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Victim to Perpetrator: Reading Trauma in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* / Change

Tamara Kimberly Wudinich
St. Cloud State University

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Victim to Perpetrator: Reading Trauma in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or,*

The Modern Prometheus

Change

by

Tamara Kimberly Wudinich

Starred Papers

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

April, 2015

Starred Paper Committee:

Glenn Davis, Chairperson

Carol Mohrbacher

Sharon Cogdill

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Victim to Perpetrator: Reading Trauma in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus*

Toward the end of Mary Shelley's 1818 edition of *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus*, the Creature articulates the cause of the violent acts he has perpetrated:

“That is also my victim!” he exclaimed; “in his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close!” he continued, pointing to the corpse, “he suffered not more in the consummation of the deed;--oh! not the ten-thousandth portion of the anguish that was mine during the lingering detail of its execution. A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse...My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture such as you cannot even imagine.” (Shelley 253)

In this passage, the Creature asserts that some form of tragedy has occurred between Victor and him. Through tracing this tragedy, the narrative presents an allegory that offers a new understanding of the Creature and his actions. Through this assessment, the novel purposefully constructs a narrative of trauma, or a telling of the Creature's trauma, that coalesces around four major traumatic stressors, which together offer a motive for the Creature's violent behavior. The passage above reflects such a scenario where the Creature's life is presented as a psychological traumatic wound, or damage to the psyche, which suggests that the Creature represents a trauma victim. With this insight, the Creature can be assessed

based on psychoanalytical theory and traumatic experience. From this perspective, the allegory unfolds as the Creature's life can be compared to theories that relate to traumatic memory and the representation of self. In this sense, trauma theory is used in this study as a theory that traces the memory wound in relation to how the self is defined through several traumatic stressors. In addition, the literary analysis incorporates the allegorical features presented in Shelley's novel as well as the traumatic theories presented by James Berger, Sandra Bloom, Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud, Geoffrey Hartman, and Elissa Marder. From this perspective, a traumatic narrative unfolds. Therefore, *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* not only deals with the violence and repercussions of repeated trauma, both experienced and witnessed, but transcends its own traumatic narrative to question the ontology of what it means to define the self.¹

In the novel, the Creature undergoes traumatic experiences that reflect a condition that relates to understanding one's self throughout the novel. In this case, the Creature is constantly trying to define himself as he suffers through multiple traumas. In psychoanalytical terms, a trauma always comes "second" (Amfreville 5). In other words, trauma does not exist until a second traumatic event awakens the first and thus is recognized or, known again, as traumatic.² This notion, brought forth by Sigmund Freud in his works of *Nachträglichkeit* (Afterwardness), is the foundation of modern trauma theory. Freud's definition of trauma theory, therefore, recognizes that trauma comes into being by the sudden intrusion of

¹ Or a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others. Also considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action.

² Traumatic here refers to an experience that "punctures" the psyche, thus creating an unnameable absence in memory.

memories that cannot or will not be remembered by the consciousness. In addition to trauma theory, literary analysis helps us hear this intrusion through tracing the unknown memory and in doing so, brings forth the allegorical trauma narrative. As Cathy Caruth notes: “It is the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (3). As such, the Creature is situated at this crossroads of knowing and not knowing, which suggests that tracing his memory exposes the wound of his being and situates him as a central character in a trauma narrative that is demonstrated throughout the novel.

For example, the Creature experiences four major traumatic stressors during his life: birth, language, rejection, and isolation. The first, his birth, creates a memory wound that remains unknown and unrecognized until the second and third stressors, the intrusion of language followed by the rejection of the DeLaceys, brings it into being. The fourth stressor, Victor’s destruction of his mate, causes the ultimate isolation for the Creature, which culminates in the closing of the wound through the Creature’s revenge that results in Victor’s death and subsequently the Creature’s suicide. These actions serve as the Creature’s testimony, which reflects Cathy Caruth’s theory of how wound becomes voice, and suggests the attempt of a trauma survivor to reconnect his or her experiences, language, and representation of self.

Victor Frankenstein creates the Creature’s body composed of exhumed body parts from a graveyard. The body parts are not from one same corpse, but rather a collection of unknown bodies. The Creature then enters the world without a natural gestation period and is

thus born as an adult with no past childhood to help base his future experiences or reactions on. As the Creature recounts his birth to Victor, his testimony fills with confusion and pain:

It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original area of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct...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.

(107)

As the passage shows, the Creature is unable to process his sudden entrance into life. He experiences unspeakable pain that causes a disconnect between his language, experiences, and representation of self; he can distinguish nothing and therefore weeps. This concept of disconnect is fundamental to trauma theory, which studies the negative evidence located in the loss of language and how the evidence manifests through the experience of suffering.

In recalling the moments after his birth, the Creature's senses resemble those of his body, a patchwork of unknown experiences. This experience of not knowing is the opening of his memory wound, and because he has difficulty remembering the original area of his being, he reenacts the violent trauma of his birth throughout the novel without realizing he is doing so in an attempt to close this psychological wound of unknown representation. The reenactment of the violent trauma surrounding his birth is known as what Sigmund Freud describes as repetition compulsion: "He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating...He cannot escape from this compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering"

(150). Therefore, each act of violence perpetuated by the Creature is one step closer he takes to coming to terms with his traumatic beginning.

Following his sudden emergence on Victor's lab table, the Creature experiences fear and loathing from human beings who should have accepted him. The first contact with another human is with Victor, who instead of embracing his creation, flees instead in horror:

With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet...I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs...Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room...Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed upon him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived. (107-108)

By denying the Creature a positive connection from the moment of his being, Victor disrupts the social nature of the Creature by severing the need of attachment that is experienced at birth (Bloom 3). In doing so, the Creature is left with an absence of self³ because, when left without a developed sense of reciprocity from his fellow beings, the Creature's memory

³ Elissa Marder explains in "Trauma and Literary Studies: Some 'Enabling Questions'" that "trauma itself must be understood in terms of "absence"—the absence of something that failed to become located in time and space (2).

wound is easily manipulated by external forces when he is finally able to gain a sense of the world and self.

