

**ACTS OF GENESIS:
A FEMINIST LOOK AT THE CHANGING FACE OF THE MOTHER
IN SELECTED WORKS OF SCIENCE FICTION BY WOMEN**

by

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the mother in selected works of science fiction written by women. Believing that society's perception of the maternal role has changed greatly in the last few decades, I set out to explore how this change is reflected by different female authors of science fiction. From a feminist perspective, I have considered how the mother is depicted in three novels: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, *The Gate To Women's Country* by Sheri S. Tepper and *He, She and It* by Marge Piercy.

The nineteenth century view of mother as "Angel of the House" had an impact on her fictional representations, in which she was sentimentalized and relegated to the background. Maternal representations experienced their greatest change after the growth of feminist beliefs in the 1960s.

Science fiction has long been a male-dominated genre, but it has also displayed an interest in the reproduction of life, especially involving alien species. The Women's Movement, as well as the growing number of female authors, broadened the scope of science fiction, and female characters and their concerns began to receive greater attention.

Despite Victor Frankenstein's usurpation of the maternal role, the mother may be abject in *Frankenstein*, but she is never absent; even the author herself acts as surrogate mother. In *The Gate to Women's Country*, women have taken control in order to pursue a theoretical dream of peace, but is this "radical feminist dystopia" a warning or wish-fulfillment. Marge Piercy embraces technology in order to challenge gender stereotypes and encourage the transgressing of boundaries in *He, She and It*.

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For my Angel —
I will never forget
how you walked across my heart
with such small soft steps

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Introduction

While Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) is now, at least, generally acknowledged as the first work of science fiction (Mellor 244), the genre had some of its roots in the adventure fiction of a century earlier, when fictional men began to climb aboard sailing ships to leave civilization—and the civilizing influence of the domestic sphere—behind. Works such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and *Moby-Dick* (1851) come to mind. As Brian Aldiss has noted, both *Gulliver* and *Robinson Crusoe* are good examples of the “masculine intellect at work”, as they “[sketch] in character with economy, not concerned with ambivalences of human relationships” (86). But neither authors nor critics of the period considered how Mrs. Gulliver felt about raising her family by herself, year after year, while Lemuel was off sailing the seas (or Mrs. Crusoe, or Mrs. Ahab).

While Shelley's early effort was a brand-new type of fiction, science fiction proper did not really “take off” until the late nineteenth century, with authors like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. Male authors were still sending their male protagonists on fantastic adventures (in 1705 one of Daniel Defoe's works featured a machine that would convey a man to the moon [Aldiss 26]); but now, they were sending them in rocket ships and time machines. Science now became the driving force as well as the explanation behind the adventure.

As the genre entered the twentieth century, for the first couple of decades, at least, the trends in science fiction continued. As in general fiction, “[n]ovelists wrote of cowboys and adventure, anything to escape mom's domain” (Thurer 225). During the 1930's and 40's, science fiction's emphasis was still on “external action”, rather than internal development (Clareson 26). The “pulp”, so named for the cheap paper they were printed on, emphasized the main ingredients of science fiction—“space flights” and “galactic warfare” (Clareson 22). The genre continued in the same general fashion up until

the 1960's, when the times began to change, and a number of events affected science fiction. During its history, science fiction was, as Judith A. Spector says, "notably hostile toward women" (21). A glance through Aldiss's *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* will give evidence of the relative scarcity of female names within its pages; but women authors began to make significant contributions to the genre by the end of the 1960's, and many of them broadened the scope of science fiction by writing about topics of concern to women.

Science fiction has often reflected current concerns and anxieties. In the 1950's, as space travel became a reality, the popular threat was the little green man from Mars, in the 1960's and 70's concerns shifted to global annihilation through an atomic explosion, or problems caused by overpopulation. In the 1980's and beyond, pollution and the ecological future of Earth has often been at the forefront of science fiction. Good science fiction is speculative, cautionary and heuristic. A writer of science fiction will not just write a story about time travel, for instance; s/he will most likely also consider the ethical implications of changing past or future events. In looking at biotechnology (as with other issues), Valerie Broege states that many science-fiction authors are "concerned with the social, political and moral impact of this knowledge on the individual and the state" (197). Whether they endorse or condemn the science, good writers will urge caution in its use. As women, particularly feminists, began to write science fiction, their concerns were, understandably, related to issues of gender.

At its very basis, feminist theory is concerned with the relationship between the sexes. According to Anne K. Mellor, "[f]eminist theory is grounded on the assumption of gender equality", and "seeks to analyze and eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender" (243). There have, of course, been historical eras of greater and lesser rights for women. There was a wave of resisting women's fiction at the turn of the century during "fervent activity for women's suffrage...women's education reform, and contraception". Specific areas of concern in the 1960's included "equal pay, reproductive rights, wider access to

both professional and non-traditional jobs, shared housework, childcare, and the removal of cultural stereotypes” (Pfaelzer 282-83). Because many of these issues are related to mothering, the very definition of motherhood came under question.

Depictions of the mother are necessarily related to her actual status in society. In her examination of the mother from prehistoric times right up to the present day (*The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*), Shari L. Thurer writes that the Industrial Revolution was “the most cataclysmic of all the social upheavals” for mothers (183). The rise of factories took workers off the land, and created a breach between home and work that still exists today. Many wives and mothers were left at home to take care of what would become the family “sanctuary”. Mother became the goddess of the hearth, which led to the simultaneous devaluation of the work that she did, and her increasing sentimentalization, until she became the Victorian “Angel of the House”. The “True Woman” was, among other things, “virtuous, gentle, devoted [and] asexual”, according to Thurer. The bourgeois mother was also judged by inflexible, high standards, which included “moral superiority, passionlessness, selflessness, [and] domesticity” (Thurer 188). In the nineteenth century, fiction in general became notable for the absence of the mother, as she became such a “wet blanket that nineteenth-century male authors were forever inventing characters fleeing from her clutches” (Thurer 188). After the turn of the century, Thurer notes, mothers became “dull as dishwater”, and she attributes the “impetus for mother’s fall from grace [to] the rise of science” (225). Conditions for women, both in real life and in fiction, did not change appreciably until the 1960’s, with the women’s rights movement.

With the advent of “Women’s Lib”, feminists began to question woman’s previously sacrosanct status as mother. According to Thurer, “activist women in the early stages of the recent women’s movement considered motherhood one of the major institutions that oppressed women and prevented them from taking more active control of their lives” (265). After the initial surge, however, feminists embraced motherhood as an

acceptable option. In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich first made the distinction between “the *institution* of motherhood under patriarchy...and the *experience* of mothering” (Thurer 265). Historically, women had had little or no choice in becoming a mother. It was the development of a more effective method of woman-managed contraception, the birth control pill, which helped usher in the idea of woman’s control over her own body. Motherhood was no longer an unquestioned given for women.

