characters and perceptions of man.[127] Turning again to "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth writes

> Therefore am I still
> lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye, and ear, —both what they half create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognise

> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.[128]

According to Wordsworth, nature serves as not only a source of spirituality but also morality. Echoing Rousseau, the poet relates man's highest moral being to his close relationship with the natural world. Nature communes with the individual through "the language of the sense," which Wordsworth claims functions as the basis of human understanding and later in *The Prelude* the imagination or "creative soul" as well.[129]

Coleridge tended to lean toward a more traditional Christian concept of religion than Wordsworth, particularly in his later years. Christian faith remained an important focus of Coleridge's life and poetry, but his interpretation of Christianity often diverged from the orthodox path. In his analysis of Coleridge's attempt to reconcile his religious faith with elements of pantheism which he found intellectually appealing, Thomas McFarland concludes that "this inability either really to accept or wholeheartedly to reject pantheism is the central truth of Coleridge's philosophical activity."[130] On one hand, Coleridge proclaims, in very Blakean fashion, that "Life is a vision shadowy of Truth;/ And vice, and anguish, and the wormy grave,/ Shapes of a dream!" from which man will be emancipated through "the Throne of the redeeming God."[131] On the other, he reflects a more Wordsworthian stance in "Frost at Midnight":

> But thou, my babe! Shalt wander like a breeze
> By lakes and sand shores, beneath the crags
> Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,

Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself,
Great universal Teacher![132]

Coleridge acknowledges the divine presence within nature, even though God remains the central point of power and redemption in his Christian faith. One of the main questions which Coleridge raises in considering his own faith, especially in his early poetry, is the extent to which God and nature integrate. One of the poet's most obvious recognitions of his own uncertainty on this point is the infamous question mark punctuating his consideration of the relationship between God and nature in "The Eolian Harp":

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?[133]

While some of his verse reflects the poet's tendency to make use of elements of pantheistic thought, it is important to note that Coleridge did not consider himself a pantheist and fought against the reputation of being considered one.[134] In comparison to the other poets of the Romantic period, Coleridge's religious beliefs most closely reflect, though not completely, common interpretations of Christianity.

Nature remains a powerful force for many poets inclined to atheism, but unlike the image presented by Wordsworth and Coleridge, these poets tend to recognize nature's divine power as separate from the control of a God figure. Rather than viewing the existence of nature as a demonstration of God's existence, these poets present a secularized vision of nature's innate power and divinity. Emphasizing the Godlessness of the universe, for example, Byron claims that Darkness "was the Universe."[135] Many of Shelley's poems—like "Mont Blanc," "The Cloud," and "To a Skylark"—celebrate nature's divine spirituality independent of a God figure. Furthermore, poets like Shelley and Byron believed that the devotion experienced in nature resulted in the uplifting of the self rather than the glorification of an outside deity. For instance, in canto three of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron writes:

> I live not in myself, but I become
> Portion of that around me; and to me
> High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
> Of human cities torture: I can see
> Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
> A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
> Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,
> And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
> Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.[136]

Echoing Wordsworth, Byron points to the soul's existence as a part of a higher divine power shared in nature, but Byron's focus here is not to simply praise this divinity but his own

soul's ability to rise above the mortal world. Likewise in "Mont Blanc," Shelley writes of the deep spiritual connection he feels with nature while looking at the Ravine of Arve:

> when I gaze on thee
>
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
>
> To muse on my own separate fantasy,
>
> My own, my human mind, which passively
>
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
>
> Holding an unremitting interchange
>
> With the clear universe of things around;[137]

Again, the spiritual experience is secularized by assigning the divine inspirational power of God to nature and uplifting the human experience. Recognizing the potential for man's mind to elevate and unite with the divine, rather than recognizing God's power, remains the heart of Percy Shelley's musing.

Imagination and Divinity

Even poets who remained essentially Christian theists, like Blake, often attempted to humanize devotional experience in their own way. It could be argued that Blake largely invented his own Christian-based concept of religion according to his own personal ideas, envisioning the necessity of both God and the imagination to humanity's well-being. Although Blake remained a staunch believer in the existence and power of God, his concept of divinity and divine power drifted off course of the mainstream religious doctrine in his, often complicated, vision of the relationship between God and human imagination.

For theistic Romantics, the imagination is itself a part of, not a substitute for, the

divine force, or God.[138] Blake's representation of the relationship between Urizen (the embodiment of reason and tradition) and Los (the image of imagination) in his prophetic books[139] provides one of the most complex Romantic views of the human mind. Within Blake's mythologized vision, Urizen and Los exist as parts of a larger consciousness or mind; however, Blake portrays the innate nature of each as predisposed for conflict with the other. Generally speaking, he believed that man's greatest impediment to realizing the divine quality of his imaginative power, which in *Jerusalem* he also identifies as the redemptive Christ, is his own cold, rationalizing reason. For Coleridge and Wordsworth, the powers of reason and imagination co-exist as equally beneficial to the individual, with reason serving as the moral guide or man's imaginative power. The imagination is, Wordsworth claims, "but another name for absolute power/ And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,/ And Reason in her most exalted mood."[140] Or as Coleridge claims, imagination is a "synthetic and magical power" in that it allows man to break free from the bonds of his physical form to become a part of a more powerful, spiritual realm, acting not of its own accord but "put in action by the will and understanding" and guided with "loose reins."[141] The imagination still serves as man's gateway to connecting with God, but for these poets, reason plays an important role in accomplishing this goal by giving the individual control over his mind and choices.

Blake's idea of the characterizations of both God and man for the most part reflect an essentially Christian perspective. God remains the embodiment of the divine, a theme which Blake consistently illustrates throughout his works as a foundational element of his complex spirituality. For example, in his poems "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found" (from *Songs of Innocence*), Blake confirms his Christian belief in the existence of a loving, paternal God. These poems illustrate the nature of God, the "father in white," according to

the traditional Christian concept of being the guide and protector of innocent, lost souls.[142] In keeping with Christian tradition, he also saw man's nature as innately evil and in need of spiritual salvation. For example, in *Jerusalem*'s "To The Deists" Blake claims that "Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually, & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary."[143] Furthermore, Blake also rejected the ideas of natural theology and deism, namely that man's interactions with the natural world alone could bring him understanding of the divine.[144] Michael Ferber asserts that he was of quite the opposite opinion; "for Blake Christianity shows the rational and natural order to be an illusion, and indeed the realm of Satan."[145] Blake remained steadfast in the belief that man's salvation could not be possible without God.

While Blake retained a belief in much of Christianity's basic theology, he was equally consistent in his condemnation of the practices of Christianity as advocated by the Church in his day. Christian doctrine claimed that a distinct boundary, created by original sin, permanently divided man from God while his spirit lived in its earthly body and denied the possibility of man's access to the divine until his spiritual afterlife. For Blake, the divinity of God is accessible to all people through imagination; this is not to say that man can become God but rather that he can elevate his mind to better recognize and connect with God during his earthly life. In *There is No Natural Religion*, Blake claims,

> VII The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite
>
> Application. He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.
>
> Conclusion. If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. the

> Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again
>
> Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.[146]

Here Blake presents his idea of the integration of the human imagination, the "Poetic or Prophetic character," with the divine. He also believed that divine truth retained a spiritual quality which was accessible to man only through poetic vision or imagination. In *Jerusalem*'s "To The Christians," Blake writes,

> I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination, Imagination, the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more.[147]

This passage illustrates the distinction Blake makes between the "real & eternal world" of imagination as opposed to the fleeting "shadow" of the natural world. For Blake, earthly life is intended to be momentary; however, God's promise of spiritual, everlasting life is fulfilled through imagination.

Like Blake, theists like Wordsworth and Coleridge also retained a foundational belief in Christianity. Identifying themselves as essentially Christian, these poets maintained a belief in a single, omnipotent God and man's need for salvation through him. They also echo Blake's rebuttal against Christianity's exile of man from the presence of God during his earthly life and emphasize the power of poetic imagination to uplift the individual into the presence of God. However, they differ from Blake in that they extend their identification of the divine to include aspects of nature.

For other Romantics, however, no rational proof could be found to fully justify Christianity's claims or practice. In his book *Romantic Atheism*, Martin Priestman draws attention to the connection between the rise in explicit atheism and the appearance of Romanticism beginning with the rise of the French Revolution. Romantic poets whose religious beliefs ranged from skepticism to explicit atheism, including Percy Shelley and Byron, found little consolation in Christianity for the injustice and suffering of the world. Accordingly, they questioned, or rejected, the existence of a Christian God who seemingly could not or would not assume responsibility for the life he created. This is not to say that they believed in the complete absence of authority, or chaos, only that they rejected the claims of Christianity. For atheistic-leaning Romantics, man not God becomes the primary focus of "religious" experience, and the role of God shifts almost completely to man. Dismissing the existence of a Christian God, these poets tended to construct a secularized concept of the world based on the power of human potential. The mind, consisting of the combined forces of reason and imagination, serves as proof of man's supreme power, and anything which inspires the development of the mind could be considered a devotional experience.

Romantics with atheistic inclinations, like Shelley and Byron, looked at the exercise of imagination as not only a gateway to the divine but as a means of the individual himself becoming in part divine. For Percy Shelley and Byron, man replaces the Christian God figure. In *Essay on Christianity*, Shelley adopts what he believes to be Christ's definition of the nature of God, in Spinoza-like terms, as "the interfused and overruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things."[148] Because God or the

divine spirit already exists within every living being, the individual needs only to look inward to recognize his spiritual power:

> Whoever has maintained with his own heart the strictest correspondence of confidence, who dares to examine and to estimate every imagination which suggests itself to his mind, who is that which he designs to become, and only aspires to that which the divinity of his own nature shall consider and approve — he has already seen God.[149]

According to Shelley, imagination allows man the freedom to recognize the divine spirit within and arrive at a better understanding of self, rather than confirming the existence of the Christian God. Michael Scrivener suggests that Shelley's characterization of God in *Essay on Christianity* is intended to prove man's limitless potential: "If God is both human and cosmic, an ideal and a presence, transcendent and immanent, then there are no metaphysical obstacles to human perfectibility."[150]

Similarly, the central focus of Byron's *Manfred* is the innate power of the individual maximized through the exercise of the mind. Manfred tells the Spirits that the power of his mind equals their own: "The mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark,/ The lightning of my being, is as bright,/ Pervading, and far darting as your own,/ And shall not yield to yours, though coop'd in clay!"[151] Manfred rebukes the Demons who have come to take him to Hell:

> MANFRED. Thou hast no power upon me, that I feel;
> Thou never shalt possess me, that I know;
> ...The mind which is immortal makes itself
> Requital for its good or evil thoughts,—
> Is its own place and time...

Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;

I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—

But was my own destroyer, and will be

My own hereafter.[152]

What is striking in the case of Manfred is that no force of the spiritual world has the power to supercede the will of the man himself. The Demons are deflected back to Hell, Heaven fails to gain Manfred through the supplications of the Abbot, and even the Witch is denied obedience. In the end, Manfred remains as he claims, completely his "own." This idea of the freedom of the individual represents a foundational element of second-generation Romanticism and the core of many writers' political philosophies.

The Individual and Political Reform

Many second-generation Romantics' emphasis on the power of the human mind serves as a primary point of their political agenda and highlights their growing focus on a decentralized concept of socio-political power. Carl Woodring points out that the British government's increasingly restrictive actions under George III contributed to the poets' sympathy for the laboring class.[153] By arguing that the individual citizen should have a greater degree of power in controlling his life than any social institution, many Romantics, especially among the more radical segment, reconfigure the idea of government to suggest that a power structure based on the needs and opinions of all citizens rather than the centralized authority of institutions would be most effective and beneficial for society. According to this democratic model, the general population would dictate the actions of government instead of a few officials and institutions controlling the lives of the majority.

The most influential and powerful figure within this bottom-up structure, then, is the individual citizen. Consequently, they believed that any significant or meaningful reform in society had to begin with providing men the freedom to exercise their minds.