The Creature feels helpless and alone after Victor's rejection and removes himself to the woods near Ingolstadt, where he slowly begins to develop a sense of self. In the forest, the Creature learns how to connect representation from the physical world into his metacognitive⁴ one: "My eyes became accustomed to the light, and to perceive objects in their right forms; I distinguished the insect from the herb, and, by degrees, one herb from another" (109). With this newfound ability to make connections, the Creature starts synthesizing his previous unknown knowledge of self, or rather, his absence of who or what he is, with that of external influences that begin to shape his current state of being. Hence, the awareness of his metacognitive processes begins his journey of reconciling his memory wound with the known and un-known.

Once food became scarce in the forest, the Creature goes in search of a new source of sustenance. He stumbles upon a small hut occupied by an elderly man. The man shrieks and flees after seeing the Creature enter his home. This is the Creature's second exposure to another human being that results in abandonment. The flight surprises the Creature, but because the incident does not elicit physical contact, he is able to ignore the incident and focus on his own comforts. The next day, the Creature enters a village and invades a cottage with a family inside and is, for the first time, physically attacked:

I had hardly placed my foot within the door, before the children
shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused;

⁴ Awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes.

some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country, and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel. (111)

In reaction to this response of his social group (other beings in human form), the Creature reacts in helplessness to defend himself. Instead of using his strength to fight back and cause harm to his attackers, the Creature remains helpless until he escapes. This small act of exclusion by his society is done without the use of spoken language. Instead, the physical violence creates an event of suffering, which is not only physical, but also psychological. The villagers not only bruise the Creature's body (physical), but they reinforce his negative association with human beings by excluding him from their contact (psychological): "For I saw the figure of a man at a distance, and I remembered too well my treatment the night before, to trust myself in his power" (112). The event burrows deeply into the Creature's consciousness and serves as a future explanation for his subsequent need for violence against those who cause him harm. Freud, despite his various conceptions of trauma throughout various moments of his career, did not abandon his concept of helplessness, which has become a foundation block for trauma theory (Amfreville 10). In "The Ego and the Id," Freud considers the possibility of trauma due to absence. Thus, through trauma theory, the absence of knowing the self, lacking a positive connection to other beings and the nonexistence of childhood create a feeling of loss, of absence, in the Creature's life. Therefore, after the attack in the village, the Creature feels that his experiences and existence are negated, resulting in the subsequent violence and revenge in the future in order to fill this sense of loss.

After the attack at the village, the Creature finds safety in a hovel connected to a cottage belonging to a family known as the DeLaceys. The hovel offers the Creature the opportunity to observe his fellow beings without fear of discovery: “in one of these was a small and almost imperceptible chink, through which the eye could just penetrate” (113). The unobtrusive observance offers the Creature a chance to form a new representation of self, through learning new emotions and the intrusion of language (his second stressor). Through observing the old man and the old man’s daughter, Agatha, the Creature feels compassion for the first time:

He smiled with such kindness and affection, that I felt sensations of a peculiar and over-powering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions. (114)

With these emotions, the Creature’s sense of self becomes closer to those of his society. The Creature is able to feel and more importantly, understand, love, hope, and empathy, which gives the Creature more control over his emotions. Additionally, his representation of self becomes stronger when he is able to learn the language of the cottagers, which allows the Creature to reflect upon his experiences and trace the path of his memory:

The words induced me to turn towards myself...And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not

even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. 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. (129-130)

The Creature is now aware of his memory, of his existence in the world. Thus, he begins to question his role and in doing so, question his beginning:

No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing. From my earliest remembrance I had been as I then was in height and proportion. I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans. (131)

Language thus becomes an intrusion into the Creature's traumatic memory because with this language comes awareness. Hence, with this new intrusion, the Creature struggles to reconcile his origin (his birth) with his society's perception of his self, as well as his own representation of self. Through this struggle, with language, the Creature's memory wound becomes voice, as he is now able to articulate his suffering.

After his mastery of language, the Creature endeavors to end his isolation and enters the cottage when the old man, who is blind, is alone. The old man befriends the Creature and shows him kindness that is henceforth unprecedented, “From your lips first have I heard the voice of kindness directed towards me” (147). The kindness shown to the Creature, however, is short-lived as Felix, Agatha, and Safie return from their walk, and upon entering the cottage, react in horror and violence:

At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted; and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung: in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently with a stick. (148)

Felix’s rejection forces the feelings of helplessness and fear accompanied at the Creature’s birth to re-emerge, and thus the rejection of the DeLaceys becomes another source of trauma (third stressor) for the Creature. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud talks about the concept of “latency,” which is how memory of a traumatic event can be lost over time, but then regained when triggered by an intrusion of a similar event (107-115). As the first traumatic event cannot be comprehended when it occurs, the representational means of how the event is remembered is presented in three ways: the return of the repressed, or the second event of trauma triggering the memory of the first; acting out versus working through, usually through violence; and transference, or the redirection of feelings to a substitute(s) (Berger 574). The

Creature exhibits the last two after the intrusion of language and the rejection by the DeLaceys brings forth the repressed trauma of his birth.

The return of the Creature's repressed feelings of helplessness and terror causes him to, once again, flee to the forest. The Creature learns from his earlier encounters with violence that fleeing ensures his survival. However, with the Creature's newfound intrusion of language and hence, knowledge, he is able to recognize that his past memory does not need to serve as a future model: "Should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No: from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery" (150). At this moment, the Creature decides to transfer his trauma to those who have, and will, harm him through a means of acting out, thus re-expressing the trauma of his birth, the intrusion of language, and his society's rejection as revenge.