E. Ann Kaplan has written about the depiction of the mother in popular culture, including works written after the start of the women’s movement (from 1970 to 1990). She believes that what most of these works have in common is “anxiety”, and she credits this anxiety to the paradigm shift whereby “childbirth and child care [are] no longer being viewed as an automatic, natural part of woman’s life-cycle” (181). There are many issues regarding motherhood—other than the question of whether or not to become one—that society has had to consider in recent decades. Society is, in fact, anxious about the state of motherhood in general. Issues include single mothers, teen mothers, surrogate mothers, and homosexuals as parents; fertility biotechnologies such as in vitro fertilization, technologies which allow prenatal screening for defects or gender, and technologies which enable the storage of embryos (or embryo manipulation); not to mention the simple fact that the world’s population still seems to be growing by leaps and bounds. Women are now bearing children (sometimes their own grandchildren), for their infertile relatives, post-menopausal women are “artificially” made able to bear children through hormone therapies, and, most recently, science has for the first time succeeded in cloning an animal from an adult cell. All of these issues involve moral dilemmas and raise complicated questions for us about bioethics and responsibility. No wonder we are unsure about what the word mother even means.

It was inevitable, given the above, that motherhood’s precarious status also had an impact on science fiction. Female (and feminist) authors took advantage of the genre’s freedoms to create utopias as alternatives to increasingly unsatisfactory conditions in the

real world. Jean Pfaelzer writes that the “utopian impulse begins in the radical inadequacy of the present” (qtd. in Fitting 32). A wave of feminist utopian fictions were produced in the 1970’s, including Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974), Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975), and Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). Women felt a “sense of empowerment” during this time that enabled them to create these fictions, which “awaited, fed upon, and enriched the women’s movements” (Pfaelzer 283). These feminist utopias, among others, “both critique the present world and attempt to prophesy or determine the future” (Mellor 243).

As alternatives to patriarchal notions of gender, feminist science fiction “explored three paradigms of a gender-free society”, according to Mellor: “an all-female society, a society of biological androgynes, and a genuinely egalitarian two-sex society”. Most of these fictions, however, depicted the “ideal gender-free society as an all-female world”, which suggests a desire for a “separatist movement”. When men or a male-dominated society were depicted, they were “power-obsessed, authoritarian, violent, and inherently self-destructive” (243, 245). Mellor adds that many “otherwise sympathetic readers of these all-female utopias will find these depictions of men reductive and alienating” (250).

The terms feminist and utopia often appear together in science-fiction scholarship; but science fiction, from its earliest days, has had a problem with respectability, and it has often been difficult to have the genre taken seriously in scholarly circles. Robin Roberts notes that discussing utopia, as opposed to science fiction, “provides an instant literary pedigree and legitimacy” (187). It is worth noting that, except for *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Marge Piercy is not commonly identified as a science-fiction writer. Ironically, her novel *He, She and It* (1991), which won the 1992 Arthur C. Clarke award (Booker 337), is categorized on its jacket simply as “fiction”.

After the first rush of the 1970’s, during the 1980’s “feminist visions of the future tended in general to show a dark turn”, says M. Keith Booker, and he attributes this darkness to political reversals (339). Although earlier writers “often included dystopian

warnings within their utopian texts” (Booker 339), or included multiple possibilities—some of which were dystopian—the numbers of dystopias increased in the last decade as utopias decreased (Fitting 32, 45). Fitting believes that the novels of the 1970’s “often had answers to questions” about gender relations, while the novels of the late 1980’s were “not so certain” (33). In opposition to utopias, dystopias “depict nightmarish worlds which could plausibly result from the one in which their authors live” (Mellor 242).

While feminist science fiction has also felt the impact of postmodernism, both in its techniques and its criticism, it has tended to minimize it. Veronica Hollinger discusses feminist science-fiction’s apparent reluctance to take part in postmodernist efforts to deconstruct the subject. This reluctance may be because “just as feminism has begun to establish, for the first time, the centrality of the female subject, critical theory has demonstrated the illusory nature of that subject” (233).

Kaplan points out that the mother, while she has been perennial, has been relegated to the margins, and has often been depicted as “Other” (3). The concept of “otherness” originates in the Western tradition of dualisms, such as male/female, right/wrong, culture/nature, self/other or whole/part, whereby everything which is not constituted as “self” is marginalized and dominated (Haraway 96). But not all feminist science-fiction writers are ignoring or simply replicating notions of “other”. Jenny Wolmark notes that they are confronting old assumptions:

Science fiction provides a rich source of generic metaphors for the depiction of otherness, and the ‘alien’ is one of the most familiar: it enables difference to be constructed in terms of binary oppositions which reinforce relations of dominance and subordination. Since feminist science fiction occupies a marginal position in relation to other forms of cultural production, it is well placed to invest this and other metaphors with new and different meanings which undermine ostensibly clear-cut distinctions between self and other, human and alien. It explores possibilities for

alternative and non-hierarchical definitions of gender and identity within which the difference of aliens and others can be accommodated rather than repressed. (2)

I have chosen to focus on three novels by female authors who have much to say about the mother and her depiction. In the first chapter I examine *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, by Mary Shelley, which involves an attempt to create life out of death. The mother almost disappears into the background as Victor Frankenstein, the prototypical mad scientist, “gives birth” to a new type of Creature in this “parable of motherhood” (Rubenstein 165). Yet, while the mothers seem to have all but disappeared, I will look at how they still manage to make their presence felt.

The next chapter belongs to *The Gate to Women’s Country* (1988), by Sheri S. Tepper. In Tepper’s vision of a post-holocaust world, women have taken control in an attempt to save humankind. Women’s Country is a society of mothers who watch as their warrior sons are killed in battle and their daughters become mothers to the next generation, all for a theoretical dream of peace. Tepper does bring a new respect and a new sense of authority to the role of mother, but because the residents of Women’s Country are hardly treated in accordance with feminist values, Tepper’s intentions may be unclear. The amount of success that Tepper has in depicting Women’s Country as a “radical feminist dystopia” becomes the primary question.

Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* is the subject of the third chapter. Piercy depicts the creation of artificial life in two parallel tales, one involving a golem in sixteenth-century Europe, the other a cyborg in twenty-first century America. Piercy’s work is especially significant because of her intertextual references to *Frankenstein*. In her depictions of mother, Piercy seeks to transgress boundaries, challenge stereotyped notions of gender, and address “essentialist models of identity” (Booker 343).

In the chapters that follow, I will explore how mothers are depicted, and their relationship to other characters. I will consider whether motherhood is viewed positively,

or as an odious condition to be dreaded. In considering whether depictions are stereotypical, as in all else, I will try to evaluate the works with an eye to feminist theories of equality. While Shelley's novel, written almost two centuries ago, will obviously not share elements with the other works, there are places where they intersect. Tepper's and Piercy's novels, while contemporaneous, also contain very different approaches, proving Hollinger's assertion that "there are women and there are feminisms, and they are made up of the differences within and among themselves" (236).

Chapter One

Repression of the Mother in *Frankenstein*

*Pensive here I sat
Alone, but long I sat not, till my womb
Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown
Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.
At last this odious offspring whom thou seest
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain
Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew
Transform'd: but he my inbred enemy
Forth issu'd, brandishing his fatal Dart
Made to destroy: I fled, and cri'd out Death;*

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (2.777-87)

One of the most striking things about *Frankenstein*, undoubtedly, is the absence of mothers in a novel that is concerned with the creation of new life. While the book teems with “orphans and beggars”, its most notable orphan is Victor Frankenstein’s abandoned Creature. Mary Shelley’s first novel has proved to be a rich source for psychoanalytic criticism relating to the story’s biographical elements. Critics have noted the parallel between Mary Shelley and the Creature, both abandoned orphans striking out at their father/creators. Only recently, however, have critics begun to explore the novel’s maternal themes. Mary Shelley was poised at a crossroads when she wrote *Frankenstein*, being both the “abandoned, displaced child” and the “new mother whose children might die or be the death of her” (Rubenstein 192). Shelley’s conflicted feelings about being a mother at a time when mothers were regarded as secondary to the male creator are made evident in her own tale of rebellious creation. On the surface, Shelley’s works cannot be termed feminist, yet it can be argued that beneath the textual surface seethes a divided consciousness, dissatisfied with the status quo. Mary Shelley’s abandoned Creature is never truly alone, for in certain ways the author herself functions as surrogate mother to her creation.