One of the main points advocated in second-generation Romantic literature is that if all the obstacles restricting each individual's full use of his imaginative power could be removed, particularly those created by man-made institutions, then society as a whole would be elevated to its ideal state. Tyranny, injustice, and oppression would eventually cease to exist. They identified these obstacles as both within man and in society. Their basis for the belief in the power of the individual linked back to the influence of Enlightenment philosophy, which claimed that the hierarchy of institutionalized power crippled the individual's ability to think and act for himself. These systems maintained power through the practice of tradition and, therefore, seemed largely averse to change. According to many Enlightenment philosophers and Romantics, institutional preference of tradition over innovation effectively had halted the potential progress of society. The freedom of man's creative power or imagination, then, became central to effective reform.

Believing that the individual holds the potential for unlimited greatness through the exercise of his mind, some Romantics, as demonstrated earlier, attempt to secularize systems of religious belief to accommodate the will of the individual and redirected power from the Church and God to the individual. Their ideas often conflict theologically with Christianity by proclaiming the possible divine presence within the spirit of every man rather than its singular existence in an outside god figure. For many of the Romantics, man's ability to think, feel, imagine, and use intuition are his greatest sources of power, and only his failure to take full advantage of these faculties limits his potential in life. Some, like Percy Shelley,

even go as far as to claim that the world as a whole could be changed if man only willed it to be so. Man's twin mental powers of imagination and reason make all things possible and serve as man's greatest source of power for influencing the world around him. Imagination allows man to envision a better world for himself and the ability to rise above the limitations of his physical form to initiate change. Reason, often viewed as the necessary counterpart of imagination, tends to provide the moral basis for guiding the individual toward the fulfillment of his imaginary vision.

In terms of the development of Mary Shelley's religious perspective in *Frankenstein*, atheistic Romantic thought, especially that of her husband Percy, can be considered as both a major influence and parallel to her own beliefs. Scrivener contends that for Percy Shelley social utopia can only exist through the efforts of man.[154] This theme consistently runs through Shelley's poetry; *Queen Mab*, *Revolt of Islam*, and *Prometheus Unbound* all celebrate the triumph of man over forces of oppression and tyranny (representatives of religious institutions and government) through the power of his mind and will. However, among the second-generation Romantics, each harbored his own degree of doubt whether man could actually reach this state of perfection if given the opportunity. While some believed that man undoubtedly possessed the potential for unlimited greatness, they also questioned whether human nature actually served as man's greatest obstacle. Characteristically cynical, Byron often presented a bleak image of man's existence, while the idealist Shelley perpetually believed in the possible redemption of mankind through the power of love. Mary Shelley, as will be seen in later chapters, also contemplates human nature's role in determining man's success or failure in *Frankenstein*. Fully sharing neither

Byron's pessimism nor Shelley's optimism, her story reveals both the god-like power that man can achieve through the exercise of his mind as well as his potential for self-destruction.

Romantics and the Church

In addition to their disagreements with the theological elements of Christianity, many of the Romantics found a further basis for illustrating their political criticism of the Church. Like the religious dissenters of earlier generations, the Romantics often connected the progress of political reform with the necessity of reform within England's religious institutions. Religious institutions and doctrines, they claimed, held man in a state of bondage both through their adherence to ritual and political corruption. To the more skeptical poets, in fact, the Church committed a much worse offense in coercing individuals to blindly accept a false and irrational system of beliefs, and they tended to link social evils to the misleading of man's reason. The practice of institutionalized Christianity at the turn of the eighteenth century, both Anglican and evangelical Protestant, created a hierarchy which placed the individual in subordination to a set of pre-established beliefs. The Romantics, however, opposed the oppressive nature of Christianity's doctrine of conformity as well as its focus on the centralized power of the Church to control the general public. Many Romantics saw the Church's political influence and pedantic adherence to tradition and ritual as its means of controlling, rather than facilitating, the spiritual growth of man.

Many poets recognized the power of the Church as an enabler of, and participant in, a larger system of political oppression. Even Romantics who retained a devoutly Christian perspective found grounds for retaliating against its mainstream practice on the basis of the perceived oppressive nature of religious institutions. Blake, for example, saw man's

servitude to self-made codes and institutions— "mind-forged manacles"— as limiting to his imaginative power and, consequently, disruptive to his harmony with the divine spirit.[155] Rather than blaming God for man's problems on earth, he looked for and found their cause within man-made institutions, especially the Church. In poems like "A Little Boy Lost" (from Songs of Experience), "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," and "I Saw a Chapel All of Gold," Blake relates the injustice and suffering of mankind to the false and corruptive nature of the Church. The Church and its clergy are represented by Blake as both the source of evil and the instrument through which evil persists. In "I Saw a Chapel All of Gold" for instance, Blake describes a serpent, recalling Satan's appearance in the Garden of Eden, defiling the perfection of the chapel and "vomiting his poison out."[156] Here Blake remains true to his beliefs by demonstrating that Christianity is only corrupted through its manipulation and abuse. Similarly, in "A Little Boy Lost," Blake describes the priest as the murderer of an innocent child who attempts to understand God. The boy dares to question the mysterious nature of God and, therefore, is executed by the church as a "fiend." The poem illustrates the injustice that arises from the Church's, or symbolically any institution, rigid adherence to dogma or "holy mystery" rather than accepting the exercise of reason and imagination.

The connection between religious and social reform was particularly strong for the radical end of the Romantic spectrum, and as will be seen later, it is with these poets that Mary Shelley's ideas in *Frankenstein* most closely align. One of the most politically outspoken of the Romantics, Percy Shelley often used poetry to directly attack the intertwining of government and religious oppression. Poems like *The Revolt of Islam*, *Queen Mab*, and *Prometheus Unbound* provide the best representations of Shelley's view of the negative influence of religious tradition over the power of the individual. His viewpoint is

more succinctly expressed in the much shorter work "England in 1819." Here Shelley describes the state of the country's religion as "Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed."[157] He claims that England's religious institutions have abandoned their spiritual foundation, operating according to their self-made terms rather than any divine authority. Shelley further connects the spiritless Church to the weapons of "Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,/ But leech-like to their fainting country cling."[158] In contrast to its declared purpose to serve as a guide toward salvation, the operation of the Church, then, became an impediment to the individual's search for truth and society's welfare. In "The Mask of Anarchy," he describes the forms which the Destructions of society show themselves. Particularly scornful of religion, he states that Hypocrisy appears as "Clothed with the Bible, as with light,/ And the shadows of the night," and the worst of the Destructions, Anarchy, declares "I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!"[159] Shelley's passionate declaration in this poem expresses his belief in the government's effective manipulation of religion, represented by the Bible and God, to control and ultimately oppress the people. His belief is more firmly reiterated through Hope's declarations on the nature of Freedom: "Thou art Wisdom—Freemen never/ Dream that God will damn for ever/ All who think those things untrue/ Of which Priests make such ado."[160] Here Shelley echoes Blake's earlier claim that only a system of slavery would condemn an individual, or innocent child,[161] for exercising individual judgment.

Writing from an apocalyptic perspective, Byron's "Darkness" portrays the ineffectiveness of religion to save man. He describes the last two survivors on earth meeting "beside/ The dying embers of an altar-place/ Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things/ For an unholy usage."[162] Byron suggests the worthlessness of the Church's icons and

imagery outside of the powers that the mind attaches to them, and the fire replaces religion as man's "altar-place" because it is essential to man's self-preservation. The only comfort or redemption that religious images can provide is as fuel for the fire, not hope in a supernatural world. Likewise, the Abbot in *Manfred* fails to win over the mind or soul of the title character to the Christian faith or, especially, to convince him of the necessity of redemption through God. Unlike Shelley or Blake's portrayal of the Church and clergy as agents of evil and manipulation, Byron's Abbot depicts an almost sympathetic character. The Abbot himself seems genuinely concerned for Manfred's soul; therefore, it is not the man but his beliefs with which Byron takes issue. Manfred voices this opinion to the Abbot saying, "I do respect/ Thine order, and revere thine years; I deem/ Thy purpose pious."[163] Byron acknowledges the priest's good intentions but ultimately points out the futility of his efforts because there is no power in religious belief, claiming "there is no power in holy men,/ Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form/ Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,/ Nor agony."[164] The Abbot's failure to win over Manfred illustrates Byron's political idea that men's actions can not be forced through coercion but can only be the result of an individual's personal judgment.

Conclusion

Both generations of Romantics translated the criticisms of the political activists to the lofty, spiritual realm of poetry and literature. Paralleling Godwin's assertions on the necessity of education through culture and literature to implement social reform, the Romantics often aimed to enlighten and redeem mankind through their poetry. Blake claims that "Poetry Fetter'd Fetters the Human Race. Nations are Destroy'd or Flourish in

proportion as Their Poetry, Painting and music are Destroy'd or Flourish!"[165] Blake's assertion about poetry's ability to uplift society reflects the prevalent belief shared among the Romantics of the redemptive power of literature. Wordsworth reaffirms Blake's assertion in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* when he claims that all good poetry has a "purpose": "we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified."[166] At the same time, they exalt the role of the poet as the liberator and defender of truth. Wordsworth proclaims in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that the poet is "the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver...the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society."[167] Or, as Percy Shelley more boldly claims, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[168] Although the Romantics tended to be highly critical of the institutional regulation of society, particularly in terms of religion, they often voiced their opinions with the hope of being a positive influence in society. They tended to believe that by drawing people's attention to the problems of society, they would increase each individual's understanding and, consequently, encourage him to utilize his own power. To these writers, literature acted as a guide toward truth by educating and expanding the individual's perceptions.

Because second-generation Romanticism in particular emphasized the divine power of the individual mind, its adherents typically hoped to reform society collectively by freeing the minds of its individual citizens. They saw poetry as not only a way of transcending the realities of life but also as a means of participating in social and political debate.[169] Religion became a symbolic focal point which many of the Romantics used to illustrate their ideas on

political reform. For many Romantics, institutionalized religious practice represented both the repressive nature and injustice created by hierarchal social systems; therefore, they often presented secularized images of the Church and Christian theology to bring attention to systematic shortcomings and the possibility of society's improvement. It is from this hope of providing insight and inspiration that Mary Shelley embarks upon *Frankenstein* and participates in the tradition of Romantic religious secularization.

IV. RELIGIOUS SECULARIZATION IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

Mary Shelley's secularization of religion in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* can be seen through her interpretation of basic religious questions: what is the nature of the world in which man exists, does God exist, and from where does evil come? She encourages the reader to consider these questions throughout the novel, quoting in the epigraph from Milton's *Paradise Lost* "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/ To mould me man? Did I solicit thee/ From darkness to promote me?" Anne Mellor identifies the philosophical questions at the heart of the novel: "What, finally, is being? Whence did the principle of life proceed?"[170] Scholars have offered many possible answers to the questions explored in the novel and their affect on the story's overall meaning; however, any interpretation aiming to define the author's intended meaning must take into consideration the overwhelming influence of William Godwin's philosophy and the ideas of the radical end of the Romantic Movement, primarily those of her husband Percy Shelley, on the development of her religious perspective in the novel. The secularization of Christian beliefs and imagery in Romanticism functioned as part of a larger argument for political reform, and atheism became a significant foundation for both Godwin and Percy Shelley to support their arguments for reform. By rejecting the existence of God and the authority of religious institutions, Romantics like Godwin and Percy Shelley identified both the blame for injustices and hope for society's improvement with the individual. Following the Romantic tradition of secularization, Mary Shelley's novel presents a compellingly atheistic view of the world to demonstrate the supreme power of the individual.

Mary Shelley's Religious Beliefs

Although Mary Shelley did not experience the same strict religious upbringing as her father, Godwin's background in Dissenting Protestantism served as an indirect influence in the development of her personal beliefs. From her earliest days, she idolized her father, admitting that as a child she looked to him as her god.[171] She never knew her mother, who died only days after her birth. Pamela Clemit points to the influence of Godwin's background in Protestant Dissent on his child-rearing, claiming that as a result of his religious heritage "Godwin derived a lasting belief in education as the key to social change, and sought to put his enlightened pedagogical theories into practice raising his children.[172] Godwin educated his daughter at home with the instructional books printed for the family's children's book store. The aim of Godwin's books was to teach children to think independently and to develop the imagination.[173] Complementing his children's studies, Godwin allowed them unlimited access to his personal library, regular outings to cultural attractions, and exposure to prominent thinkers who participated in Godwin's intellectual circle.[174] Shelley's education under William Godwin was certainly more liberal than most schools offered at the time and unusually extensive for a girl in the eighteenth century.