The DeLaceys leave the cottage immediately after the Creature's intrusion and in doing so effectively sever the only link the Creature has to kindness, compassion, and society in general, and following this cut, the Creature's representation of self shifts. Before this betrayal, the Creature has been content to function as a victim of trauma. He has been content to spend his days hidden in the hovel by the DeLaceys' cottage, as long as he is able to be near to those he regards as his protectors. Once again, as Victor did earlier by leaving the cottage and abandoning the Creature, the DeLaceys deny the Creature the reciprocity he desires from those around him. Thus, without the DeLaceys, the Creature is no longer able to give his testimony and unable to further reconcile himself to his newly formed representation

of self as an abhorrence. Therefore, a new absence caused by rejection is created in the memory wound.

The widening of the memory wound forces the Creature to re-evaluate his representation of self, and with the intrusion of knowledge, he is able to recognize his ability to shift this representation, “For the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom, and I did not strive to control them” (152). In giving in to his feelings of rage and hatred, the Creature then transfers the trauma of abandonment and isolation into a physical action, and he sets fire to the cottage and takes delight in the destruction:

I placed a variety of combustibles around the cottage; and, after having destroyed every vestige of cultivation in the garden, I waited with forced impatience...I lighted the dry branch of a tree, and danced with fury around the devoted cottage...and with a loud scream, I fired the straw, and heath, and bushes, which I had collected. The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues. As soon as I was convinced that no assistance could save any part of the habitation, I quitted the scene, and sought for refuge in the woods. (152)

Transference therefore becomes an instinct of survival for the Creature. In his struggle for meaning after the abandonment of the DeLaceys, the Creature decides to redefine his perception of self to that of a monster and shifts the power balance from victim to perpetrator in order to, not only survive, but also to begin the process of coming to terms with his unknown beginning.

This shift in the rhetoric of the Creature's suffering presents the Creature as both a victim of suffering and a perpetrator of violence (perpetrator trauma⁵), and that unleashing his rage through violence and revenge is his response to his suffering. Hence, the act of arson functions both as a result from the Creature's previous trauma, as well as a stressor for his subsequent actions of violence. Violence, therefore, becomes the Creature's unspoken testimony to his society. Through violence, not only is the Creature able to articulate the level of his suffering, he also becomes closer to the unknown being he is at his birth, with each new act of revenge acting as a re-expression of the traumatic violence that attends his birth.

After setting fire to the DeLaceys' cottage, the Creature sets forth to Geneva to seek revenge against Victor: "Towards you [Victor] I felt no sentiment but that of hatred...The nearer I approached to your habitation, the more deeply did I feel the spirit of revenge enkindled in my heart" (153-154). To the Creature, Victor becomes the source of his suffering. After the intrusion of language, the Creature reads pages of Victor's journal tucked in the pocket of the shirt the Creature steals after his birth:

Soon after my arrival in the hovel, I discovered some papers in the pocket of the dress which I had taken from your laboratory. At first I had neglected them; but now that I was able to decypher the characters in which they were written, I began to study them with diligence...Every thing is related in them which bears reference to my accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which

⁵ According to Sue Vice in "Exploring the Fictions of Perpetrator Suffering," perpetrator trauma is trauma caused by act(s) of killing or similar violence.

painted your own horrors, and rendered mine ineffaceable. I sickened as I read. "Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your's, more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested." (142)

In following Victor to Geneva and exacting revenge against Victor and his loved ones, the Creature chooses Victor as his ultimate and final substitute for his suffering. In doing so, the Creature's transference of his trauma unconsciously acknowledges that the trauma is still active, and through revenge against Victor implicates the trauma's destructive effects, which therefore indicates the Creature's future violence.

During his travels to Geneva, the Creature saves a young woman from drowning in a stream. In response to his act of kindness, the young woman's companion shoots the Creature due to his frightful appearance, which reinforces the Creature's perception of his self as hideous and unwanted. The memory of the original wound is awakened due to this later trauma, and in reply, the Creature vows "eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind" (155). Thus, the representation of his trauma fully emerges as transference to all mankind, instead of solely Victor.

The Creature then acts out his representation of trauma by murdering Victor's younger brother William:

Suddenly, as I gazed on him, an idea seized me, that this little creature was unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of

deformity...Urged by this impulse, I seized on the boy as he passed, and drew him towards me. As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream: I drew his hand forcibly from his face, and said, "Child, what is the meaning of this? I do not intend to hurt you; listen to me." He struggled violently; "Let me go," he cried; "monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces—You are an ogre—Let me go! Hideous monster! let me go!" The child still struggled, and loaded me with epithets which carried despair to my heart: I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feet. I gazed upon my victim, and my heart welled with exultation and hellish triumph: clapping my hands, I exclaimed, "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." (156-157)

In "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," Geoffrey Hartman explains that "The very absence of an intuitable psyche, or the speechless deed sets up the possibility that there is no motive based on selfhood.^[6] At most the act of killing, like kids stoning a dog or hanging a cat, is provocative of what is missing" (542). Because the Creature does not have an individualized defined representation of self (an absence), the murder of William is a deliberate re-expression and transference of his society's and Victor's definition of self as the monster onto humanity. It is the Creature's first attempt at connecting his experiences and language to give form to his representation of self as the monster. Therefore, the violence that

⁶ Selfhood being the state of having an individual identity.

attends his strangling of William gives the Creature a sense of self through the language of violence that accompanies the murder. Instead of feeling remorse or guilt, the Creature instead feels elation and joy in the killing. Thus, these feelings reinforce the perception of being a “monster” among other humans.