An analysis of the undercurrents that run through *Frankenstein* most effectively starts with Mary Shelley's life story, which has been summarized by many scholars (Rubenstein, Homans, Knoepfelmacher, Joseph, et al). Perhaps only Charles Dickens's early experiences with jail and the workhouse have played such an obvious role in forming an author's psyche, which is then revealed in his/her writing. Mary Shelley was the daughter of two noted political thinkers and writers, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. Mary Wollstonecraft, however, died just eleven days after Mary Shelley's birth. Her father remarried when his daughter was three, and she took her place in a melded family with her new stepmother and step-siblings. Pregnant at the age of sixteen, she ran off with the father of her baby, the married poet Percy Shelley. Two years later, in 1816, Shelley's first wife, Harriet, committed suicide and Mary and Percy were married soon after.

That Mary had been an unmarried teenager facing pregnancy and childbirth was obviously an important factor in her state of mind as she composed *Frankenstein*. As Ellen Moers states, "[s]urely no outside influence need be sought to explain Mary Shelley's fantasy of the newborn as at once monstrous agent of destruction and piteous victim of parental abandonment" (85). When she began writing the story in June 1816, at the age of eighteen, Mary had already been pregnant twice. Her first baby, a girl, born in February 1815, died only weeks later. Her son (William) had been born just six months previously, in January 1816. She would be pregnant a third time before *Frankenstein* was completed. According to Moers, Shelley "hurtled into teenage motherhood without any of the financial or social or familial supports" that would have helped make the experience easier (85). Moreover, Mary is unusual in being both an author and a mother, as most of the important eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women authors were "spinsters and virgins" (Moers 79). However, despite the fact that "[t]ravelling, and the cares of a family" occupied Mary's time (*Frankenstein*, Intro. 6), she managed to write a novel which would remain a "phenomenon of popular culture" (Levine 3) for almost two centuries.

Although largely speculative, it can be assumed that Mary greeted the knowledge of her impending motherhood with something less than enthusiasm. While Moers believes that Mary “rejoiced at becoming a mother” (82), Barbara Johnson terms her first pregnancy as “unwanted”, and assumes that after giving birth twice, Mary “must have had excruciatingly divided emotions” (61). To be sixteen, unmarried, and expecting a baby would be challenging enough today, with all the benefits of modern medicine and changed societal attitudes; but Mary also faced the very real possibility of dying in childbirth. No doubt, her own mother’s death was never far from her thoughts. Shari L. Thurer reports that in earlier centuries it was conservatively estimated that a woman had a seven percent chance of dying in childbirth (171). In Mary’s time, the delivery of a baby was very much a “hit-or-miss proposition”, as no real advances in surgical techniques or in anesthesia would occur until the 1870’s (Thurer 200). Levine believes that the “displacement of woman [in *Frankenstein*] obviously reflects a fear of birth and Mary Shelley’s own ambivalence about childbearing” (9).

It would not be difficult, therefore, to imagine that young women of the time would have had grave fears (pun intended) as they faced motherhood, or that they would have experienced feelings of resentment towards their offspring. However, the idea that a woman could even think of rejecting or resenting her baby is still controversial. Our society still persists in believing the myth that pregnancy brings with it an automatic flood of warm maternal feelings. Johnson notes that the “idea that a mother can loathe, fear, and reject her baby has until recently been one of the most repressed of psychoanalytical insights” (61). It is not surprising, then, that if Mary had such thoughts she repressed them. The resulting guilt, as well as the connection forged early in Mary’s mind between birth and death, however, would eventually re-surface in Victor Frankenstein’s revulsion and horror when faced with the being whom he had created.

Mary Shelley’s psyche was also formed by her relationship with her parents, both her father and her long-dead mother. While growing up, she read and re-read the works of

her mother and father (Gilbert & Gubar 223). Mary idealized her absent mother and, according to Marc A. Rubenstein, very much wanted to “identify herself” with a mythic vision of Mary Wollstonecraft as the “faultless author” and “perfect mother” (188). Nevertheless, it is also common for individuals to feel anger towards loved ones who have died, especially parents, because of feelings of abandonment. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar speculate that Mary, “like all orphans, must have feared that she had been deliberately deserted by her dead parent...” (244).

Mary Wollstonecraft, known for her feminist beliefs, was a woman whose values were sometimes at odds with those of her daughter. Wollstonecraft, the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, “was not just famous”, says Rubenstein, “she was notorious” (167). Wollstonecraft’s radical views left her open to harsh criticism. For example, Gilbert and Gubar believe that Shelley would have been familiar with the reviews of her mother’s *Posthumous Works*, which called Wollstonecraft a “philosophical wanton” and a “monster” (222). The vilification of her mother would help cause Mary’s internal discord. She writes that her husband urged her “to obtain literary reputation”, which was something she, too, “cared for then” (Intro. 6); but Mary had no desire to be considered brazen or unfeminine, like her mother. In later years, Shelley claimed to be “very averse to bringing [her]self forward in print” (Intro. 1). The depiction of Safie’s mother, the Christian slave who is now dead, may summarize Mary’s inner conflict: “the mother, while superficially revered, is represented as defeated” (Rubenstein 189). Mary’s early experiences undoubtedly colored the general depiction of mothers in *Frankenstein*, while an understanding of Wollstonecraft’s notoriety makes it easier to appreciate the daughter’s reluctance to emulate her.

William Godwin appears to have had just as much impact on his daughter’s personality. Mary both “admired and deeply resented” her father for his “imperfect attempts” at childrearing (Knoepflmacher 91). During Mary’s childhood her father was her primary tutor, and she appears to have worked hard to win his love and approval, which were,

apparently, not always forthcoming. According to U. C. Knoepfelmacher, “Mary Shelley’s deep ambivalence about William Godwin informs most of her works of fiction” (118). In fact, she was estranged from her father while she was writing *Frankenstein*, he having broken contact with her when she eloped with Shelley (Moers 85).

The sum effect of Mary’s upbringing appears to be that she clearly wanted to identify herself with the male world of intellectual and artistic pursuits out of inclination, but that she always carried the “hideous” female reality within her. The Romantic period was still a time when “creator” meant God, not the woman who did the birthing. The patriarchal view of the world can be seen in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, where Adam is closer to God, being first created, than the “inferior” Eve who, because of her weakness, is also the cause of man’s fall from grace. Woman’s place is beside man supporting his endeavors, according to Adam, who tells Eve that “nothing lovelier can be found / In woman, than to study household good,” (*PL* 9.232-33). In a world where to be female is to be imperfect and “fallen”, to be female and an artist is, according to Gilbert and Gubar, cause for great anxiety. After all, the masculine God is rightly the “World’s great Author” (*PL* 5.188), and male authors are formed in his image. The male “Hee” was formed for “contemplation” and “valour” — “shee” for “softness” and “sweet attractive Grace” (*PL* 4.297-98).