Religious practices did not have a significant role in the Godwin house, except as a subject for intellectual consideration, and the Godwins attended church only on rare occasions. Although Godwin did not submit his children to the same strict religious upbringing that he experienced, he did acknowledge in a letter to James Marshall that he considered faith in a loving God revealed through nature, similar to Coleridge's concept of God, to be important for little children.[175] Godwin also pseudonymously published *Scripture Histories*, a collection of stories adapted from the Bible, for Mary and her sister Fanny in

1802.[176] From this account, it is clear that Godwin allowed and even encouraged Mary to become familiar with the Bible and Christian teachings; however, it is also worth noting that he does not equate familiarity with the Bible with coercing a child to believe in a particular theological agenda. Godwin claims that the youthful mind seeks only pleasure and the avoidance of pain and that "it is not till very late that mankind acquire the ideas of justice, retribution and morality, and these notions are far from existing in the minds of infants."[177] He clearly saw a distinct difference between the process of the child's mind and adult reason. To Godwin, children were not capable of understanding the specific arguments which pointed to Christianity's flaws; however, a simple faith in the Christian concept of a loving God would fit more easily within their dichotomous classification of the world into terms of giving pleasure or pain. He further claims that "to a youthful mind, while every thing strikes with its novelty, the individual situation must be peculiarly unfortunate, if gaiety of thought be not produced, or, when interrupted, do not speedily return with its healing oblivion."[178] By allowing a child to develop a favorable opinion of Christianity, but not necessarily a devout belief in it, Godwin set the stage for the individual to distinguish some benefit from the doctrine but to also exercise his reason in dismissing its illogical claims.

While Shelley shared her father's distain for organized religion, she was not as confident in completely denying the existence of God. Her personal religious beliefs seem to strongly question rather than outright deny the existence of God, although her beliefs became substantially more theistic in her later years.[179] She never publicly claimed to be an atheist at any time in her life; however, this lack of admission holds little weight in arguing her acceptance of Christianity. Her unwaveringly severe criticism of Christianity throughout her life and association with self-declared atheists and unorthodox believers alike undermine the

possibility of her harboring any devout religious inclinations. In her early years, she often referred to the subjects of God and Christianity with sarcasm or criticism. In a letter to Percy Shelley dated September 30, 1817, she associates revenge with "that abominable *Christian* name retribution."[180] In another example, she writes to Leigh Hunt on April 6, 1819 her opinion of Raphael as a "God of painting" sardonically followed by the clarification of the term God, saying "I mean a heathen God not a bungling modern divinity."[181] Her association of religious language with terms like abominable and bungling illustrates her negative perception of Christianity. Although these personal correspondences provide some insight into her thoughts, the best reflection of Shelley's religious beliefs at any point in her life exists within the text of the work she produced during that time. The 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, in particular, provides a good representation of the beliefs of her early years.

Frankenstein's Origins in the Literary Bible

Shelley directs the focus of her consideration of religion in *Frankenstein* to disproving the rationale of Christian theology, particularly the existence of God. She begins by discrediting the divine inspiration of the Bible. Shelley undermines the idea of a divine hand guiding or dictating the text of the Bible by demonstrating the unfounded basis of its assertions.

As an advocate of rationalism, Godwin considers the Bible to be "one of the most valuable repositories of information, and examples of intellectual power, in the whole circle of literature."[182] However, he goes on to caution that the individual should approach this book "with a firm and impartial mind" in order to distinguish between its truths and flawed reasoning.[183] As such, it can be contemplated and judged like any other literary work.

According to Godwin, the reader of the Bible should carefully consider all aspects of the writer's argument to separate truth from fiction.

It is with this mindset that Mary Shelley secularizes the biblical account of creation in *Frankenstein*. Following the Romantic's secularized view of the Bible as literary text, Shelley believed that the Bible required a place of distinction among literature for its extensive historical information and moral guidance, not because of a belief in its origins as the inspired word of God. Because the biblical source of her story could not be concretely verified as true, its claim of divine creation invited rebuttal. *Frankenstein*, then, is more than just a recording of the "grim terrors" of Mary Shelley's "waking dream" (as she states in her 1831 Introduction) but a carefully constructed argument to refute the Bible's assertion of the existence of a divine, supernatural creator.[184] If man could successfully create life, then the Bible's assertion of creation as a power of God alone would automatically be disproved. Because all aspects of the Bible are considered by most Christians to be true as the invention of an infallible God, the disproving of any one tenet of the Bible would open the door to doubt the truth of any other part. Furthermore, the disproving of a biblical claim would lead to two possible conclusions: either God is not infallible or that the text of the Bible was subject to human error. As a result, Christian belief could be looked at as seriously flawed and at worst false.

For many of the Romantics, including Shelley, the lack of proof to support the Bible's claims made the text more comparable with mythology than absolute truth. Shelley emphasizes this idea in *Frankenstein* by drawing parallels between the biblical and Miltonic accounts of the creation and fall of man to the mythological story of Prometheus. The Prometheus myth was popularly utilized by the Romantics to illustrate social injustice and

the power of man, and many of the Romantic poets created their own adaptations of the story, including Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Byron's "Prometheus." Two different versions of the Prometheus myth exist— Prometheus *plasticator* and Prometheus *pyrphoros*. In the first, Prometheus creates man from clay, and in the later, he steals fire from the god Jupiter. Eventually, the two versions were combined so that Prometheus uses the fire he has stolen from the gods to give life to the man he has made from clay.[185] Jupiter in turn punishes Prometheus for daring to usurp the power of the gods by chaining him to a rock where his liver would be eaten by vultures and then regenerated daily. Although the details of Prometheus's crime against Jupiter vary from version to version, the myth consistently presents an overruling idea of the god's tyrannical control over man. Shelley conscientiously connects her adaptation of the creation story with the Prometheus myth to emphasize that social oppression results from centralized religious authorities and institutions and that man has within his own means the power to overcome tyranny through the use of his mind. Underscoring the biblical account with this particular myth leads to the implication that every individual must be responsible for his own welfare and that of mankind, while reliance on God and religion will adversely effect his welfare.

The Problem of Evil

To further illustrate her case for atheism, Shelley inverts the moral order of *Frankenstein*'s world, undermining Christianity's evidence of God's authority. The Bible clearly defines God as the ultimate moral authority, the supreme ruler and father figure, evidenced in the apocryphal Book of Revelations by his ability to hold man and Satan accountable for their transgressions. Although differences in belief exist among its various

denominations, Christian theology generally upholds God as the sole creator and governor over life on earth; therefore, the moral order of the world reflects the power of God to maintain order. However, in the world of *Frankenstein* vice surmounts virtue, the innocent fall victim to affliction, and injustice prevails. If the condition of justice in the world is any indication of the existence of an all-powerful, benevolent God, then Shelley presents a rather skeptical outlook.

The inversion of moral order in *Frankenstein*'s world is evident by the fact that vice in many instances overcomes virtue. Most often, the exercise of virtue leads the characters to suffering while acts of vice go unpunished. The first instance of this inversion occurs with the death of Caroline Frankenstein. After attending Elizabeth during her illness, Victor's mother herself catches scarlet fever and dies.[186] As a result of her love and attention to her "favourite," she is taken by "that most irreparable evil" death.[187] From this point forward, virtuous characters meet their downfall as a result of their goodness. In another instance, the creature is shot in exchange for saving the life of a drowning girl.[188] The creature comments on the injustice of receiving punishment for his good deed: "This was the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being from destruction, and, as a recompence, I now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound, which scattered the flesh and bone."[189] Similarly, William, Justine, Elizabeth, and Henry are murdered for their loyalty and care for Victor. No morally upstanding character escapes persecution.

Conversely, instances of vice most often receive some form of reward in exchange for misdeeds. Victor and the creature's involvement in Justine's conviction serves as a primary example of this. By framing Justine for the murder of William, the creature inflicts suffering upon both the innocent girl and the Frankenstein family, while receiving personal satisfaction

in exercising revenge against Victor. Likewise, Victor avoids the blame for William's death and the disappointment of his family by not disclosing the truth of the creature's existence. Though his conscience suffers, he still benefits to a degree from his actions because he protects the truth of his own guilt. The most blatant indicator of the dominance of vice is the fact that the truth of the creature's deeds are never publicly discovered or punished. Victor's greatest source of agony comes from the guilt and knowledge of the injustice that "They [his family] were dead, and I lived; their murderer also lived."[190] Even as Victor spends the remainder of his life hunting the creature, his failure to destroy the creature and self-induced demise leave the murders without retribution. The creature claims that he will destroy himself, but Shelley gives no indication that he actually followed through on his word. In the end, all that the reader is left with is the image of the creature "borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" and the weight of the story's overruling injustice.[191]

Furthermore, in a just world, the weak and innocent would be safeguarded and good would always triumph over evil. Significantly, they are the first to suffer in *Frankenstein*, indicating an inversion of moral principles and the triumph of evil. In terms of religion, Shelley uses this inversion to imply that no divine spirit or God is at work in the world. Considering the relationship between Victor and his creation as symbolic of the relationship between God and man, the creature is the first innocent being to suffer needlessly at the hand of his god. The creature begins life in a state of infancy with no understanding of himself or the world around him; furthermore, he has no knowledge of the concepts of good and evil. Because the creature starts out as a blank slate, he relies on influences from the outside world to instruct him in the ways of civilized society. Victor refuses to accept the responsibility of caring for the creature that he has created, and in doing so leaves him to suffer through a

world which he is neither aesthetically built to conform to nor mentally prepared to live. The creature describes the experience of his first days of life to Victor, "I felt cold also, and half frightened, as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate.... I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept."[192] Guiltless of any transgression, he has done nothing to earn Victor's heartless scorn and abandonment. The creature enters into the world like a child and suffers from hunger, cold, and pain because there is no one to care for him.

In addition to physical affliction, the creature suffers psychological torment from the discovery and knowledge that he will never be accepted by human society because of his appearance, a characteristic for which he is not responsible. The first time the creature looks at his reflection he is horrified by what he sees: "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity."[193] Victor never takes into consideration the creature's feelings or welfare, and he discards his creation like a failed science project rather than respecting him as a child to whom he has given life. Consequently, a feature of the creature's psychological anguish is his realization that he has been haphazardly created and abandoned by his maker.

All four of the creature's victims embody the optimism and spirit of youthful innocence and are not protected by a higher power from the grasp of evil. William's death is perhaps the cruelest because he is denied the opportunity to fully experience life and with him dies the hope of the future. His father describes him as, "That sweet child, whose smiles delighted and warmed my heart, who was so gentle, yet so gay!"[194] Elizabeth serves as the

emotional pillar of the Frankenstein family, providing comfort and support through the deaths of Caroline, William, and Justine. Victor justly comments that "Every one adored Elizabeth."[195] As Victor's wife, Elizabeth can ensure the continuation of the Frankenstein family by producing children, and like William her murder signifies the death of the future because it eliminates the possibility of an heir to the family name. The unborn innocents of future generations are being punished along with the innocent living in the present. Equally tragic are the deaths of Justine and Henry, whose devotion to the Frankenstein family is rewarded with death. These innocent victims can be viewed as martyr-like characters, suffering persecution and death for their loyalty to Victor Frankenstein.

On an allegorical level, these characters portray a set of virtues, and their murders reflect God's inability to preserve virtue from evil in the world. The reader gets an indirect glimpse of these characters through the story that Victor is telling. Relaying the supporting characters' stories through the central characters' point of view instead of giving them their own voices limits the reader's intimacy with them and further reduces their characters to the personifications of virtues. More directly, they represent the death of God himself because they embody the qualities which Christianity claims he personifies and protects— innocence, justice, benevolence, and morality.