To solidify this perception in his own mind, the Creature frames Justine for his murder of William. After killing William, the Creature notices a small locket in William’s breast pocket. The Creature takes the locket, which holds a picture of a young woman inside. After viewing the picture, the Creature remembers that he was “for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow,” (157) and in retaliation for this perceived harm, he follows Justine and waits until she falls asleep and places the locket in the folds of her dress. Justine is then hanged for the murder of William. Not only is the Creature therefore transferring his trauma of suffering upon those that he perceives to have slighted him in some way, he is indirectly transferring his suffering to Victor, who is the direct cause of his memory wound:

I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder, if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. Shall I respect man, when he condemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are

insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will revenge my injuries: if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you curse the hour of your birth. (160)

In causing pain to Victor, the Creature's actions of violence and revenge are working towards eliminating this cause, which in turn would lead to the closing of his memory wound. Victor serves as the indirect cause of the Creature's memory wound because Victor fails to provide the Creature with previous knowledge of self at the moment of birth, which is the source of the memory wound. In addition to this failure, Victor also provides the Creature with his first experience with rejection from his society. Thus, when the Creature transfers his trauma onto all humankind, with Victor as the primary target, the Creature is without a selfhood, or an individual identity and instead acts out the representation of self given to him by others as the monster. Therefore, by eliminating Victor, or the cause of the wound, the Creature is subconsciously working towards the closing of his memory wound.

After Justine's hanging, the Creature quits to the mountains nearby and patiently waits for Victor to seek him out. During his first meeting with his creator since his birth, the Creature is finally able to deliver his testimony to the one being he has sought after since his first few days in the forest of Ingolstadt. As the Creature recounts his days from the forest, to the murders of William and Justine, the Creature realizes that whereas violence alleviates his emotional traumatic suffering, it does not alleviate his isolation and loneliness. In order to fulfill his need for social exchange, the Creature commands Victor to build him a mate: "You

must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse” (159). As the Creature is still struggling with defining his representation of self, he is hoping that a mate will bring him back to the peace he feels when he is hidden in the DeLaceys’ hovel, “for that one creature’s sake, I would make peace the whole kind!” (160). Hence, the creation of a mate would act as a balm upon the Creature’s traumatic suffering. He would not have to suffer alone.

Victor consents to building his mate and for two years, the Creature waits patiently for her completion. However, in the end, Victor is unable to bring himself to bring another abhorrent being into existence:

As I looked on him, his countenance expressed the utmost extent of malice and treachery. I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew. (190)

Witnessing the act of destroying his possible companion creates an irrevocable break in the Creature’s psyche, thus rendering the closing of his memory wound impossible to close without the act of suicide or death. Before the destruction of his mate, the Creature relies on his society’s idea of his self, that of a monster. The creation of his mate would shift the Creature’s reliance of an alienated outside source of self to one influenced by a creature similar to him. The mate may have given him a representation more in-line with the feelings

of love and kindness the Creature feels in the hovel at the Delaceys' cottage. As a result, the destruction of his mate only serves to reinforce the representation of self as the monster by leaving no other alternate definition of self for the Creature to embody. He now fully embodies the role of the monster and is motivated by his desire to transfer his own suffering onto others to perpetuate the same trauma he suffered. With his reliance on this transference of trauma, the death of Victor would eliminate the cause of the transference, and render the Creature's new definition of self useless. Therefore, Victor's death reverts the Creature's representation of self back to that of unknown. Without Victor, the Creature does not have a connection to humanity as a monster and, therefore, the only way to close his memory wound is by suicide as he is left with no alternate definition of self: he becomes a void. Additionally, the destruction of his mate reinforces the idea that he is worthless, evil, a source of abhorrence. Up until Victor tears his mate into pieces, the Creature's experienced traumas are physical in nature. The destruction of his mate introduces a new intrusion into his memory, an intrusion of psychological trauma.

Because the Creature functions at a high level of intelligence, he is able to recognize this intrusion, which informs a new way for him to relate to his society. Elissa Marder, building on the work of Cathy Caruth, explains that "[l]iving through trauma thus exposes the traumatized person to a seemingly unbearable degree of isolation, the very act of surviving trauma entails discovering new ways of relating and being related to others" (2). Hence, the Creature is able to use his experience of isolation, past experiences, and the intrusion of psychological trauma to create a new way of relating (a new language) himself to his society. This new language is fear.

After Victor destroys his mate, the Creature leaves for several hours before returning to confront Victor. As previously mentioned, without a mate to reform his representation of self, the Creature has no alternative but to become the very thing Victor and his society perceives him as, the monster: “Evil thenceforth become my good. Urged thus far, I had no choice but to adapt to my nature to an element which I had willingly chosen” (254). As a result, the progression of coming to terms with his memory that informs his perception of self and world halts, and instead becomes a reality. With this new representation of self, coupled with the intrusion of psychological trauma, the Creature makes his language of fear known to Victor:

Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master!...Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom. Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict...I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your wedding-night.

(192-193)

In making his language of fear known, the Creature transfers his intrusion of psychological trauma onto Victor. By including the last line about Victor’s wedding night, the Creature forces Victor to remain in perpetual fear, “All was again silent; but his words rung in my ears...I walked up and down my room hastily and perturbed, while my imagination conjured up a thousand images to torment and sting me” (193). Thus, Victor is left to wonder how the

Creature will avenge the destruction of his mate throughout the next section of the novel. The Creature's subsequent acts of violence are not only physical manifestations of violence, but are also psychological in nature.

After this point, the narrative of *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* shifts to Victor's point of view. After his destruction of the Creature's mate, Victor leaves the hut that is situated on an island, gets in a rowboat, and sets off for shore. During the journey back, the wind blows him off course and he arrives at a fishing village just off the coast. He is arrested upon arrival for the murder of a young gentleman who was found dead the night before. Victor is then held and questioned due to the evidence the townspeople presented that indicated Victor as the killer:

When Daniel Nugent was called, he swore positively that, just before the fall of his companion, he saw a boat, with a single man in it, at a short distance from the shore; and, as far as he could judge by the light of a few stars, it was the same boat in which I [Victor] had just landed. A woman deposed, that she lived near the beach, and was standing at the door of her cottage, waiting for the return of the fishermen, about an hour before she heard of the discovery of the body, when she saw a boat, with only one man in it, push off from that part of the shore where the corpse was afterwards found. Another woman confirmed the account of the fishermen having brought the body into her house; it was not cold. (202)