In this regard, Mary Poovey believes that much of what Shelley read—and this, of course, included *Paradise Lost*—“must have alternately sanctioned and condemned her adolescent ambition” (81). Poovey adds that the revisions Shelley made to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, along with its new Introduction, written by Mary, not Percy, emphasize Mary’s passive role in the face of a powerful force of creation, justifying her youthful audacity and elevating “feminine helplessness to the stature of myth” (105). Mary could not but suspect that anything that came from a female pen would be flawed, and truly one’s “hideous progeny” (Intro. 10). For Gilbert and Gubar, that memorable phrase carries the implication that Mary, “in her alienated attic workshop of filthy creation... has given birth to

a deformed book, a literary abortion or miscarriage” (233). It comes as no surprise, then, to discover that Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin were hoping for a boy, instead of the daughter they got (Knoepfmacher 94).

Shelley’s insecurities did not stop her efforts, although her somewhat ironic deference to masculine superiority is evident in most of her writings. In the Introduction added in 1831, she praises the efforts of Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, referring to the latter’s poetry as “the music of the most melodious verse”, while minimizing her own efforts to “invent the machinery of a story” (7). Within this acclaim, however, Knoepfmacher hears a “faint note of resentment” directed towards the two “illustrious poets” (100). Most of Shelley’s protagonists and central characters are male. Just as she did not make herself the heroine of her childhood tales (Intro. 6), she avoids placing female characters in major roles. For instance, Johnson notes that in *Frankenstein*, “all the interesting, complex characters...are male”, while the women “are beautiful, gentle, selfless, boring nurturers and victims who never experience inner conflict or true desire” (63). Shelley’s later novel, *The Last Man* (1826), also focuses upon the male protagonist and the male point of view, while female characters are colorless and almost interchangeable.

Shelley’s desire to be taken seriously is evident in her choice of intertextual references. Rubenstein views it as especially ironic that Shelley, the “feminist’s daughter”, would write a novel that arises out of such a “heritage of masculine creation”—including the Book of Genesis, the Prometheus myth and, of course, *Paradise Lost* (187). Gilbert and Gubar even call *Frankenstein* one of the “key Romantic ‘readings’ of *Paradise Lost*” (221). Yet, without a female heritage of writing, Shelley had little choice. There were no “great” works written by women to draw upon.

Under the surface, *Frankenstein*—which, it has been pointed out, was essentially written by an “adolescent” before her character had taken on its “final stamp” (Rubenstein)—contains an excess of mixed emotions which emerge through the cracks of the story. On

the surface, *Frankenstein* is a masculine-centred scientific tale of overreaching and pride, told by three male narrators. Within its pages, female characters take on, at best, supporting roles. Yet Mary Shelley has also written a book about the definitive female experience: childbirth. Several critics have commented on Victor Frankenstein's attempt to usurp the female role. While Rubenstein has noted "the exclusion of women" from the text, he asserts that "for all the disclaimers, *Frankenstein* is a woman's book". According to Rubenstein, "[t]he mother and the problems of motherhood are never far from hand in the novel, even if they are highly disguised or seem to recede into the very design of the story" (187). Gilbert and Gubar add that "[t]hough it has been disguised, buried, or miniaturized, femaleness...is at the heart of this apparently masculine book" (232). However, Shelley's portrayal of women—and particularly mothers—suggests a deep ambivalence about woman's place in society. Victor does not "so much appropriate the maternal", says Margaret Homans, "as bypass it, to demonstrate the unnecessary of natural motherhood and, indeed, of women" (138).

Mary Shelley wrote a novel that deals with the anguish that women experience in childbirth, especially the "trauma of the afterbirth" (Moers 81). The text introduces the childbirth myth, only to suggest that it is fraught with hazards. Victor Frankenstein takes one look at the monstrous being he has "given birth" to and flees in terror. Through Victor Frankenstein, Shelley expresses her deepest fears and indulges her darkest fantasies.

Victor Frankenstein is a scientist who is determined to discover the "secrets of heaven and earth" (37). He wants to be a God-like patriarch and forge a "new species" who would bless him "as its creator and source" (54). But in order to do so, Victor "usurps the female role by physically giving birth to a child" (Johnson 63). The male "deity" is transformed into Eve, because, as he hides himself away in his workshop of filthy creation, "Victor Frankenstein has a baby" (Gilbert & Gubar 232). In this way, Mary Shelley's experiences as both the abandoned infant and the reluctant mother inform the creation of Frankenstein.

There is an extraordinary number of individuals in *Frankenstein* who are motherless. Almost every character has lost, or loses, his or her mother, or else the mother is simply never mentioned. While we learn that Robert Walton's father had died early, and that Robert was raised by his uncle, Walton's mother is never mentioned. His letters are addressed to his closest relative, his sister (17). Caroline Beaufort, Victor's mother, had no maternal presence to look after her, and her own death occurs just before Victor leaves for university. Victor's adopted "sister", Elizabeth Lavenza, is the orphan of a Milanese nobleman and a German woman (35). The servant, Justine Moritz, is taken in by Victor's mother because her own mother "treated her very ill", preferring Justine's brothers and sisters (65). The cottagers, Felix and Agatha, have only their blind father to share their miseries—there is no Mother De Lacey. Safie, Felix's fiancée, is also motherless; her mother, a Christian slave who loved and instructed her daughter, is now dead. Henry Clerval's father is also mentioned, but his mother never makes an appearance. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that for Shelley, the family histories of these "orphans", as they pass from security to desperate straits, re-tell the story of the fall and expulsion from Paradise (227).

With the wholesale absence of mothers, younger women and girls, such as Elizabeth, Justine and Agatha, are called upon to take on the maternal role, which they do willingly, even eagerly. The young Caroline Beaufort looked after her ill father in her younger days, doing menial work in order to "earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life" (32). As she lies dying, she informs Elizabeth that she "must supply my place to my younger children". Elizabeth, of course, "veiled her grief, and strove to act the comforter" (43-44). Justine, too, nurses both her own mother and Mme. Frankenstein, and eagerly helps raise William, acting "towards him like a most affectionate mother" (85). Agatha is the De Lacey family's maternal figure, as well as housekeeper. She cooks, cleans, and takes care of her father and brother. Knoepfelmacher notices that Agatha is never referred to as "daughter" in the list of De Lacey family referents, only as "sister" (101).

On the one hand, one might expect the fiction of Shelley's time to reflect the realities of high mortality rates, when many women did die young. On the other, however, Shelley appears to be over-emphasizing a world emptied of mothers. The net effect in *Frankenstein* is to establish the mother firmly as the Other and as object. In the text, mothers exist only in relation to their offspring, or have disappeared entirely. E. Ann Kaplan has written about representations of the mother in *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*. She states that the mother has often been an "absent presence", who was "generally spoken, not speaking..." (3). The mother is often seen only as an adjunct, or even a hindrance, to the main character. Consider Mrs. Bennett, Elizabeth's flighty mother in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In *Frankenstein*, the mother is necessary only for childbearing. She can be dispensed with in relation to caretaking—especially if one has sisters to spare.

It is also significant that the raising of girls to take on the maternal role is what ensures their involvement and eagerness. There is nothing in the text to suggest that the youngsters are not capable of taking on the maternal role. Even though Elizabeth feels guilty, believing her bad judgment about the necklace caused William's death, she is mistaken. The way girls are raised, to be nurturing caretakers, is what tends to reproduce the new generation of mothers, according to Nancy Chodorow. Despite the absence of maternal role models, the girls in *Frankenstein* have no trouble in reproducing mothering.

When Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*, the father was still the head of the patriarchal household, representative of the unquestioned masculine God the Father. Fathers decided how children would be educated, what they would do with their lives, and made decisions for the entire family. Henry Clerval's father is one such example—it takes much persuasion on Clerval's part to convince his father to allow him to continue his education. Mothers gave birth, and raised their children, but what influence did they really have? From the text, we may get the impression that mothers are "optional accessories"—nice to have, but not necessary. The only fatherless household in *Frankenstein* belongs to

Justine Moritz. And Justine, who was “the favourite of her father”, must be saved from her widowed mother (64). What characters often seem to be in need of is a father figure. Up until now, mothers have at least been necessary for the birth of children, but Victor’s discovery, of course, may make them obsolete. In either case, the mother’s place in the family seems tenuous, at best.

Thurer points out that by the Victorian era, novels “were brimming with orphans whose parentlessness was resolved by a surrogate father” (206). This observation leads us to speculate about the needs and wants of Victor’s Creature. Having absorbed the story of the paternal God of *Paradise Lost* as fact, the Creature fixates on Victor, the father/creator who has abandoned him, never realizing that there is such a being as a mother. It is seeing Agatha kneel at her *father’s* feet that moves the Creature: “He raised her, and smiled with such kindness and affection, that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced...” (108). Knoepfelmacher suggests that when the Creature comes across young William in the woods, he mistakes William’s papa, “M. Frankenstein”, for Victor himself. If that is the case, William would be both Victor’s son and the preferred “brother” who has received the father’s love that the Creature has been denied (102).

It is not until after his lessons at the De Lacey’s that the Creature is even aware that mothers exist. Valdine Clemens states that when the Creature decides to scapegoat Justine, he is “furious at being deprived of both a mother and a mate” (100) but, by this point, the mate appears to be the greater desire. The Creature’s apparent lack of a need for a mother will hopefully support my ongoing assertion that, because of Shelley, the creature did not really go without a mother’s care.

Yet *Frankenstein* does contain a number of mothering issues, especially concerning the mother- and fatherless creature at the novel’s center. Mary Shelley may have intended to tell a horrifying gothic ghost story; but once she began, she appears to have developed an abundance of sympathy for the Creature whom she had created. Gothic settings imply

certain conventions, which include dungeons and dark castles; bleak landscapes; villains, heroes, and vulnerable heroines; and more than a touch of the supernatural. Shelley explicitly detailed her intentions to horrify in the 1831 introduction. She wanted a story “which would...curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart” (8). Yet for all of Victor’s protestations that the Creature is a “fiend” and a “devil”, his “offspring” is not depicted as a heartless killing machine.

As Shelley developed her story from its purported beginnings on a dreary November night in the laboratory of a “pale student of unhallowed arts”, the space that she devoted to the Creature’s story conveys a mood far removed from gothic horror. The Creature’s saga of development contains, according to M.K. Joseph, “certain improbabilities and some rather obvious contrivance” (x). The entire series of events, as it “recapitulates the development of aboriginal man” (Joseph x), seems out of place, disproportionate, and even excessive. Rubenstein notices that the creature’s “prolonged” speech seems “wildly irrelevant” (168), while Knoepfelmacher observes that Shelley “lingers” over the Creature’s story. He also comments on the effect of Shelley’s digression into the Creature’s trials and tribulations. “By the time the Monster does strangle little William”, he says, “our sympathies have so fully shifted from Frankenstein to the Monster that the action almost seems justifiable” (100). A good portion of the Creature’s tale is spent in documenting the unfair and brutal treatment he receives, as a justification for his murderous actions. Victor, on the other hand, becomes less and less a sympathetic character. *Frankenstein* is unusual in its “blending” of roles. There is no clear-cut gothic villain or hero, so that the novel contains a “constantly shifting moral perspective” because “each of its major figures—Walton, Victor, the Monster—is at once victimizer and victim” (Levine 12). One might expect, in a gothic story, that after the Creature leaves Frankenstein’s laboratory, he would go on an enthusiastic rampage of destruction and terror. This is certainly not the case, and it has been suggested that one possible reason for the shift in sympathy is that Shelley came to see herself as the abandoned “child”, orphaned by a

parent who rejected her (Rubenstein 192). Gilbert and Gubar add that the Creature's saga is the story of all the "secondary or female characters to whom male authors have imperiously denied any chance of self-explanation" (235). In any case, Shelley could not resist caring for her infant children, or her novel, any more than she could resist caring for Victor Frankenstein's abandoned Creature.

Consequently, Shelley's Creature is never really motherless. I believe that Shelley herself—along with her "nurse", the Moon—serves as mother for the Creature at the level of the plot. Homans notes that Shelley, like several other nineteenth-century female authors, tends to figure her writing as a "form of mothering" (133). Consequently, just as the Creature cares for Victor during their final "chase"—even providing him with a dead hare and sometimes leaving "some mark to guide [him]", lest "[he] should despair and die" (205, 203)—so Mary Shelley makes sure that her Creature is never without the essentials that enable him to carry on.

Shelley's plot interventions on the Creature's behalf begin even before he leaves the laboratory. The Creature knows enough to cover himself with some clothes, even though it was "a long time before [he] learned to distinguish between the operations of [his] various senses". He is still cold once he is on his own outdoors, however, and he just happens to find a cloak "under one of the trees". To ease his hunger and thirst, the Creature drinks from a nearby brook, and eats the berries which he finds "hanging on the trees". A little later, still "oppressed by cold", he also manages to find a leftover fire. He must leave the fire behind in order to find food, however, so just when he is longing to find food and shelter, he comes across a small hut (102-05). Gilbert and Gubar consider the Creature's time alone with "mother" nature to be a "time of primordial innocence", even though his "infancy is isolated and ignorant, rather than insulated or innocent" (235-36). It is only after the Creature approaches human dwellings, and tastes "man-made food and drink", such as bread, cheese, wine and milk (Clemens 114), that his troubles really begin.

Shelley not only provides for the Creature's physical needs. His adventures in the world see him develop emotionally, and they provide him with a rudimentary education. Safie the Arabian actually plays no part in advancing the story. Her only contribution is to unwittingly help the Creature learn the "godlike science" of speech. Safie is introduced soon after the Creature realizes that in order to befriend the cottagers, he must "first become master of their language" (113). Safie speaks only Arabic, so when Felix begins to teach her their language, the Creature, of course, immediately realizes that he "should make use of the same instructions to the same end" (117). The volume Felix uses to instruct Safie, Volney's *Ruins of Empires*, gives the Creature a "cursory knowledge of history" (119), and reinforces Shelley's "depictions of social injustice" (Clemens 112). The Creature even learns to write (by himself), having "found means, during [his] residence in the hovel, to procure the implements of writing" (123).