Furthermore, the De Lacey family creates a sub-layer of allegory in the text through the meaning of their names— Felix, felicity; Agatha, honor; and Safie, wisdom. Anne Mellor also suggests that the De Lacey family represents the ideal "loving and egalitarian bourgeois family."[196] The one thing the creature desires more than anything is companionship from one who will accept him for what he is. Specifically, he desires the love of his father, but the only way he can experience "family" is vicariously through the De

Laceys. Symbolically, the creature longing to become acquainted with the De Lacey family represents man's need to obtain acceptance, happiness, honor, and wisdom in life. As long as the creature lives in close proximity to the De Laceys he shows the development of these virtues in his own character. The creature's feeling of being connected to the family motivates his practice of virtue. He does the family's chores and empathizes with their feelings, saying "when they were unhappy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys."[197] When Safie (representing wisdom) arrives at the De Lacey house, the creature also receives a deeper understanding or form of wisdom regarding human nature. As Felix teaches Safie, he unknowingly teaches the creature as well. He explains,

> Every conversation of the cottagers now opened new wonders to me. While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me...The words induced me to turn towards myself.[198]

It is also after the arrival of Safie that the creature discovers another source of wisdom through the copies of *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and *Sorrows of Werter* he finds in the woods. He describes how "they produced in me an infinity of new images and feelings, that sometimes raised me to ecstacy, but more frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection."[199]

However, the family's denial of the creature's singlemost desire of recognition as their fellow being and desertion of the cabin symbolize the withholding of virtue from humanity. Considering the De Lacey family members as personifications of virtues, their rejection of the creature's attempt to become personally acquainted with them represents a denial of the creature's complete union with these qualities. Once the family moves, the loss

of their allegorical virtues becomes manifest through the creature's change of character and subsequent behavior. He notes the loss of his desire for virtue saying,

> I, like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin.[200]

To the creature, the De Lacey home is his ideal of a perfect world where men experience love, honor, and wisdom unconditionally, and as religious allegory a heaven that he can never enter. In terms of the scene's larger implication for humanity in general, the creature's exclusion represents Christianity's view of heaven as a reward not attainable during man's earthly life. Shelley uses the relationship between the creature and De Lacey family to point out the cruelty and injustice that would result if this Christian view were true. She emphasizes the point that withholding love, honor, and wisdom from man only increases his negative qualities rather than motivating him to more fervently pursue virtuous behavior. In this way, Christianity becomes a negative force in society.

The Secularization of God

Like many of the Romantics, Shelley's response to the flaws she perceived within the Christian system of belief was to offer a secularized version of religion. Shelley's vision in *Frankenstein* follows in the path of Godwin and Percy Shelley's secularization through the exploration of the limitless power of man's creative mind, or the Romantic imagination. In the preface to the essay "Thoughts on Man, His Nature, Productions and Discoveries Interspersed with Some Particulars Respecting the Author," Godwin states his opinion of the supremacy of man: "All that we observe that is best and most excellent in the intellectual

world, is man: and it is easy to perceive in many cases, that the believer in mysteries does little more, than dress up his deity in the choicest of human attributes and qualifications."[201] Following this line of thought, Shelley secularizes the image of God by showing humanity not as an image of God, but God as a deification of humanity.

The ultimate display of man's divine power in *Frankenstein* is through Victor's ability to create life. According to the Bible, man's acquisition of the power to create life implies his access to the power of God. The book of Genesis describes how God single-handedly created the world from void and proceeded to fill his new earth with all forms of life. If man could obtain the power to create life, he would assume the creative role of God. Shelley's secularization begins by dispelling the mystery and supernatural elements at work within the Christian explanation of creation. Christianity traditionally assigns the power to grant life and defy death as being beyond the understanding of man, accessible only to a superior God. Shelley undermines this power structure in *Frankenstein* by transferring authority from the ambiguous realm of God to the worldly control of man. Shelley argues against the existence of God by demonstrating how the act of creation exists as a process of the natural world that can be learned through scientific inquiry rather than a supernatural phenomenon. Victor is drawn to the study of science after hearing Waldman's lecture at Ingolstadt in which he describes the potential power of the scientist:

> They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its shadows.[202]

Here Waldman hints at the scientist's potential to assume godlike powers in claiming that "they ascend into the heavens" and "command" its elements. His view reflects Godwin's comments in "Of Religion": "Think of the astonishing powers of intellectual man, a being looking before and after, fitted to improve by the past, and to provide for the future."[203] Within *Frankenstein*, science provides Shelley with the means through which to free her characters and creation story from the bounds of Christian dogma. Christianity's abstract version of the creation story appears to be an outdated superstition when compared with Victor's concretely proven process. When analyzed in scientific terms, the essence of life which Christianity considers the spirit becomes little more than an electric spark, and the God of Christian creation is reduced to a deflated myth.

With the success of his experiment to create life, Victor breaks the final boundary between God and man— immortality— and demonstrates the ultimate creative power of the culmination of human reason and imagination. Victor's acquisition of the power to give life back to the dead granted him and those he loved the possibility of never-ending life. This was the initial goal of Victor's experiment: "I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption."[204] His success can be interpreted as a declaration of man as god, the Romantic notion of the glorification and power of the individual, creative self. Stretching the power of reason and imagination to consider infinite possibilities, Victor's sheer will drives him to succeed: "After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life."[205] There is no divine intermediary guiding Victor toward his goal nor is there any unnatural secret to creation. The answer lay plainly before him in the natural world for anyone to discover, and Victor succeeded because he was

inspired and willing to commit the mental energy necessary for the task. He proves that if pushed enough, the mind can achieve anything and even supersede the limits of earthly knowledge to grasp the divine. This idea encapsulates the very heart of Godwin's philosophical point that ultimate power rests in the exercise of individual's mind. In "The Genius of Christianity Unveiled," Godwin refutes Christianity's insistence on the incompetence of human effort:

> It is not true, that 'all our righteousness is filthy rags,'[206] and that, 'from the sole of our foot to the crown of our head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores'[207] and he that conceives and speaks thus of himself, is ill prepared for those noble and magnanimous things by which we may be raised to that which is worthy, in an elevated sense, of the name of man.[208]

The success of Victor's experiment defies conventional understanding of the laws of nature and the Christian concept of divine creation to show that nothing is beyond the reach of the human mind. Victor tells Walton, "my imagination was vivid, yet my powers of analysis and application were intense; by the union of these qualities I conceived the idea, and executed the creation of a man."[209] Victor shows no incompetence or limit to the reach of his understanding, as Christianity had claimed existed, and his success in creating life confirms Shelley's rejection of Christian belief.

Victor is a successful creator because, like God, he does give life to a human being fully capable of reason. From the beginning of his life, the creature has the ability to think; therefore, he cannot be considered anything other than human. The creature enters into the world like a child and suffers from hunger, cold, and pain because there is no one to care for

him; however, he soon discovers how to use the elements of nature for his survival. His ability to learn how to maintain the fire he discovers and cook his food through a process of observation and experimentation illustrates the creature's ability to exercise reason and not simply to strive for self-preservation. The creature's capacity to master language further points to his ability to reason and, consequently, his humanness. Shelley's projection of the creature as nothing less than human, not a monster, underpins the idea of Victor achieving the status of god. The creature's absolute humanity signifies that Victor indeed has acquired genuinely God-like knowledge of creation and is not simply mocking God's power with a botched effort.

Shelley's identification of the essence of humanity with the capacity of the mind to reason strongly parallels Godwin's ideas on the nature of man's being. In *Political Justice*, he asserts that "No inconsiderable argument may be derived from the singular and more important nature of that property of human beings, which we term thought; which it is surely somewhat violent to strike out of our system as a mere superfluity."[210] For Godwin, man's being was not spiritual in a supernatural sense but rather defined in terms of an internal consciousness which he believed was the distinguishing essence of the individual. "Consciousness," Godwin writes, "is a sort of supplementary reflection, by which the mind not only has the thought, but adverts to its own situation and observes that it has it."[211] But for Godwin, the ability to reason and recognize the possession of this capacity is only half of the equation of human existence. In "Of Religion," Godwin claims, "So far as we are employed in keeping up facts and in reasoning upon them merely, we are a species of machines; it is our impulses and our sentiments, that are the glory of our nature."[212] To be human, then, is to possess both thought and feeling.

Shelley follows Godwin's definition of humanity in her depiction of Victor's creature, giving him not only the capacity to reason for the sake of self-preservation but also to contemplate the nature of his being. Eventually, his mind begins to move beyond considerations of self-preservation, and he begins to show the aptitude for emotion. Harold Bloom points out that the creature can even be considered more human than his creator because he shows more depth of feeling.[213] The creature reflects on the pleasure to be found in the facets of nature, even trying to imitate the singing of the birds that "delighted" him.[214] When he first begins to observe the De Lacey family, the creature starts to learn language but claims he is unable to understand the concepts of "good, dearest, unhappy."[215] As he continues to watch the family's interactions, the creature's comprehension of these terms as well as his capacity for experiencing emotion grows. He reflects on his emotional connection to the De Laceys, saying "when they were unhappy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys."[216]

The creature's deformed physical appearance in no way lessens his humanity; conversely, it could be argued that his deformity increases his humanity because it leads to his attempt to answer questions about his being. When the creature first sees his reflection, he is startled at his own gruesome appearance, saying "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification."[217] Confronted with the reality of his unnatural form, he experiences a deeply emotional moment that results in his increased consciousness of self. As he listens to Felix discussing the construct of society, the creature questions "And what was I?"[218] Drawing on his consciousness of his existence and what he has learned about

society, the creature begins to look beyond his self to define his being in the context of his place in the world.

The novel's association with the Prometheus myth highlights Shelley's intent to portray man's ascent to divine power. Anne Mellor connects Shelley's use of this theme in *Frankenstein* with the trend in Romanticism to "elevate human beings into living gods," drawing attention to their belief that man's imagination and reason could enable him to overcome the evils of the world.[219] Shelley does not suggest that Victor is the mythological Prometheus, but rather a "modern" or Romanticized version of the original. According to the myth, Prometheus steals his power from the existing deity; however, Victor obtains his power through the exercise of his own mind. More important in distinguishing Victor as a modern Prometheus is the absence of the god figure from his endeavor. Borrowing the power of the gods does not make Prometheus himself a god, only god-like, but the source of Victor's power is innate and, therefore, more authentically divine. In Shelley's vision, man as the "modern Prometheus," as she declares in the book's subtitle, not only gains access to divine power but replaces God himself.

Each step of Victor's search for the source of life depicts the transformation of the divine to the earthly. Victor's search for divine power takes him within the depths of the earth itself rather than heaven above. "I pursued nature to her hiding places," Victor claims as he describes his many hours spent working among graves and charnel houses.[220] Searching within the natural world, Victor discovers the secret of life while observing how the lowliest of creatures, the worm, "inherited the wonders of the eye and brain."[221] He then takes the power he has gained from the natural world below to his "solitary chamber" in the uppermost room, separated from the rest of the house.[222] The physical height and disjoined

position of Victor's workshop symbolizes the lofty, inaccessible sphere of God. However, in a reversal of Christian perspective, the natural world replaces heaven as the source of divine knowledge and power, and within the heavenly heights resides not a mystical God but a man of flesh and bone. Similarly, the process of creation loses its heavenly luster in Victor's "workshop of filthy creation," becoming "profane" and "loathsome."[223]

Divine Nature

Secondary to the relationship between Victor and the creature, Shelley's depiction of the natural world also reinforces her secularization of religion. In addition to man, nature itself takes on a sovereign power, perhaps inspired indirectly by Wordsworth's view of the relationship between man and the natural world. Percy Shelley remained engrossed in Wordsworth's poetry throughout the 1816 summer stay in Geneva. His enthusiasm for the elder poet's view of nature permeated his writing during this time, most notably "Mont Blanc"; moreover, Percy's Wordsworthian enthusiasm was contagious to those around him. Byron's third canto of *Childe Harold* and Shelley's *Frankenstein*, both composed during the same summer, heavily incorporate Wordsworthian perspectives of nature via Percy Shelley.