The evidence presented shows that the Creature used what he had learned from the framing of Justine to frame Victor for the murder of the young man. Victor is unable to refute the

charges, as he knows it is the same boat he arrived in and cannot explain the Creature's existence. The terror continues for Victor, as he is unaware that the dead body is that of his dear friend, Clerval. When Victor is asked to view the body, he realizes whom the Creature had chosen as his next victim and collapses: "The human frame could no longer support the agonizing suffering that I endured" (203). The Creature's actions no longer situate him in the path of not knowing and knowing, but rather place him on the road of knowing. The Creature recognizes the consequences his actions will have upon Victor, and the Creature recognizes that with these actions, he is able to take an active role in Victor's life as a perpetrator of trauma. Thus, this act of active participation not only transfers the Creature's feelings of rage and revenge on those he murders, but it also allows him to transfer his testimony of abandonment, isolation, and confusion to Victor through the act of killing, as Victor highlights when he says that "A fiend had snatched from me every hope of future happiness" (229).

Soon after Victor's realization of Clerval's death, he falls ill and remains in prison for three months until he is acquitted of the crime. Victor is able to return home to Geneva and form relationships with his family again, in particular, his cousin Elizabeth to whom he becomes engaged. The echo of the Creature's threat on the night Victor destroys the mate reverberates throughout several places of Victor's narrative, such as when Victor receives a letter from Elizabeth on his travel home to Geneva: "This letter revived in my memory what I had before forgotten, the threat of the fiend—'I will be with you on your wedding-night!'" (217). For the Creature, the use of psychological fear is just as powerful as physical violence. This is evidenced by the Creature's murder of Elizabeth on the eve of her wedding to Victor.

The Creature chooses not to murder Victor, but instead to murder the one person closest to Victor, thus inflicting the most pain. Victor says,

While I still hung over her in the agony of despair, I happened to look up. The windows of the room had before been darkened; and I felt a kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber. The shutters had been thrown back; and, with a sensation of horror not to be described, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred. A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer, as with his fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse of my wife. (227)

The murder of Elizabeth serves as a dual representation of trauma for the Creature. The murder of Victor's wife serves as a reenactment of the Creature's birth, as well as mirrors that of Victor's destruction of his mate. Elizabeth lies in "deathly languor and coldness" (227) as the Creature does on Victor's lab table, and Victor is filled with the same feelings of helplessness and confusion that the Creature does upon awakening. Both representations also function as the ultimate act of transference. Elizabeth becomes a substitute for the Creature on Victor's lab table and Victor becomes a substitute for the Creature on the night of his mate's destruction. Subconsciously, by murdering Elizabeth instead of Victor, the Creature is beginning to come to terms with his birth, or memory wound, by recreating the act symbolically. Freud theorizes in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the:

Human psyche is driven by two major instinctual drives: 1) Eros or the sexual instincts...and 2) Thanatos or the death-instincts...In other words, whereas one part of the human psyche is seeking gratification, another part

is geared to seek a quiet return to the quiet non-existence: the “death instinct” allowing the comprehension of human tendency towards destruction possible. (Sections IV-VII)

With every step taken closer to coming to terms with his memory, the creature comes closer to his destruction, or the closing of his memory wound—the return to the “quiet of non-existence.”

After the murder of Elizabeth, Victor sets out to destroy the Creature, but is unable to fulfill his goal. Victor dies on Walton’s ship after delivering his own testimony to the captain. After his death, the Creature visits Victor’s body. The final death of his creator allows the Creature to realize and reflect upon his actions and come to terms with what he has become:

But it is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely and the helpless; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or any other living thing. I have devoted to my creator, the select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration among men, to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin. You [Walton] hate me; but your abhorrence cannot equal that with which I regard myself. (256)

The Creature has completely fulfilled his perception of self as a monster with the death of Victor, by causing the death of his creator through years of violence and revenge. With no one left to transfer his feelings to, the Creature is forced to reflect upon himself and his actions. Hence, he returns to his unspoken representation of an unknown trauma victim from his birth. When this happens, the Creature is left with his unresolved suffering as Walton points out in

the last scene of the novel, “Hypocritical fiend! if he whom you mourn still lived, still would he be the object, again would he become the prey of your accursed vengeance. It is not pity that you feel; you lament only because the victim of your malignity is withdrawn from your power” (255). Thus, the only language left to the Creature to close his memory wound is that of death. After visiting Victor’s corpse, the Creature quits the ship with the lasting promise to set fire to his funeral pile and expire from the earth, “I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame...I shall die. I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me, or be the prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched” (257).

Reading Mary Shelley’s 1818 version of *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* through a literary trauma theory lens reveals that the novel is much more than just words on paper. Studying literary characters as trauma victims widens the field of trauma studies even further by providing understanding of the victim’s actions. Character actions can be related to real life scenarios to offer more understanding of how a traumatic event can affect a life, and trauma can be studied through multiple lenses, as a novel offers various perspectives of one event. Without trauma studies, Victor Frankenstein and Mary Shelley’s creature remains a psychopathic monster instead of a creature motivated by grief, trauma, and loss.

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Change

by

Tamara Kimberly Wudinich

Starred Papers

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Change

When I was in fifth grade, my teacher, Mrs. Toohey, brought in a large box filled with rocks she had picked from the stream in her backyard. We were instructed to pick a rock and write a poem about it. Some kids wrote about the colors of their rocks, others about the sharp edges, and a few went so far as to include metaphors. I, on the other hand, glued jiggly eyes to the top and pasted green yarn over the smooth round body. I named him Jellybean, and titled my poem, “My Pet Rock.”

Jellybean had many adventures in my poem. He took a visit to the amusement park, a trip to the science museum, and had lunch with President Lincoln. He had conversations with John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks. A classmate who sat next to me read my poem during peer review and we got into an argument. She adamantly believed that a rock could do no such thing as have adventures. I spent the better part of my day convincing her otherwise. Little did I know that this small poem would influence the better part of my young adult years.