Soon afterwards, the Creature makes his most important discovery. In the neighbouring wood, he finds "a leathern portmanteau, containing several articles of dress and some books", namely *Paradise Lost*, a volume of Plutarch's *Lives*, and the *Sorrows of Werter* (127). These volumes form the basis for the Creature's education about the wider world, especially *Paradise Lost*, for, like the other books, the Creature reads it as a "true history" (129). Just as Mary Shelley may be said to have parented herself by reading the works of her mother and father, books "appear[ing] to have functioned as her surrogate parents" (Gilbert & Gubar 223), so too does the Creature find "truth" in words. Now that he is able to read, the Creature finds, in the clothes which he had taken from the laboratory, Victor's "journal of the four months that preceded [his] creation" (130). The journal gives him insights into his creator's thoughts and opinions—and particularly how Victor was horrified by his "odious and loathsome person" (130); but, through Safie's other lessons, as well as the example of the De Lacey's, the Creature also learns how a mother and father are supposed to treat their children: "how the father doated on the smiles of the infant... how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up in the precious charge" (121), all

of which combine to make him aware of what he lacks. We need to reflect upon what might be considered to be “mothering”, however, to appreciate better Shelley’s contributions.

In *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann sets out what he terms the basic “feminine functions”, which include “the giving of life, nourishment, warmth, and protection” (43). Today, one might revise his terminology to reflect the awareness that these are considered “maternal” functions, not strictly “feminine”. With these criteria, however, it becomes apparent that Shelley not only provides for the Creature’s physical needs, but also his emotional well-being and his intellectual growth. There is, of course, no proof of Shelley’s intentions regarding the Creature, only the recognition that Shelley made those particular choices, as opposed to a myriad of other possibilities, in the story’s plot. Fiction, after all, is a series of choices. Only a little imagination is required to begin compiling a number of other turns in the plot. For instance, the Creature could have gone hungry until he was forced to return to the laboratory. He could have been discovered at any time, arrested by villagers and put in jail, or even executed. After all, reactions to the Creature—Felix’s “supernatural” fury and the rage of the “rustic” who shoots him—seem excessive. However, the Creature’s “painful degradation” (Knoepflmacher 100) is more emotional than physical. While he is shot, his wound heals on its own, and has no lasting effect. No matter how badly bruised the Creature’s body, his emotional wounds are worse.

Nor is Shelley’s manipulation of the plot the only maternal influence that affects the Creature. There is also the author’s agent, Mother Nature, in the particular guise of the Moon. Because of its relationship to the night as “the Great Mother of the night sky”, Neumann points out that the moon is the “favored spiritual symbol of the matriarchal sphere” (55). The moon has long been connected with the feminine, even before Artemis (Diana) was known as the moon goddess of ancient Greece.

It follows then that the Creature's first comfort should come from the Moon. He reports that, as he wept in pain, "a gentle light stole over the heavens, and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started up, and beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees.* I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path..." (103). Notice how Shelley focuses attention on the image by not naming the moon in the body of the text; instead, she relies on a rare footnote. She anthropomorphizes the moon by referring to it as a "form" that moves independently. The moon provides the Creature with comfort and guidance. In fact, he is a "follower" of the moon during the time that he resides with the De Lacey's. He becomes a creature of darkness, and "never venture[s] abroad during daylight" while living near the cottagers (118). After the confrontation with Felix, the Creature decides to wreak vengeance upon the De Lacey's by burning down their cottage. He waits "with forced impatience" until the moon has sunk below the horizon before he applies the torch (138), as if his deed is too horrible to be witnessed by his "protectress".

Not surprisingly, Victor is depicted as being distrustful, or fearful, of the moon. Victor wakes from his dream, after running from his "new born", to find the Creature waiting for him "by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters" (58). The language here emphasizes Victor's distaste for the "dim" moon, as it "forces" itself upon him. He waits to dump the remains of his female creature until the exact moment in the evening when the moon is obscured: "At one time the moon, which had before been clear, was suddenly overspread by a thick cloud, and I took advantage of the moment of darkness, and cast my basket into the sea" (171). Later, as Victor stands over the body of the murdered Elizabeth, he feels a "kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber" (196).

Of course, neither Mary Shelley nor "Mother Nature" is the Creature's only mother. There is still Victor Frankenstein, who is both mother and father, to consider. Victor, of course, thinks of himself as the masculine creator, the progenitor of a new race of beings.

While there are many who point out that he is also the mother who “gives birth” to his Creature, Victor is an example of a “Faustian overreaching male intellect” that lacks the “humanizing involvement of a feminine principle” (Mellor 244). He is incapable of nurturing or protecting, and so abandons his needy “infant”.

It would be easy to consider Victor’s rejection of his Creature as the result of his own faulty upbringing, but this may not be the case. Ominously, the novel’s only character whose mother is alive throughout his entire youth is the one who is unable to parent. Victor claims that his mother and father were paragons of love and devotion. According to Victor, they “were possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence”, and seemed to “draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow” upon their young son (37, 33). However, Victor’s recollections occur after the fact, and so may be distorted.

Victor’s contradictory statements about the Creature’s appearance—the journal records his ongoing horror while he tells Walton that he had “selected [the Creature’s] features as beautiful” (57)—suggest that he is capable of revising history. It may be that Victor’s parents were not just loving, but overindulgent, leaving him ill-prepared for life’s disappointments. After all, Victor also reports that his father spoiled his young wife, as “[e]very thing was made to yield to her wishes and her convenience” (33). Victor was not just his parents’ child, but their “plaything and their idol” (33). Victor’s self-absorption and his single-minded pursuit of his goal, while excluding his family and friends, typify a personality unused to considering the wishes of others. It appears that the flaw is within Victor himself. Perhaps Victor’s “Edenic” childhood really was an “interlude of prelapsarian innocence”, as Gilbert and Gubar claim (230), but also one where the seeds of his downfall were nourished by his overindulgent parents.

Initially, there is little to suggest that Victor’s mother had any impact at all on her son. Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein is a good example of Shelley’s female characters—beautiful, gentle, loving and self-sacrificing. She even passes away conveniently when her

main purpose—raising Victor—is complete. She is endowed with her own identity, Caroline Beaufort, rather than being known solely as “Victor’s mother”, but the story of her early life only emphasizes her passage from father to husband, caring for one father-figure and then another. Caroline, who, in a very maternal way, has insisted upon nursing Elizabeth through the scarlet fever, catches the disease herself, an act which Victor, rather harshly, terms “imprudence” (42). She dies after a noble deathbed speech, in which she remains self-sacrificing and dignified to the very end. Yet Caroline’s only directly-reported speech is notable because of its tone.

Caroline beseeches Elizabeth to fulfill her “firmest hopes of future happiness” by marrying Victor, and tells her that she “*must supply my place to my younger children*” (43, emphasis mine). Here Kaplan’s discussion of the work of Monique Plaza, who theorized about “fusional mother processes”, would be useful. Plaza states that the “over-indulgent mother” identifies with the child “to the extent of vicariously mothering herself”, while the “phallic mother” gets “gratification through exercising control over the child”. Kaplan considers this behaviour to be a logical result of the “mother-child dyad in patriarchal society”. She writes that it is an “understandable urge on the part of mothers to gain some satisfaction for themselves in return for the sacrifices they have undergone” (47). Kaplan also suggests that when the father is in the Master position in the household, “mothers take out their subjection to their husbands on their children”, and treat their children as “slaves” (48). In this context, then, it may be that Caroline’s early experience of heavy responsibility—she is, after all, the woman who simply brought home the orphaned Elizabeth because she wanted a daughter—has accustomed her to having her own way. Her demand to have Elizabeth and Victor marry may, in fact, be also her desire to live through her children.