In the poem "Nutting," Wordsworth claims, "there is a spirit in the woods."[224] As discussed in chapter three, Wordsworth saw in nature the divine spirit of God connecting all living things. Closely following Wordsworth's understanding of the connection between man and nature, Victor describes the connection between Henry Clerval's spirit and the natural world, borrowing directly from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"[225]:

> The sounding cataract
>
> Haunted him[226] like a passion: the tall rock,

> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to him
> An appetite; a feeling, and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.[227]

Clerval's spirit is uplifted through its connection to the natural world. Similarly, Victor turns to nature to regain a sense of peace. After Justine's trial, Victor takes a long walk through the countryside, stating, "These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling, and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquilized it."[228] The creature's account of his life in the forest during his first days in the world also strongly recalls Wordsworth's ideas and Rousseau's "noble savage." He communes with the facets of nature and learns to depend on them for his survival; furthermore, the light "over the heavens," "the bright moon," and even "the songs of the birds" give him pleasure.[229] Following in the tradition of the Romantics' entertainment of pantheism, nature possesses the capacity to be a powerful force of emotional inspiration and stability in *Frankenstein*, and man is in his optimal mental state when in harmony with nature.

Shelley also uses the imagery of the natural world to symbolically reflect the actions or emotions of her characters. This mirroring reveals the connection that mankind maintains to the natural world, in that the actions of one world produces a reciprocal effect on the other. For instance, Robert Walton meets Victor while trapped among the ice fields of the northern seas. The cold and desolate landscape reflects the fruitless endeavors upon which the two

men have embarked as well as their unfeeling attitude toward the sacrifices that must be made to reach their goals. In another example, Victor observes his anxiety after the death of William manifested in the natural world as he travels home:

> Yet, as I drew nearer home, grief and fear again overcame me. Night also closed around, and when I could hardly see the dark mountains, I felt still more gloomily. The picture appeared a vast and dim scene of evil, and I foresaw obscurely that I was destined to become the most wretched of human beings.[230]

Moments after this observation a great thunderstorm erupts. The storm not only represents the turmoil of Victor's conscience but also refocuses his attention from his "foul occupation" to thoughts of the natural world. He says, "This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits."[231] By reconnecting with nature, Victor regains a degree of harmony and joy which he had lost.

While there is an obvious power present in the natural world of *Frankenstein*, Shelley also gives an indication of the influence of Percy's atheistic manipulation of these ideas by illustrating nature's divine power as existing independent of a God figure. Nature in *Frankenstein* serves as more than a source of inspiration or reflection of the divine, wielding an innate power which rivals man's own. Shelley's imagery of the ice surrounding Walton's ship recalls the characterization of the ocean in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: "Water, water, every where/ nor any drop to drink."[232] The natural world operates on its own, and man is subject to both its pleasures and furies when he intrudes upon her. As Walton and the mariner discovered, the same natural forces which normally contribute to the preservation of life can just as easily extinguish life. Water is essential to all life; however, when confronted in the ocean or sea of ice, it becomes a deadly force that acts on its own

accord and cannot be controlled. Walton exclaims in a letter to his sister that "I am surrounded by mountains of ice, which admit of no escape, and threaten every moment to crush my vessel."[233] There is nothing that Walton can do to change the condition of the natural world around him, and he is forced to endure the consequences of his intrusion until nature allows him to depart with the breaking of the ice.

Conclusion

Throughout *Frankenstein*, Shelley presents a demonstration of possible circumstances in which the existence of God cannot be rationally justified. Heavily inspired by the atheistic beliefs of her father and husband, she presents a secularized view of the world in which the traditional power of God is transferred to man. Her goal in this effort is twofold. First, she intends her representation of religion in the text to be interpreted as a criticism of its negative influence on society, in the same way as Percy Shelley's poetry and William Godwin's philosophy. Secondly, as will be seen in the following chapter, *Frankenstein* functions as a form of political criticism which illustrates Shelley's answer for the liberation of society through the application of Godwin's moral philosophy. By refuting the possibility of a higher power controlling the world, Shelley shifts all responsibility for both society's success and failure directly to man. This power shift sets the stage, as shall be shown in the following chapter, for the development of Godwin's philosophical ideas.

V. *FRANKENSTEIN*'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Frankenstein engages in England's tradition of joining religious secularization with arguments for political reform by rejecting Christian belief to demonstrate the assertions of William Godwin's moral philosophy. As a leading advocate of the omnipotent power of the mind, Godwin participated and inspired many others in the Romantic tradition of religious secularization by demonstrating the necessity of a life governed by reason and morality rather than religious practice. Many of the first-generation Romantics were familiar with Godwin's writings and close acquaintances of the political philosopher. As participants of Godwin's intellectual circle, the early Romantic poets discussed and exchanged ideas on political issues with Godwin that were mutually influential. For instance, Wordsworth's "Guilt and Sorrow" and "The Borderers" strongly reflect a foundation in Godwinian moral philosophy, and Godwin's revisions of *Political Justice* reveal the growing impact of the Romantic interest in the emotions on his personal vision.[234] Although most of the early Romantics shared his ideas regarding the corrupted state of organized religion, they ultimately rejected Godwin's atheistic vision, with many turning instead to modified forms of Christianity. However, Godwin found a particularly receptive audience for his atheistic stance against religion in the second-generation of Romantic writers, most notably his daughter Mary Shelley. She and her peers found inspiration in her father's optimistic vision of humanity's potential, and already inclined toward atheism, they found in Godwin's writings convincing arguments for the corruptive nature of religious belief and institutions. Because Shelley's own beliefs were deeply influenced by her father, it is important to first

consider the argument presented in William Godwin's philosophy to better understand Mary Shelley's secularization of religious beliefs in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein* engages in England's tradition of joining religious secularization with arguments for political reform by rejecting Christian belief to demonstrate the assertions of Godwin's moral philosophy.

Although Mary Shelley's story of creation gone awry is popularly interpreted by modern readers as a warning against man's desire to overreach his station, when considered in the context of its basis in Godwinian and Romantic philosophy, the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* can in fact be interpreted as an atheistic vision of man's secularized political potential. The novel is intended to function as a guide for society's redemption by exposing its flaws and the power of individual choice. To accomplish this, Shelley's story presents a case study of morality and the origins of good and evil. In place of Christianity's doctrine of spirituality and dogma, she advocates Godwin's belief in the supreme power of the individual's reason and links the potential for the improvement of society to the perceptions and actions of individuals rather than the will of a divine God or an institution. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley argues that man's suffering is not the result of a supernatural creator's divine will, but the natural outcome of each individual's failure or inability to make reasonable moral judgments. Consequently, the solution to humanity's problems must be sought through human and not supernatural means. Godwin states: "it [Christianity] is absurd, it is the underminer and corrupter of human understanding: a race or nation of men, who give up to such a degree their discretion and the use of their reasoning faculties in one point, must be mere intellectual eunuchs in all the rest."[235] Godwin viewed society as a group of rational individuals; therefore, the welfare of society depended on each individual's

commitment to always use his reason to act for the greater good.[236] Following Godwin's assertion, Shelley uses atheism in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* to prove that the responsibility for maintaining a just and productive society falls on each individual citizen through the decisions that he makes.

Man's Social Purpose

In the context of religion, the individual's happiness in *Frankenstein* depends upon his ability to foster tangible relationships with others instead of with an intangible, supernatural deity. Shelley's representation of the necessity of interpersonal relationships goes beyond Godwin's principle of universal benevolence to advocate a position more closely linked to Percy Shelley's concept of love. According to Godwin, the purpose of the individual's life was to be useful to his fellow man, and the ultimate reward for the individual's utility would be his personal satisfaction in contributing to the welfare of his society.[237] He contradicts Christianity by arguing that the individual's ultimate reward for a life of good works is experienced through the security and advancement of the present world rather than a personal prize to be received in a future heaven or hell. While Percy generally agrees with Godwin on the importance of the individual's ability to be useful to society, what Godwin terms the individual's utility, he expands its application to include his ability to form meaningful relationships through love. Percy defines love as

> that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason we would be understood; if we

> imagine we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own...This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists.[238]

According to Percy, love is a unifying power. In giving love, the individual continually seeks to find the reciprocation of love from another, and through this exchange, man communes with man and the world around him, advancing one step closer to an ideal utopian society. In *Frankenstein*, the joy of heaven and pain of hell become internal states of being that result from the strength of the individual's connection to society as well as his need for utility. Each individual still maintains an inherent duty to be a beneficial contributor to the welfare of his fellow man; however, Mary Shelley tends to side with Percy Shelley in that man's utility must not be at the expense of his personal relationships. In the case that either is neglected, immorality and injustice are sure to follow. In this respect the stories of the creature and Victor represent opposite sides of the same coin. The creature's longing for social acceptance at the price of his utility contributes to the corrosion of his moral character. On the other hand, Victor's neglect of his personal relationships in pursuit of utility brings about the same result.

Shelley illustrates the individual's relationship to society through the development of the creature's character. The creature tells Victor that the education he received by observing the De Laceys and reading the classics of literature (*Plutarch's Lives*, *Sorrows of Werter*, and *Paradise Lost*) taught him "to admire their virtues, and to deprecate the vices of mankind" and "produced in me an infinity of new images and feelings."[239] Before his self-education,

the creature's mind was "unformed" and concerned primarily with his day-to-day survival; however, the development of his mind and introduction to the concepts of good and evil awakens his sense of power as an individual. By learning about morality and the history of human civilization, the creature discovers both purpose for life beyond self-preservation and the wretched condition of his own life: "Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was...my heart yearned to be known and loved by these amiable creatures [De Laceys]."[240] He finds, in accordance with Godwin's philosophy, that man's purpose is linked directly to ability to be useful to society and recognizes the futility of his existence outside of society.

In the beginning, the creature attempts to be beneficial to his fellow man, evidenced by his efforts to save the drowning girl and ease the burdens of the De Lacey family. He claims, "benevolence and generosity were ever present before me, inciting within me a desire to become an actor in the busy scene where so many admirable qualities were called forth and displayed."[241] Observing the De Lacey family, the creature learns the concept of love. As he struggles to understand how he can ever be a useful part of society, the creature also begins to long for acceptance and love. He tells Victor of the pain which accompanied the realization of his status in life:

> Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge....I admired virtue and good feelings, and loved the gentle manners and amiable qualities of my cottagers; but I was shut out from intercourse with them, except through means which I obtained by

> stealth...which rather increased than satisfied my desire I had of becoming one among my fellows.[242]

The creature's greatest psychological torment results from the discovery and knowledge that he will never be accepted or allowed to be a productive member of society by other people because of his appearance, validating Godwin's theory on man's social existence.

Here Shelley explores what seems to be a complex moral dilemma between the principles of universal benevolence and love. The creature's personal happiness depends on his ability to be loved and accepted; however, once the creature allows his personal desire for love to compromise the possibility of his social utility, he ceases to act in accordance with the criteria of Godwinian justice. The creature had already proven that his greater physical abilities were highly beneficial to the De Lacey family when he completed their daily chores for them during the night; however, he allows his feelings of loneliness to overtake his satisfaction in knowing that his assistance has benefited the family. He claims, "sometimes I allowed my thoughts, unchecked by reason, to ramble in the fields of Paradise, and dared to fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathizing with my feelings and cheering my gloom."[243] Fully aware of the irrationality of his desire for the family's companionship, the creature follows through with his wish to make contact with the family. For the creature, simply contributing to the welfare of those around him is not personally fulfilling. If it were, he would have been content to continue assisting the De Laceys without making his presence known to them.

Aside from his benefit to the family, the creature's physical strength and endurance against the natural elements also give him the potential to be of even greater benefit to mankind. Victor describes him as "a creature who could exist in the ice caves of the glaciers,

and hide himself from pursuit among the ridges of inaccessible precipices."[244] Shelley emphasizes the creature's potential utility by contrasting the creature's ease of mobility in the sea of ice with the failures of average human efforts to access such regions. As Victor chases the creature across the ice fields, the harsh terrain progressively deteriorates his health. Similarly, and more poignantly, Shelley brings Walton's ice-bound ship back into the picture, highlighting man's limitations in the natural world. The creature seems to possess no such limitations and, therefore, could possibly be successful in bringing knowledge of the unknown world to man where Walton has failed.