As I grew older, my poems changed from “My Pet Rock” to poems about heartbreak, family, and the world around me. As I grew, my poetry grew with me. It was not until I became involved with LGBTQIA rights that my poetry changed drastically. I have always been a firm believer in equal rights. In history class in high school, I questioned the validity of the accounts given for the Civil War within our textbooks. How could the information be presented correctly if there was not information from the slaves present? The same was true in college. I noticed that my literature courses only included one or two women authors and only

one black author; no “queer” authors were present. When questioned, the response I received was, “that’s the way it always is.” This answer bothered me. And when I’m bothered, I write.

I began writing poems about race, gender equality, sexism, body image, and rape culture as my questions remain unanswered. Why are certain voices oppressed? Why are they silenced? In supporting LGBTQIA rights, these questions became unavoidable. Anger welled within my chest as those I loved were silenced because they were perceived as different. I also began to write about gender inequality as personal experiences as a woman began to affect my personal and professional life. Their voices, as well as my own, began to swell and poke their way to my pen and paper. Poetry gives me the chance to make these voices heard.

In the summer of 2013, I went to a summer festival in Stillwater, MN. There was a small antique shop nestled between an ice-cream parlor and a used bookstore. I decided to go in and see if they had any old typewriters for sale (as everyone should have a good working typewriter). On my way to the back of the store, my elbow knocked over a small wicker basket. Inside of this basket were about twenty to thirty brown, torn, cardboard envelopes. As I knelt down to start putting these envelopes in the basket, I opened one and inside was a picture of a handsome man and his wife. The picture was taken in 1920. Once I saw the smile on the man’s face, a poem sprang to mind. I knew immediately that I had to purchase the photo and give voice to that crooked sardonic smile. I spent about two hours on the dirty floor looking over the photographs and jotting notes for each one that spoke. I left that day with three new voices tucked under my arm. Thus, this poetry project was born.

Searching for those voices has become a fun adventure for the poet in me. Every time I enter an antique shop, I immediately gravitate towards the musty shelf that holds these

untold stories. I search the faces of each person in the photograph and start rolling tone, imagery, and rhythm about on my tongue. If one takes, I tuck it away in my cheek until I can get to a pen and paper. Through these poems, I explore the relationship between time and how inequality has remained either stagnant or evolved throughout the centuries through the use of the photos. I expose the issues in a new way for readers with vivid, sometimes shocking, details that engage all five senses, and enter the reader into a conversation about a serious subject through the twist and turns of poetic language.

In this collection of poems, my tone ranges from bitter to bemused to resentful to cautious. With different tones, I show that there are multiple perspectives on an issue; that there is more than one voice. If the tone is bitter, I want my readers to taste the bitterness of the language. If the tone is cautious, I want my readers to hesitate to untangle the language on their tongues. Tone sets the mood of each poem and by engaging my readers through the use of tone, I influence the way they feel.

Next, this collection uses imagery and rhythm to provoke an emotional response from my readers. Not everyone has experienced rape, but through the use of violent sexually charged language, my poems allow the reader to enter that world. It is an uncomfortable place to be and my poems do not allow an easy escape. The voices that come through in the imagery are further invoked by the rhythm of the poem. Short, choppy sentences lend an urgency to the poem. A violent staccato that taunts readers. Longer sentences provide a false sense of security. Very rarely will a line in these poems be longer than five words. Security is a privilege within my poems; a security that is not available to everyone.

I preface different sections of the poems with one of the photos I have found throughout my adventures in Minnesota antique stores and thrift shops. The poems that follow each photo represent a different voice that needs to be heard. Sometimes it is the voice of the subject in the photos, other times it is a voice unseen. Most often, it is the voice of the struggling. Thus, the poems in this collection address the underlying threads of violence and danger that underpin American society, whether it is domestic violence, racism, gender inequality, or violence against women. Each poem within this collection seeks to unearth a repressed voice and bring it into temporality through the use of language and photos that show that even though we live in the 21st century, some conditions remain the same.



Woman

32-24-28
 are waiting
 on the cold
 concave hollow
 of a worn spoon
 licked clean
 between
 each breast
 cupped by
 a murmur
 whose tongue
 pushes
 pulls
 smooths
 and rounds
 the flesh
 into perfect 32's
 until not a smudge
 is left on
 the worn
 silver spoon.

A cackle
 escapes His
 bi-focals-
 the ones that have
 a crack in them-
 as He moves on to
 the waist.

24-24-24

It must be 24.
 He takes the spoon
 and begins to scrape.
 Flesh and bone
 gather along
 the curvature
 of the metal
 and under
 His brittle fingernails.
 A sigh escapes
 the lens

fogging the pupil
for only a slight moment
as 32 becomes 24
in a few quick scoops
of the slick silver spoon

Fangs descend from
His eyelids
as they rove lower
to the hips
28 they must be
perfect
for the hungry
lips
to suck
her beauty
from the
hollowed
dips
This is Woman
He croons.
As His
smile slides
off the crook
of His
bent, worn
spoon.

Breathe

Women
Hunger

Jeweled
Beneath the sea

Spun of Gold
Cracked sheen

We forget

To

Breathe

Eye Candy

They say
Wear makeup
(lotion, lipstick, lipo included)
You'll look pretty
(Easy breezy Covergirl)

Shave your legs
And under your
Arms
(and everywhere else too)
You'll be more
Attractive
Desirable
Sexy
(11 isn't too young!)

Diet early
Salads and water
No fat or sugar
(What's a cookie?)

Exercise those legs
The thigh gap
Is in
(Photoshop can't help everyone)

Resemble a skeleton
(We want to see those ribs)
Walk like Victoria Secret models
Large breasts, tiny waists, voluptuous, curvy
(but not too many now!)

Fill your skin with collagen
And silicon
Improve
Modify
Enhance
(Plastic is sexy)

Be like Barbie
Dye hair blonde

Wear heels
Drive red car
(Ken is waiting!)