Victor’s childhood experience of being Caroline’s “slave” may help to explain the ambivalence that one senses about the possibility of reviving his dead mother. Victor’s report of Caroline’s death is unusual, because he spends relatively little time and space

mourning his mother. In one paragraph, Victor passes from grief to resignation. He consoles himself with the thought that his is a “sorrow which all have felt, and must feel” (43). Victor’s philosophical musings on death might lead the reader to conclude that his mother was elderly, which is really not the case. Victor, her eldest child, is only seventeen when she dies, while her youngest, William, cannot be much older than an infant.¹ Yet Victor never even considers the impact that the loss of Caroline has on other family members, such as little William, who would be deeply affected. Victor’s dream, in which he embraces Elizabeth, only to discover that he “held the corpse of [his] dead mother in [his] arms” (58), seems to suggest a number of unresolved issues for Victor in regard to his mother.

In Victor’s quest to bestow “animation upon lifeless matter” (52), his deceased mother is the obvious, but unexpressed, candidate. Knoepfelmacher presumes that one of Victor’s intentions in his research is “to restore his mother”, but states that the dream in which Elizabeth and his mother are conflated, “underscores his rejection of the maternal or female model” (108). Clemens suggests that the brevity of Victor’s account of his mother’s death indicates his “difficulty in dealing with his own grief and anger”. She states that while, through his project, Victor “seeks the means of bringing her back to life”, in his “self-destructiveness Frankenstein attempts unconsciously to rejoin his mother in death” (99). In either case, Victor’s goal would seem to be a reunion with his mother. According to Gilbert and Gubar, however, in Shelley’s “fierce, Miltonic world”, what “is to be feared above all else is the reanimation of the dead, specifically of the maternal dead” (244). Significantly, Victor reports that while he hoped in time to be able to “renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption”, he still found it impossible (54). Shelley, on some level, may have needed to prevent the reanimation of the mother, convinced that what she would find there would be “graveworms crawling in the folds of the flannel” (*Frankenstein* 58).

Regardless of whether Victor's parents were good, bad or mediocre, the fact remains that he does not acquit his duty towards the creature that he has worked so hard to bring into existence. In examining women's own records, feminist scholars have discovered that "the main nineteenth-century motherhood discourse is that of suffering and self-sacrifice in the service of a *duty* to mother that goes unquestioned" (Kaplan 194). Early in the novel, Victor recounts his own formative years, making the statement that he was his parents' "child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me" (33-34). This pronouncement appears to establish Victor's own beliefs about parenting, but he does not heed them. Victor has certainly learned that the role of parent has its own duties, that parents owe something "towards the being to which they had given life" (34), yet Victor does not acknowledge the same duty towards the being he creates. Later, Victor tells us why he rejected his Creature:

In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. (217)

One might be able to accept that his fellow humans had the greater claim, except for the fact that Victor did absolutely nothing to acquit his duty towards his creature. He provided no care or comfort. At the very least, if he believed his Creature to be too "damaged", he should have destroyed it, as he does its unfinished mate. Instead, as soon as he saw the result of his "labor", Victor rushed from the room. Victor focuses solely on his own fears and disappointment, and he feels only relief at his "good fortune", when he returns to find that "his enemy had fled" (61). Levine is certainly correct in pointing out that "Victor's

worst sin is not the creation of the Monster but his refusal to take responsibility for it" (10). Throughout the novel, Victor Frankenstein, who has become the prototype for the "mad" scientist as a central stock character in science fiction, is revealed to be irresponsible, immature, self-absorbed and shallow.

To begin, Victor's rejection of the Creature is based entirely on surface appearance. Victor feels only horror and disappointment, believing that he has given "birth" to something not human. He runs out of the room because he is "unable to endure the aspect of the being [he] had created" (57). Victor cannot reconcile himself to the Creature's appearance:

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 on 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. (58)

The Creature's repulsiveness is not just in Victor's imagination, because others, like Walton, share his reaction. Walton, too, is horrified by the Creature's looks, but he manages to remain calm: "I shut my eyes involuntarily, and endeavoured to recollect what were my duties with regard to this destroyer", he recalls. "I called on him to stay" (219). Never mind that the duty Walton refers to is his promise to Frankenstein to kill the Creature, he still manages to overcome his revulsion. Soon, however, he is moved by the Creature's words and actions. His first inclination, to destroy Frankenstein's enemy, is "suspended by a mixture of curiosity and compassion" (219). Victor, too, discovers that the Creature's words are persuasive—once he listens to him. He sees "some justice in his argument", because the Creature's tale and the feelings he expressed "proved him to be a creature of fine sensations" (146). Still, Victor cannot accept the Creature's appearance: "when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred" (147).

Victor's superficiality is revealed early on the narrative when he meets his professors, Monsieurs Krempe and Waldman. He initially dislikes M. Krempe, who was a "little squat man, with a gruff voice and a repulsive countenance", and consequently he "did not prepossess [Victor] in favour of his pursuits" (46). M. Waldman, on the other hand, has an appearance more to Victor's liking, with an "aspect expressive of the greatest benevolence". He is short, but "remarkably erect" and his voice is the sweetest Victor has ever heard (47). Victor's reliance on appearances blinds him to the Creature's potential. He is like Milton's Eve, who is easily fooled by Satan's appearance as the serpent. Victor, we discover, is equally misled as he considers appearance to be a measure of goodness.

Victor is also self-absorbed, focusing only on himself, never on others. For instance, he does not speak up to save Justine because he fears that his tale's horror "would be looked upon as madness by the vulgar" (80). Instead, he does nothing while she is executed for a crime of which he believes her innocent. Actually, Victor is everything that an ideal mother should not be: self-centered, shallow and irresponsible. Shelley's ideal mother is self-sacrificing, dutiful, and filled with unconditional love for her child.

Victor's rejection of his Creature is also not the first time that he abandons something that has let him down or disappointed him. We remember that at fifteen, Victor gave up natural history and "all its progeny as a deformed and abortive creation", after he was "enlightened" by a visitor well versed in natural philosophy (41). He abandoned his former passion in the same way that he later abandons his Creature, who also does not live up to his expectations.

Perhaps we can discover whether there is some reason for Victor's irresponsible and selfish behaviour, some flaw in his personality. The text seems to indicate that Victor is somehow socially impaired. He claims that his early life, having been "remarkably secluded and domestic", had given him an "invincible repugnance to new countenances", and he believed himself to be "totally unfitted for the company of strangers" (45). Perhaps it is Victor's early over-indulged life that leaves him unsuited to handle any adversity.

Perhaps, with his mother's death, Victor finally experienced an event where he was unable to have his own way.

Victor also displays other deficiencies. He appears to have less sensibility than his companions, Elizabeth and Clerval. While they find inspiration in the world around them, Victor is oblivious. He admits that the summer that passed while he worked on the Creature was "a most beautiful season", but Victor's eyes "were insensible to the charms of nature" (55). Clerval, on the other hand, was "alive to every new scene; joyful when he saw the beauties of the setting sun, and more happy when he beheld it rise..." (154). Victor also lacks an appreciation for literature—an important failing in a novel noted for its "self-conscious literariness" (Gilbert & Gubar 222). Elizabeth and Clerval, as well as Walton, and even the Creature—all are exposed to works of poetry and romances. Clerval and Walton even try their hand at writing. Victor reads only "scientific" works, such as Cornelius Agrippa, and Gilbert and Gubar conclude that he has "misconceived...his monstrous offspring by brooding upon the *wrong* books..." (233)—and, more importantly, like his Creature, without the guidance of a teacher.