As in the case of Godwin's example of the house fire, the ultimate evil in *Frankenstein* is not the creature's choice to pursue his personal desires over the greater good but the injustice of a society which forces him to make such a choice. Godwin claims that "the moral qualities of men are the produce of the impressions made upon them, and that there is no instance of an original propensity to evil."[245] The creature's initial benevolent disposition reflects Godwin's idea that evil is not an innately human characteristic. Rejected from the company of other human beings, the creature tells Victor, "if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear."[246] The creature at this point allows his desire for revenge to overtake any consideration of his potential usefulness to those around him, claiming that "misery made me a fiend."[247] In adherence to Godwin's ideas, Shelley shows that the prejudices of society, as a collective group of individuals, are the source of the creature's misery and impressions that led to the corruption of his virtue. Society rejects him on the superficial basis of his outward appearance without true knowledge of his character. In his appeal to the elder De Lacey, the creature describes his wish to help his "friends" overcome the unfounded "prejudice" which they hold against him.[248] Godwin claims that "whatever limits truth is error."[249] Because

society perceives the creature to be evil based on his appearance, they fail to see the truth of his potential usefulness to mankind. Society's irrational acceptance of a false perception (or prejudice in Godwinian terms) regarding the creature's appearance results in the dismissal of sensible morality and directly creates the injustice of the creature's position.

Victor's story presents the exact opposite set of circumstances but reaches the same result. He begins life with a firm foundation in a loving, supportive family. Victor is peacefully content during his early years spent in the company of his family: "I feel pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind, and changed its bright visions of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self."[250] He derives a sense of purpose and, therefore, pleasure from being strongly bonded to his family. Victor's use of the Godwinian term "extensive usefulness" also parallels and reinforces the text's connection to Godwin's idea of the individual's utility. Victor's family constitutes a form of "society" in which he enjoys acceptance. As long as he fulfills his role as a contributor to the general welfare of the family, he is reasonably content with life.

However, as his interests become increasingly self-centered, Victor's connection to his family weakens and consequently his personal satisfaction with life and moral sensibility lessens. While working on the creature at Ingolstadt, Victor is both intellectually consumed and emotionally isolated from his family: "I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit...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."[251] During this same time, he becomes carried away with the idea of being an agent of great benefit for the welfare of all mankind, believing that his work will "pour a torrent of light into our dark world."[252] This desire to benefit society quickly turns to an

interest in self-glorification: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs."[253] He quickly disregards any thought of serving the greater good, concerning himself only with egotistical notions of his entitlement to worship from his creation rather than his duty to care for this life or world. As shall be demonstrated later, this lack of consideration for his moral responsibility will directly result in the creation of further injustice as well as Victor's own downfall.

Once the consequences of his self-indulgent behavior begin to manifest with the murder of William and prosecution of Justice, Victor shows a renewed interest in working to support the general welfare of society. His concern for preserving the greater good is most easily recognizable in his rationalization for destroying the female creature. He claims, "I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race."[254] Even in the face of the creature's threats, Victor chooses the course of action which he believes will produce the greatest good rather than the greatest personal happiness. This decision serves as a significant turning point in the story which fully illustrates the novel's grounding in Godwin's philosophy. "There is one rule to which we are universally bound to conform ourselves," Godwin writes, "justice, the treating of every man precisely as his usefulness and worth demand, the acting under every circumstance in the manner that shall procure the greatest quantity of general good."[255] Justice is, therefore, a significant indicator of the presence of truth, but justice for Godwin implies its own set of criteria. As argued through the fire case in chapter two, an action can only be considered just if it has served the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people. When considered under the terms of

Godwin's philosophy, the destruction of the female creature was not only a just decision but also Victor's duty to mankind because of her potential to harm others.

However, just as in the case of the creature, Shelley points out that social utility alone is often not enough to give the individual a sense of personal fulfillment. She again illustrates Godwin's idea of the significance of meaningful social relationships in the individual's life through the negative impact of Victor's self-imposed isolation on his physical and mental health. Cut off from human society, he becomes "oppressed by a slow fever" and "nervous to a most painful degree; a disease that I regretted the more because I had hitherto enjoyed most excellent health."[256] After giving life to the creature, the death of Justine, and his time in Ireland, Victor suffers from fits of "nervous fever" and relies on his loved ones to come nurse him. Victor is able to restore his health and spirits only by setting aside his focus on himself to reconnect with others.

This connection between the condition of the individual's being and his social relationships is further reinforced through Victor's chance meeting of Robert Walton. Like Victor, Walton is consumed with the idea of being a benefactor to the progress of society: "you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole...or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet."[257] Walton pursues his desire with little regard for the sacrifices required, particularly the human sacrifices. Even after spending days trapped by ice in the middle of the arctic seas, he plans to continue his self-destructive endeavor should the ship be freed from its entrapment until his crew refuses to continue:

> I had rather die, than return shamefully, my purpose unfulfilled. Yet I fear such will be my fate; the men, unsupported by ideas of glory and honour, can never willingly continue to endure their present hardships.[258]

Shelley never suggests that Walton's mission cannot be accomplished or that it is a meaningless endeavor, remaining supportive of Godwin's assertion of the necessity of man's continuous search for truth. However, she also gives no indication that it would have been successful. In this instance, it seems that Walton's decision to turn back supports both principles of universal benevolence and love. By conceding to the wishes of his crew, he provides the greatest immediate benefit to the greatest number of individuals and also proves the value of human connections.

The cold and desolate landscape in which Walton and Victor meet reflects the isolation of these two men from the rest of the world. The friendship that develops between the two ends up being the saving grace of both. Walton writes to his sister, "I have but one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend...I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine."[259] Walton's account of his lack of friendship here strongly reflects Percy Shelley comments in the essay fragment "On Love" of the importance of interpersonal bonds. Walton finds in Victor all of the qualities of friendship that he has so long desired and enjoys his moments of greatest personal happiness during his voyage while with him. Victor too regains a degree of harmony and joy which he had lost after the deaths of his loved ones, and it is with his reconnection with society, via his friendship with Walton, that he finds a release from his misery through death. Walton experiences a similar release of both body and spirit at this time. As he rediscovers the joy of

friendship, his ship frees from the ice that has held it captive and provides him the opportunity to return to England.

The Necessity of Individual Judgment

Godwin adamantly argued for the existence of one overruling truth, cited above: "The various opinions prevailing in different countries and among different classes of men upon the same subject, are almost innumerable; and yet of all these opinions only one can be true."[260] For Godwin, the exercise of individual judgment, or reason, is the necessary foundation of a politically just society. Reason is the means through which the individual continually searches for truth, and it is only by drawing nearer to truth that society, as a collective group of individuals, can progress. Michael Scrivener notes that for Godwin "Cultivating the truth was the means by which stagnation was to be dissolved."[261] Truth, as Godwin himself admits, however, is not easy to come by. According to Godwin, political and religious institutions and systems of belief impose limitations on the exercise of the mind from which the individual must break free if he hopes to come closer to truth. Godwin's philosophy takes authority away from society's institutions and gives control and responsibility to the individual for determining the direction of his life. Man's life becomes whatever he will make of it instead of a one-way path toward heaven or hell. This restructuring of the Christian hierarchy indicates man's capacity to be a purveyor of both good and evil. Godwin further claims that

> Man, while he consults his own understanding, is the ornament of the universe. Man, when he surrenders his reason, and becomes the partisan of implicit faith and passive obedience, is the most mischievous of all animals.

> Ceasing to examine every proposition that comes before him for the direction of his conduct, he is no longer the capable subject of moral instruction. He is, in the instant of submission, the blind instrument of every nefarious purpose of his principal; and, when left to himself, is open to the seduction of injustice, cruelty and profligacy.[262]

The search for truth requires the individual to exercise a continual process of trial and error, in which all possible actions, consequences, and motives are weighed on the basis of reason, benevolence, and justice.[263] Reason provides the individual the means to determine the extent to which justice has been met in any given situation; therefore, laws and dogmas which dictate justice must be considered harmful because they do not allow the individual to exercise his own judgment. Godwin believed that the mind operated in a state of "flux," or constant activity: "at the very time that the most methodical series of perceptions is going on in the mind, there is another set of perceptions, or rather many sets playing an under or intermediate part."[264] The mind attempts to blend these accumulated perceptions into one unified perception.[265] In this process, reason serves as the mediator for determining the accuracy or prejudice of each perception. Prejudice opposes justice and detracts the individual from the path of truth. Because they limit the application of reason, Godwin sees political and religious institutions as agents of prejudice and injustice rather than truth.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley depicts the inability of religious institutions to protect humanity and enact God's will to illustrate Godwin's political stance on the failure of regulatory institutions to uphold truth and justice. Shelley leaves her text noticeably void of religious institutions, but in the single instance in which they do surface, she undercuts their presence with an inability to uphold the basic tenets of Christian doctrine: love, truth, and

justice. The weak and ineffective representation of the church and clergy in *Frankenstein* echoes Godwin's thoughts on religious institutions: "The most malicious enemy of mankind could not have invented a scheme more destructive of their true happiness, than that of hiring at the expence of the state a body of men, whose business it should seem to be to dupe their contemporaries into the practice of virtue."[266] Employing irony, the people and institution closest to God in *Frankenstein* in fact inflict the most harm.

After the murder of William, the case against Justine Moritz rests wholly on grounds of circumstantial evidence; however, convinced of her guilt but unwilling to issue a death sentence without certain proof, the court sends a priest to confer with the accused. Supporting the public condemnation, Justine's confessor frightens the girl into confessing to a crime which she did not commit instead of advocating for more substantial evidence to prove her guilt. Justine confides to Elizabeth and Victor that her fear of being executed without receiving absolution, a certain sentence to hell for the Christian believer, drove her to falsely confess.

> I confessed, that I might obtain absolution;...The God of heaven forgive me! Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments if I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me; all looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition.[267]

As Justine's namesake implies, her death symbolizes the death of justice, ironically at the hands of those in whom she places her greatest faith. She relies upon her belief in God's protection of the innocent; however, God remains silent and his earthly representatives fail to

uncover the truth of her innocence.[268] The image of the priest as threatening and menacing contradicts the merciful and benevolent characterization of Christianity.

Furthermore, the novel's view of Christian faith reflects Godwin's assertion that institutional systems of belief negatively impact man's ability to exercise reason. In *Political Justice* he states that religious conformity "is founded in the most sovereign ignorance of the nature of mind": "If the people be not blinded with religious zeal, they will discover and despise the imperfections of their spiritual guides. If they be so blinded, they will not the less transplant into their own characters the imbecil and unworthy spirit they are not able to detect."[269] According to Godwin, if people would fully consider the rationality of religious beliefs, then they would be less inclined to accept them. The problem, he claims, is that people often allow their emotions or "zeal" to stand in the way of the exercise of reason. Following Godwin's lead, Shelley equates religious faith with irrationality or madness. The characters look for hope in Christianity only after their emotions have consumed their minds and they have abandoned reason.

For instance, Justine's Christian faith holds her mind captive to its principles and directly leads to her forfeit justice, liberty, and life, the very things which Godwin claims are the right of every human being. She mistakenly believes that God will set her free when in fact that power lies with Victor or the creature. During her trial, she claims that "God know how entirely I am innocent."[270] Rather than adamantly arguing her own defense, Justine resigns her fate to the will of a supernatural power and gives her life as retribution for a crime she did not commit. Furthermore, she allows her fear of excommunication and hell in what she describes as "an evil hour" to lead her to falsely confess to the murder of William Frankenstein.[271] In this way, Justine becomes what Godwin calls a "slave" to religion's

system of oppression.[272] Because her faith dictates that she must conform to the customs of the Church, in this case receiving absolution to avoid eternal punishment, she believes that confessing, though innocent, is her only option for the salvation of her soul. Reason on the other hand would point out, as does Shelley, that any system of belief which requires the adherent to commit a wrong to receive forgiveness is unjust and, therefore, to be rejected. So, although Justine's faith comforts her, it is an empty belief that provides no real benefit.