Your chest should jiggle
When you walk
Fill a pair of hands
(Pop out and say hello!)

Have an empty head
Gossip
Celebrities
And credit cards
(Stores were made for you!)
Sit by the pool
Tan, lather, rinse.
Read magazines
Instead of books
(That's what's good for you)

Listen to what
They say
Be afraid
To be you
(Anything else
isn't good enough
anyway...)

Modified

Pulled
Flesh
Nipped
And
Tucked
With a
Click
Of a
Tool

Hungry
Dissatisfied

Limbs
Lengthen
Locks
Lighten

Salivate
Flatten

Neck
Elongates
Lips
Redden

Glass
Sharp

Curved
Hips
Flat
Belly
Tan
Skin

Perfect
Plastic

Smooth
Gone



C. D. Avery Jr.,

The Elite Studio,
Concordia, Kas.

Bruised

A broken wing
of a bird
the marrow
sucked
from its bone
by hungry mouths
bent on
peeling the feathers
from the soft flesh
to reveal
just another bruise
in the shallow
of its
mouth

Coreless

I sit on the edge of the table
Porcelain
Hollow
My lace and frills touching the gloss
Mimicking my frozen fingers
Flayed outwards
While my blonde ringlets sit heavy
Against the smooth curve of my neck

The feeling of the brush
That smoothed my smile
Peachy Pink
Still lingers in the dust along the crease
The apples of my cheeks
Rusted and round
Perfectly formed
Beneath
Your thumbs

Up higher beneath my painted brows
Are two large circles
Almost human
One with a black hole
Off-center
Sucking in the night
The other
Large
Sightless
Cracked.



No

For Her:

A punch to the gut
Sucking the belly button in
Until it winches to the spine.
It's a slap across the lips
Dry, flaky, with
Flecks of the pale dead skin
Sticking to the knuckles.
It's a baseball bat to the knees
Shattering bone
As metal pings into the air
Crippling and buckling

For Him:

It's a sing along tune
Whistling around his head
Notes make-believe
Erratic.
It's an adrenaline filled kick
Pumping and coursing
High voltage, electrifying
Hot.
It's a skin-tight dress
Bloodred nails
Silky, smooth
Forbidden
The way her mouth
Forms the perfect O
When she utters
No.