Similarly, Victor also turns to a belief in "guiding spirits" watching over him as he pursues the creature across the continent. He allows his hate and desire for revenge to consume him as "the furies possessed me," and in the midst of his emotional rage he convinces himself that his mission to destroy the creature is divinely commissioned:

> A spirit of good followed and directed my steps, and, when I most murmured, would suddenly extricate me from seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Sometimes, when nature, overcome by hunger, sunk under the exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspired me. The fare was indeed coarse, such as the peasants of the country ate; but I may not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had invoked to aid me.[273]

His belief in spirits disturbs his judgment so that he cannot recognize that it is in fact the creature who is enticing him to follow. Victor's altered sense of reality verges on madness as he calls on "the spirits of the dead; and...wandering ministers of vengeance" to aid him in his revenge while recklessly abandoning all concern for his personal welfare.[274] Shelley's portrayal of Victor's deranged reliance on the guidance of the supernatural underscores her argument of the irrational futility of religious belief.

Choice & Fall of Man

Even though each individual must exercise reason in all decisions, Shelley claims that morality must serve as the guiding principle for the exercise of individual judgment. Throughout *Political Justice*, Godwin bases his philosophical outlook on morality as "the source from which its [justice's] fundamental axioms must be drawn."[275] Godwin and Shelley's emphasis on individual judgment does not imply that moral authority is subject to the agenda of each individual. Because only one truth exists in any instance, some of the individual's perceptions will be right and others wrong. Reason gives the individual the ability to distinguish what is morally correct. It is the duty of the individual to always act in accordance with what is morally correct, which means upholding justice and supporting the greater good.[276] "Morality," Godwin claims, "is, if any thing can be, fixed and immutable; and there must surely be some strange deception that should induce us to give to an action eternally and unchangeably wrong, the epithets of rectitude, duty and virtue.[277] According to Godwin, morality must be the motivating factor behind every just action, and the problems of the individual and society result from deviances from morality, as Shelley points out in *Frankenstein.*

By erasing the line established by Christianity to separate God from man, Shelley emphasizes the fact that man possesses the ultimate power of moral authority. *Frankenstein* is a world without God, only man. Although she rejects the possibility of a supernatural being regulating the world in *Frankenstein*, she does not imply that the world exists in chaos. By eliminating the possibility of God's moral authority, Shelley reconstructs the Christian moral hierarchy from God ruling over man to mankind being responsible for regulating itself.

Politically, this transfer of power symbolizes the Godwinian perspective of the power of the individual to make judgments for himself without submitting to a centralized authority figure. In *Frankenstein*, there is no central figure capable of enforcing justice; therefore, any attempt to do so must be initiated and carried out by each individual. Consequently, both Victor and the creature attempt to enforce their own systems of justice. The creature vows to inflict Victor with the same degree of misery he experienced because of the hideous façade given by his creator: "towards you my archenemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care: I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you curse the hour of your birth."[278] Likewise, Victor swears to devote his life to pursuing and destroying the murderous creature he brought to life: "I swear to pursue the daemon, who caused this misery, until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict."[279] While neither possesses the power to control the actions of the other, each acts as the only agent of justice capable of holding the other accountable for his actions. Victor and the creature's actions create a chaos of competing "justices." But, as Godwin asserts, there can be only one truth, and truth can only be realized by upholding justice through morality.

Any injustice emerging in the world would, therefore, be the direct result of man's failure to uphold morality. Because each individual's decisions can impact society as a whole, Godwin states that it is imperative that the individual's reasoning be based on moral considerations. The main conflict of Shelley's novel results from both characters' deviation from the principle of morality, as defined by Godwin, in their attempts to enforce their own brands of justice. In *Political Justice*, Godwin further elaborates on the role of the individual's private judgment:

> To a rational being there can be but one rule of conduct, justice, and one mode of ascertaining that rule, the exercise of his understanding...if, not being operated upon by absolute compulsion, I be wholly prompted by something that is frequently called by that name, and act from the hope of reward or the fear of punishment, my conduct is positively wrong.[280]

In their drive for fulfillment of their personal desires for vengeance, not justice, Victor and the creature disregard the Godwinian concepts of universal benevolence and reason, which in turn results in the profusion of injustice in the world around them.

Victor chooses to abandon his creation, leaving the eight-foot, grotesque superhuman with the ability to reason to his own devices. While Victor is able to rationalize that this situation could present adverse affects for mankind when he destroys the female creature, he is unable to see past his own ego to reach the same reasonable conclusion before the creation of the first creature. He works in a state of mad frenzy to construct the creature without fully comprehending its monstrous appearance: "a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit."[281] It is not until the creature comes to life that Victor takes in the reality of what he has done: "I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!–Great God!"[282] At this point he allows his sensations of horror and disgust at the truth to inhibit reason. Instead of waiting to learn more about his creation, Victor runs from him. Reason would have brought Victor to the realization that morally he must remain accountable for his actions, and if he did not accept the creature because of his appearance, then no one else would either.

The temptation is to argue that Victor's fall confirms that he has overreached the boundaries of man to steal the power of God, that he has committed the Promethean or

Faustian sin. However, within the context of her secularization of Christianity in *Frankenstein*, it does not seem likely that Shelley intended Victor to be seen merely as a man grasping for the power of God but rather as a god-like being himself. George Levine points out that "the theme of the overreacher is largely complicated by the evidence that Victor's worst sin is not the creation of the Monster but his refusal to take responsibility for it."[283] As Levine argues, the central question of the story is not theological but one of morality. Mary Shelley's removal of God from the world underlines her Godwinian belief in the power of man, rather than a distant supernatural being, to control his own destiny through the decisions which he makes. Victor does not steal the power of life or make a Faustian deal with supernatural spirits. As Harold Bloom points out, Victor's failure is not in the act of creation but one of moral responsibility.[284] He successfully gives life to the creature, but Victor fails to provide him love and guidance. The creature begins life, as Godwin believed, innocent and good; however, Victor's neglect and rejection directly resulted in the alteration of the creature's perceptions of life, on which he would base his future actions. Godwin claims, "The moral qualities of men are the produce of the impressions made upon them, and that there is no instance of an original propensity to evil."[285] The creature's hate and desire for revenge results from his negative experiences in society: "I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind."[286] The misery which ultimately consumes Victor, then, results as the consequence of his initial neglect of his moral responsibility to care for the creature.

However, Victor cannot be held completely responsible for the creature's evil deeds because the creature is also capable of reasoning. While the source of the creature's wickedness is society's rejection of him, Shelley, following Godwin, is not content to use

this as an excuse to completely pardon him from the responsibility of the crimes he has committed. Just as no one forces Victor to abandon the life he has created, no one forces the creature to commit murder. These are immoral courses of action which he freely chooses. For instance, the creature originally plans to kidnap William Frankenstein and raise him as his own, even though the child shows the same aversion to the creature's appearance as the adults he has encountered. It is not until the child reveals his family name that the creature has any desire to harm him: "Frankenstein! you belong then to my enemy— to him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim."[287] Realizing his power to torment his maker, the creature voices his conscious decision to pursue revenge: "I, too, can create desolation; my enemy is not impregnable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him."[288] From this point forward all of the creature's attacks are directed toward the Frankenstein family.

The creature's downfall, then, is his failure to use his better judgment in exercising the restraint of reason over his passionate desire for revenge. The creature's idea of morality empowers his decision to hold his creator accountable for the wrongs committed against him, while his ability to reason gives him control over how he will do this. He knows that his actions are morally wrong because he has been educated, by observing the De Lacey family and studying Plutarch, Milton, and Goethe. However, the creature's negative experiences with society have led him to form prejudices against mankind and Victor which affect his choices. He tells Victor that

> From you only could I hope for succour, although towards you I felt no sentiment but that of hatred. Unfeeling, heartless creator! you had endowed me with perceptions and passions, and then cast me abroad an object for the

> scorn and horror of mankind. But on you only had I any claim for pity and redress, and from you I determined to seek that justice which I vainly attempted to gain from any other being that wore the human form.[289]

The creature hates Victor before ever meeting him; therefore, rather than appealing for care, he approaches Victor with an ultimatum: "If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them [mankind] and you at peace; but if your refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends."[290] He then proceeds to reveal the news that he killed William, artfully constructed Justine's identification as William's murderer, and has further demands and threats. The creature gives Victor the same cruel treatment that society has shown him. The novel indicates that Victor was receptive to a reasonable appeal for pity, saying "His tale, and the feelings he now expressed proved him to be a creature of fine sensations; and did I not, as his maker, owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow?"[291] But, the creature's self-admitted history of crimes weighs heavily on Victor's mind and, ultimately, influences his decision to refuse to finish the creature's female companion. He tells the creature, "Your threats cannot move me to do an act of wickedness; but they confirm me in a resolution of not creating you a companion in vice. Shall I, in cool blood, set loose upon the earth a daemon, whose delight is in death and wretchedness?"[292] Had the creature not acted immorally in his treatment of William and Justine, then it is at least possible that Victor would have created him a companion. The creature's continued loneliness, then, could be considered a direct consequence of his decision to put his personal feelings above morality.

Conclusion

Following a long English tradition of interpreting established religion to support political philosophies, Shelley presents a Romantically secularized view of religion in *Frankenstein* to support Godwin's ideas about the power of the individual and the negative impact of institutional authority. *Frankenstein* draws attention to the best and worst of human nature with the intent of providing the reader guidance toward the realization of truth. The truth that Shelley advocates reflects the basic elements of Godwin's philosophy— the duty of the individual to uphold the general welfare of society, the importance of the exercise of reason, and the necessity of reason based in morality. In the novel, the individual assumes a god-like role in directing the course of his own life through the decisions he makes, and Shelley uses *Frankenstein* to reveal how failure to uphold any one of the elements of Godwin's philosophy results in the creation of injustice and can lead to the direct downfall of the individual. Because the rational individual serves as the basis of Godwin's just society, any institutions or belief systems which limit the individual's exercise of private judgment, like religion, must be considered counter-productive to society. Christian practice and belief become negative forces in the novel which contribute to the spread of injustice, and as Shelley's characters submit to spiritual beliefs, their moral judgment becomes markedly impaired. Shelley attempts to redeem her readers not by warning them of the dangers of challenging a Christian God, but by warning them of the fatal consequences of not exercising the full power of their own reason and moral responsibility.

NOTES

Introduction

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4. Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 139-40. Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989).

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7. Rosa 78-79.

8. Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 250.

9. McGrath, *Reformation Thought* 251.

10. Margo Todd, *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17.

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12. Alister McGrath and Darren C. Marks, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 97-98.

13. McGrath and Darren 98-99.

14. Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 99.

15. Todd 27.

16. McGrath and Darren 99.

17. C. John Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (New York : Oxford UP, 1992), 69.

18. McGrath and Darren 5-8.

19. McGrath and Darren 100.

20. See Ryan 14, McGrath and Darren 101, for further detail on Puritans' role in politics during reigns of James I and Charles I.

21. Ryan 15.

22. David Lagomarsino and Charles J. Wood, *The Trial of Charles I; a Documentary History* (Hanover: UP of New England, 1989), 61.

23. Lagomarsino and Wood 66.

24. Lagomarsino and Wood 51.

25. Lagomarsino and Wood 55.

26. Ryan 19.

27. Sommerville 123.

28. Ryan 19-20.

29. Ryan 19.

30. See Ryan, ch.1, for more detail on discriminatory laws against Nonconformist Protestants in England.

31. Ryan 20.

32. McGrath, *Reformation Thought* 271.

33. McGrath and Darren 104.

34. Frederick Dreyer, *The Genesis of Methodism* Bethlehem, PA: London Lehigh UP, 1999), 21.

35. Dreyer 21.

36. Arminianism more closely parallels Calvinism than Anglicanism in its complete rejection of the centralization of authority within the institution of religion. Instead, the Arminians and Calvinists believed in the centralized authority of God alone; however, the two differed largely on the issues of predestination and salvation. For more detail on the relationship between Arminianism and Calvinism, see McGrath's *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism* 102, 148-49.

37. Dreyer 106.

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39. Frederick Gill, *The Romantic Movement and Methodism; a Study of English Romanticism and the Evangelical Revival* (London: Epworth Press, 1937), 24.

40. Gill 25.

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42. Priestman 13.

43. Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007), 43-44.

44. Baron Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach, *The System of Nature: or, The Laws of the Moral and Physical World* (London, 1820), II.13.

45. A.E. Rodway, *Godwin and the Age of Transition* (London: Harrap & Co., 1952), 17.

46. Rodway 17-18.

47. Rodway 16.

48. Rodway 22.

Chapter 2

49. Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s : Literature, Radicalism, and the Public Sphere* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 59.

50. It is necessary to clarify that the reform advocated by Godwin was gradual not revolutionary. He detested all violence and in no way supported the "Reign of Terror" which the French Revolution had fallen into. Godwin states his position on the use of violence in revolution in *Political Justice* 4.1-4.109-56.

51. Michael H. Scrivener, *Radical Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982), 6-7.

52. William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, ed. Mark Philp, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), 1.4.1.

53. Godwin, *Political Justice* 4.4.1.

54. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.4.1.

55. Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970), 37. For recent re-evaluations of Godwin's moral philosophy see D.H. Monro, Michael H. Scrivener, Robert Pollin, and Mark Philp.

56. D.H. Monro, *Godwin's Moral Philosophy: An Interpretation of William Godwin* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1975), 36.

57. All references in this study are based on Godwin's first edition of *Political Justice* published in 1793, unless otherwise noted.

58. Godwin and Wollstonecraft began their highly publicized love affair in 1796. This was the first romantic relationship of Godwin's life. He was forty years old at the time. Soon after the affair began, Mary became pregnant with Godwin's child, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley. The couple married in March 1797, though neither changed their negative opinion of the institution of marriage. They even lived in separate houses next door to one another throughout their short marriage. In September 1797, Godwin's partner for barely a year, Mary Wollstonecraft died ten days after giving birth to their daughter.

59. Rodway 36.

60. William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Bioren and Madan, 1796), *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans 1639-1800.* Web. 23 Nov. 2008, 1.5.80-81.

61. See Monro and Rodway.

62. Monro 8.

63. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.3.13.

64. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.3.10.

65. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.2.54.

66. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.6.76.

67. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.6.73.

68. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.6.72.

69. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.4.21.

70. Godwin, *Political Justice* 6.1.314.

71. Godwin, *Political Justice* 6.1.315.

72. Godwin, *Political Justice* 6.2.326.

73. Godwin, *Political Justice* 6.2.325.

74. William Godwin, "Of Religion," *Religious Writings,* ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), 68.

75. Godwin, *Political Justice* 6.2.324.

76. Monro 2.

77. Godwin, "Of Religion" 64.

78. Monro 2.

79. Rodway 27.

80. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.1.109.

81. Ian Ward, "A Man of Feelings: William Godwin's Romantic Embrace," *Law and Literature* 17.1 (2005): 40.

82. Abrams 187-88.

83. Abrams 68.

84. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.3.10.

85. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.6.72-80.

86. Monro 21.

87. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.6.73.

88. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.2.54.

89. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.2.49-54, 2.6.72-80.

90. Monro 21-22.

91. François Fénelon was appointed Archbishop of Cambrai under Louis XIV. He is best known as the tutor of the king's grandson Louis de France, Duke of Bourgogne, and as a staunch critic of the ideas of divine right and absolute monarchy. It seems ironic that Godwin chose a Catholic priest as an example of an important contributor to the greater good; however, when considered in the context of Godwin's purpose in writing *Political Justice*, Fénelon's religious beliefs become less important than his willingness to publicly take a stand against the centralized power of the monarchy.

92. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.2.50-51.

93. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.2.50.

94. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.3.62.

95. Monro 9.

96. Monro 13.

97. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.4.64.

98. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.4.65.

99. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.6.27-31.

100. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.6.27.

101. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.6.27.

102. Godwin, "Of Religion" 70.

103. 1 Corinthians 4.7

104. Godwin, "Of Religion" 71.

105. William Godwin, "The Genius of Christianity Unveiled: In a Series of Essays," *Religious Writings*, ed. Mark Philp, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), 79.

106. Godwin, "Genius of Christianity" 79.

Chapter 3

107. Pamela Clemit, "Frankenstein, *Matilda*, and the Legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft," *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Ester Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 29.

108. Nancy Easterlin, *Wordsworth and the Question of "Romantic Religion"* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1996), 38.

109. Abrams 65-68.

110. Abrams 66.

111. Evan Daniel, *The Prayer Book: Its History, Language, and Contents* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1905), 5.

112. J. Robert Barth, *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969), 54-59.

113. In using the term "dictated," Barth references the "dictation" theory outlined by Richard Hooker in a sermon on Jude 17-21.

114. Barth, *Coleridge* 54-59.

115. Barth, *Coleridge* 54-59.

116. Barth, *Coleridge* 59-64.

117. Abrams 91.

118. Priestman 7.

119. Although Keats' significant contribution to Romanticism has earned him designation among the canonical poets, his work will not be extensively considered in this particular study of Romanticism's relationship to religion because of his tendency to avoid such topics and the general difficulty of isolating his personal religious inclinations.

120. Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 53.

121. Spinoza, *Ethica* I. 18. translated in McFarland 54.

122. McFarland 54.

123. Trinitarian refers to the belief common among Christian religions in God's existence as one being in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Trinity).

124. William Wordsworth, "Ode: Imitations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 327-29, lines 5.7-9.

125. Easterlin 35.

126. William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 259-60, lines 93-102.

127. Russell Noyes, ed., *English Romantic Poetry and Prose* (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 238.

128. Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" lines 102-11.

129. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*; *or, Growth of a Poet's Mind, English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 269-302, lines 12.207.

130. McFarland 107.

131. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "A Desultory Poem, Written on the Christmas Eve of 1794," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 383-86, lines 396-99.

132. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Frost at Midnight," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 408-09, lines 54-63.

133. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Eolian Harp," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 381-82, lines 44-48.

134. McFarland 196.

135. Lord George Gordon Byron, "Darkness," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 798-99, line 82.

136. Lord George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 799-827, stanza 122.

137. Percy Shelley, "Mont Blanc," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 976-78, lines 2.34-40.

138. See J. Robert Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Romantic Imagination*, (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2003).

139. Including the *First Book of Urizen, The Book of Ahania, The Book of Los, The Song of Los*, and *The Four Zoas.*

140. Wordsworth, *The Prelude* 14.188-192.

141. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979), 12.

142. William Blake, "The Little Boy Found," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 201, line 4.

143. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982), 200.

144. Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007), 46-47.

145. Michael Ferber, *The Social Vision of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 20.

146. William Blake, *There is No Natural Religion [b]*, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982), 3.

147. Blake, *Jerusalem* 231.

148. Noyes 1089.

149. Percy Shelley, *Essay on Christianity, English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 1090.

150. Scrivener 101.

151. Lord George Gordon Byron, *Manfred, English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 831-47, 1.154-57.

152. Byron, *Manfred* 3.4.125-39.

153. Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970), 18.

154. Scrivener 81.

155. William Blake, "London," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982), 26-27, line 8.

156. William Blake, "I Saw a Chapel All of Gold," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982), 467-68, line 13.

157. Percy Shelley, "England in 1819," *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1967), 1057, line 11.

158. P. Shelley, "England in 1819" lines 4-5.

159. Percy Shelley, "The Mask of Anarchy," *Shelley: Poetical Works,* ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1967), 1052-57, lines 22-23, 37.

160. P. Shelley, "Mask of Anarchy" lines 234-37.

161. "A Little Boy Lost" from *Songs of Experience.*

162. Byron, "Darkness" lines 57-60.

163. Byron, *Manfred* 3.1.155-156.

164. Byron, *Manfred* 3.1.66-69.

165. Blake, *Jerusalem* 146.

166. William Wordsworth, Preface, *Lyrical Ballads, English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 358-59.

167. Wordsworth, *Lyrical* Ballads 363.

168. Percy Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 1112.

169. Ryan 5.

Chapter 4

170. Anne Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 136.

171. See Sunstein, particularly ch.1-4, for more detail on the early father/daughter relationship between Godwin and Mary Shelley.

172. Clemit, "*Frankenstein, Matilda*" 29.

173. Clemit, "*Frankenstein, Matilda*" 29.

174. Clemit, "*Frankenstein, Matilda*" 29.

175. Sunstein 26-27.

176. Sunstein 26-27.

177. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.3.11-12.

178. Godwin, *Political Justice* 8.7.461.

179. Mary Shelley's shift in religious belief is generally attributed to her struggle with extreme depression after the deaths of her children, Clara and William, and husband Percy Shelley while the family lived in Italy. She never fully recovered from these losses and began to believe that an ill-fate pursued her. For further biographical information see Sunstein.

180. Mary Shelley, "To Percy Shelley," 30 September 1817, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,* ed. Betty T. Bennett, vol. 1. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 49.

181. M. Shelley, *Letters* 90.

182. Godwin, "Of Religion" 72.

183. Godwin, "Of Religion" 72.

184. Mary Shelley, Introduction, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus,* ed. Cynthia Brantley Johnson (New York: Pocket Books, 2004), 283.

185. Mellor, *Mary Shelley* 71.

186. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 38.

187. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 38-39.

188. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 167-68.

189. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 168.

190. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 250.

191. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 275.

192. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 367-68.

193. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 379.

194. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 75.

195. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 31.

196. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 88.

197. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 130.

198. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 140.

199. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 151.

200. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 161-62.

201. William Godwin, "Thoughts On Man, His Nature, Productions And Discoveries Interspersed With Some Particulars Respecting The Author," (London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1831), *Anarchy Archives,* ed. Dana Ward, Pitzer College, 8 Jan. 2008 <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives>.

202. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 44.

203. Godwin, "Of Religion" 71.

204. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 51.

205. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 49.

206. Isaiah 64.6

207. Isaiah 1.6

208. Godwin, "Genius of Christianity" 91.

209. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 261.

210. Godwin, *Political Justice* 4.7.176.

211. Godwin, *Political Justice* 4.7.178.

212. Godwin, "Of Religion" 67.

213. Harold Bloom, *Mary Shelley* (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), 3.

214. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 117-19.

215. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 130.

216. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 130.

217. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 132.

218. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 140.

219. Mellor, *Mary Shelley* 70-71.

220. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 52.

221. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 49.

222. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 52.

223. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 52, 53.

224. William Wordsworth, "Nutting," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 260-61, line 56.

225. Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" lines 76-83.

226. M. Shelley changes Wordsworth's "me" to "him."

227. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 191.

228. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 360.

229. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 118-19.

230. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 336.

231. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 337.

232. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 392-401, lines 121-22.

233. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 262-63.

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234. Noyes 238.

235. Godwin, "Of Religion" 67-68.

236. Godwin, *Political Justice* 3.4.91-94.

237. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.2.52-54.

238. Percy Shelley, "On Love," *English Romantic Poetry and Prose,* ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), 1093.

239. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 150, 151.

240. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 155-56.

241. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 150.

242. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 140-41.

243. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 155.

244. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 176.

245. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.3.13.

246. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 173.

247. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 114.

248. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 158-59.

249. Godwin, *Political Justice* 4.2.124.

250. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 32.

251. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 53.

252. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 51.

253. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 51.

254. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 204.

255. Godwin, *Political Justice* 3.6.97.

256. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 54.

257. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 8.

258. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 266.

259. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 12.

260. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.4.14-15.

261. Scrivener 20.

262. Godwin, *Political Justice* 3.6.100.

263. Scrivener 12.

264. Godwin, *Political Justice* 4.7.183.

265. Godwin, *Political Justice* 4.7.183.

266. Godwin, *Political Justice* 6.2.326.

267. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 94.

268. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 89.

269. Godwin, *Political Justice* 6.2.325, 6.2.326.

270. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 89.

271. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 94.

272. Godwin, "Of Religion" 68.

273. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 251-52.

274. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 250.

275. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.2.49.

276. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.3.59-62.

277. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.3.59.

278. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 173.

279. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 250.

280. Godwin, *Political Justice* 2.6.72.

281. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 52.

282. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 55.

283. Levine 301.

284. Bloom 6.

285. Godwin, *Political Justice* 1.3.13.

286. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 173.

287. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 169.

288. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 170.

289. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 165-66.

290. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 113.

291. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 174.

292. M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 206.

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