We are Insects

I

Girl

You

Boy

Speech like champagne
 Bubbles smooth
 Like juicy fruit

Paint with lipstick
 Pink bubblegum
 Pop

I

Girl

You

Boy

Blueberry bursts
 Beneath the cream
 Of skin

Bit by flower
 Caught like caterpillar

Dress like whore
 Act like lady
 Smile, nod, repeat

Velvet stalk unthreads
 Petal eyes rinse
 Colorless

Melt like pavement
 Stay July
 Stay August

A good girl
 With june bug heart

I

Girl

You

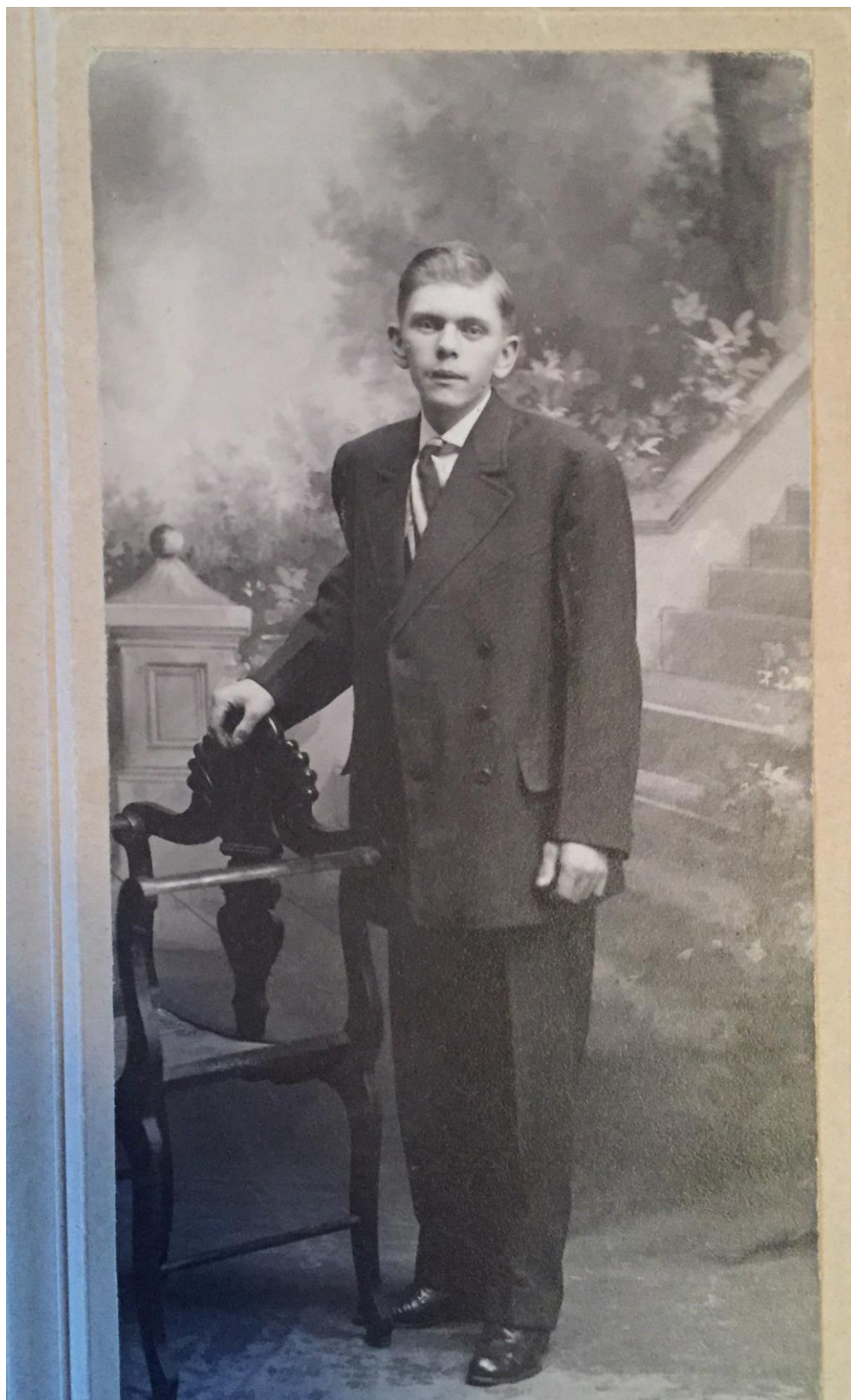
Boy

Tethered Bones

Bite your tongue
She warns
Lest you swallow
The sperm of dusk
Slink he will
Past those vulgar lips
Creeping creeping
Through your shallow teeth
Bite...bite
His whisper will go
Hanging
As the head rolls

Hold your tongue
She warns
Lest your salted lips
Hang the night
Twist she will
From a rotted rope
Tethered to winters' bone
Tick...tick
Her shoe will go
Tapping against
The kiss of woe

Hush my child
She warns
The lullaby sings
In ghostly form
The mouth is silent
The tongue adores
As the whisper winds
Through littered bones
Shhh...shhh
Her sigh will go
Lips crimson
On the fall
Of snow



I Am Invisible

You pitiful souls
I am Wicked man.

Creeping and crawling
Across my web
To suck the struggling.

My consuming legs
Gather you close
Soothing and calming
Brushing your hair back
Exposing the vying pulse.

Skin pale
Quivering flesh
I dip my head
Feeling and tasting
Before biting.

Hard.
Fast.

Pinning you.
Trapping you.

As you wilt
Shriveling and fading
I drain the dark liquid.

You are now mine
Mine to hold
Mine to torment
Mine to keep.

Another has arrived.

Struggling and wasting.

My fangs lower.

You pitiful souls.
I am Wicked man.

Patchwork

The woman in red will not be quiet
As I stitch, stitch up her dress

It's silk you know.

Her gaping mouth just opens
and opens, never stopping.
I want to take my gleaming
Silver needle
And jab,
Pierce
Those never closing lips.
Taking black thread and
Looping it round and
round and round,
Those cherry popsicle lips.

Drops of her ruby blood
Would drip on that devil
dress, melting, mixing.
But here I sit making
stitch after stitch on that
Red silk dress.



Un-

He was born
dirty
A color seen
on the bottoms
of shoes
with pieces of gum
stomped and trodden
stuck between

He doesn't know
any different

Hands in the pocket
of midnight
head in the hood
of dusk
bleeding from
A bullet wound
shot by a
"standard police gun"

Entire life of don't
and shouldn'ts

Feet in the shoes
of ghettos
Legs in the jeans
of Bastille
learns to run
faster than
cars

Kept quiet
throat dry
full of letters
jumbled in
the esophagus
restrained
by the
Un-dirty

Better to hide
between the gravel
than to raise hands
and bleed
Try to run and hide, I dare you.

His eyes
peer through
the wood.
Grasping for a
glimpse
but knowing
that on the
other side
It is there.
Waiting.

Eating
Nibbling
Chomping
Biting
at the
gray mushy
matter.

It is there.
Waiting.

No dark masks
or pointed
white sheets
with
unopened
eye holes
to cover the
sink full
of rotting flesh.

Fragments
of teeth
nip at
his toes
as he scrapes

through
stringy veins
and black hearts.

It is there.
Waiting.

Plunging
his hands
in congealed
blood
he reaches
to spray
the matter
down the
drain.

Knowing
that tomorrow

It will be there.

Waiting.



Slut

You are the dog
They see lurking in the alleyways
Less than intelligent eyes
Dimming yellow
And bared teeth
Dripping globs
Of drool
Onto rough asphalt.

To gain friends
With the humans
You tuck your tail
And whimper
Enlarging
Those dumb eyes
And when the hand
Is just close enough
To brush
Coarse bristles
You snap
Those fangs
Sinking
Into soft flesh
Leaving puncture wounds
To scar
Earning you a
Boot to the mouth
Silencing
Wanton whines.

A small growl
Is all you can
Must
Before slinking
Away to the shadows
Where they say
The filth
Of you
Belongs.

Hidden

The women creep
Like hidden spiders
Across the lawn
Peering through
Blades of grass
With eyes too large
To see the moon

Pinkies and thumbs
Scuttle along
The old oak tree
The one where
The owls sleep

They seek
That which is hidden
Under layers of shadow
And earth

Small pieces
Of themselves
Tucked away for
Colder afternoons.



I Remember

I remember
The heavy silence
Like counting
The seconds
Between the lightning strikes
One one thousand
Two one thousand
Three one thous—

I remember the sound
Of breaking glass
The unmistakable
Clinking and tinkling
The pieces made as they
Fell to the hardwood floor

I remember bending down
My knees creaking
And cracking
Before landing in a
Jarring jolt

I remember
Frantically trying to mop
Up the mess splattered
On the floor
Sticky and sweet
Staining the blue rag
I always kept
Hanging on the refrigerator door

Just in case.

I remember looking down
At my stained fingers
As his words
Pushed through the
Red sworls.

“Child.
You ain’t nothin’
but dirty.”

Boys will be Boys

cream colored monsters
with pointy raw teeth
aren't satisfied
under the covers
they slowly take
from your flesh
in violent
nips and snips
entering you
with violent hunger
where you split in two
eyes flicker over your
chest and down
your legs as
tongues flick out
to catch the drool
dripping from
their lips
red welts swell where
hands grip soft flesh
as one melts
into two
still unsatisfied
they shove
your fingers
in their
grinning mouths
sucking
until parts of you
are dangling
between the spaces
of jagged
black
teeth
sucking until
nothing is left
except for a
beating heart
in the hollow
of the red
silk sheets.