Victor also displays another negative trait—his frequent, "feminine" weakness. On more than one occasion Victor is rendered "lifeless" for months at a time, as he fights fevers and illnesses that seem more suited to the pale heroine of gothic fiction than to the hero. Perhaps Victor's physical weakness reflects his moral and emotional condition, for Victor always seems to be too passive and ineffectual to be considered a hero.

Victor is also misguided in his singular obsession with death, as opposed to life-bringing sex. "[S]exuality and the domestic sphere associated with women" (Clemens 103), is a critical area which Victor avoids. He would rather have the glory associated with his own form of creation than indulge in old-fashioned human procreation. One of Victor's reasons for destroying the Creature's mate is the prospect that a "race of devils would be propagated upon the earth" (165). Eve, too, suggests a celibate life to Adam as one way to prevent the conception of "The Race unblest" (*PL* 10.988). The Creature represents the

horror of the flesh. “[T]he Monster’s presence on the wedding night becomes a permanent image of the horror of sexuality”, says Levine (9).

There is no obvious reason for Victor’s avoidance of sex. Jean Pfaelzer discusses Isabel Knight’s theory that the “origin of gender resides in a splitting of the self into desirable and undesirable qualities, the projection of the undesirable qualities upon another, and then the repressive subjugation of the other as the embodiment of those rejected qualities” (289). In *Frankenstein*, the Creature certainly embodies the threat of sexuality that Victor seems to reject. Perhaps Victor’s denial is a way of avoiding the aura of incestuousness that Gilbert and Gubar suggest permeates the book. The source may also be in the feelings of “sexual nausea” that Gilbert and Gubar believe that Shelley felt towards “the maternal female image” (228, 244).

It is ironic that, despite all the injustice he suffers, Victor’s abandoned Creature displays more concern for others than does his Creator. If one compares the mothering skills of Victor and his Creature, the latter is by far the better nurturer—and is capable of selfless acts. When he realizes that the cottagers have very little, and that his thefts “inflicted pain” on them, he stops stealing from their store, and contents himself with “berries, nuts, and roots”. He collects firewood for them so that Felix can concentrate on other tasks (111). He also displays a concern for Victor’s well-being. The Creature urges Victor indoors in order to hear his tale, telling him that “the temperature of this place is not fitting to your fine sensations” (101). Whereas Victor can barely look at his Creature, never mind feel any affection or a sense of duty towards him, the Creature still loves Victor, even after he has been reviled and disappointed. During their final “chase”, the Creature does what he can to keep Victor alive and motivated—guiding him and providing him with food—and he mourns for him when he dies. He calls Victor “the select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration among men” (222). Overall, Victor’s “un-human” creation displays more concern and devotion, more “humanity”, than his creator.

It is probable, then, that the Creature is “feminine” in its capacity for sacrifice and nurture. Knoepflmacher writes that the Creature “initially displays feminine qualities” (106). Homans notes that the Creature resembles the Eve of *Paradise Lost* in “its female attributes”. Its “very bodiliness,” she continues, “its identification with matter, associates it with traditional concepts of femaleness”. She also suggests that the Creature’s femaleness is why Victor does not finish its mate, the “object of its own desire”: the Creature is aligned with women, “who are forbidden to have their own desires” (140). Incidentally, it is interesting that, although Shelley includes no details, the common visual image of the Creature that has evolved emphasizes limbs “sewn” together (a feminine activity), with enormous, ragged stitches, appearing very much like a gigantic rag doll.

The images that Shelley uses in connection with the Creature support its interpretation as representative of the feminine archetype. These symbols include the Earth, caves, mountains, pools of water, fruit, grain, wood and coffins. Neumann has connected all of these symbols to the different aspects of the feminine—either to protect, to transform, or to destroy. The Moon guides the Creature; the woods provide him with protection, light and heat; the earth gives him shelter and food, and the mountains and glaciers become his hiding places. Even his shelter behind the De Lacey’s hovel is low, “constructed of wood” and coffinlike (106).

Ultimately, the Creature can be identified as a mother figure. Not just a mother, but also the archetypal mother in her guise as the Terrible Mother who devours and destroys (Neumann). In a sense, the Creature acts as Victor’s mother, as he protects and guides him. At a key moment, the Creature is connected with Victor’s real mother, Caroline. As the Creature hovers over Victor’s coffin, Knoepflmacher notices that the scene parallels “Caroline Beaufort’s own grief by her father’s coffin” (110). As the Creature begins his series of murders, however, he becomes the agent of vengeance, punishing Victor—and all men—for their arrogance. Just as Caroline, the repressed (possibly “phallic”) mother, acts through her son Victor; so, too, does Mary Shelley act through her hideous offspring, the

Creature. The Creature acts on its “mother’s” behalf, bringing death to so many detestable targets: “death to the childish innocence of little William...death to the faith and truth of allegorically named Justine; death to the legitimate artistry of the Shelleyan poet Clerval; and death to the ladylike selflessness of angelic Elizabeth” (Gilbert & Gubar 242). In other words, he brings death to all the forces that serve to repress the “fallen” female spirit.

Mary Shelley’s Creature is ultimately the focal point of her novel. The other characters, including Walton and Victor, pale beside this abandoned, rejected being. As Thurer puts it, in twentieth-century terms Frankenstein’s Creature was a “product of a dysfunctional family”. He was “born innocent”, but “driven to monstrosity by parental rejection” (182). Only a young woman with Mary Shelley’s background could have imagined that in order to create life, one must look to death. I believe that I have satisfied my claim that Shelley acted as her Creature’s mother within the text, and possibly satisfied her own anger through his deeds. In Shelley’s day, the only way for a mother to be heard was through her offspring; a state of affairs that has improved in this century.

Chapter Two

Sheri S. Tepper: *Dystopian Motherhood and The Gate to Women's Country*

*Yes, he had the heart
to sacrifice his daughter,
to bless the war that avenged a woman's loss,
.....
Her father called his henchmen on,
on with a prayer,
 'Hoist her over the altar
like a yearling, give it all your strength!
She's fainting — lift her,
sweep the robes around her,
but slip this strap in her gentle curving lips...
here, gag her hard, a sound will curse the house' —
and the bridle chokes her voice...*

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* [224-237]

Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) shows us a very different side of motherhood than does *Frankenstein*. In general, Tepper has always placed a great deal of emphasis on motherhood in her fiction, and from an ostensibly feminist perspective. Works such as *Grass* (1989), *Beauty* (1991), and *Shadow's End* (1994) all contain major characters who are also mothers, and deal with mothering issues. While Mary Shelley wrote in the early nineteenth century and in the process invented science fiction, Tepper writes from a perspective that has seen science fiction grow to a distinct genre with an extensive history, which has felt the impact of women authors like Ursula K. Le Guin and Marge Piercy. Great changes have happened in the world since *Frankenstein* first appeared. Two world wars have been fought, we have marched for civil rights, man has landed on the moon, the electronic revolution has taken place and, most importantly for our purposes, feminism, in the form of the Women's Movement, has begun to change society.

By the time *The Gate to Women's Country* was published in the late 1980's, a backlash was occurring against certain feminist ideals. Liberal feminism urged equality between women and men, while "radical" feminism stressed the superiority of women over men (Austin 6). The 1970's was an era when many feminist utopian fictions were written. One of the most widely known works was Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975). *The Female Man*, like the majority of other works during this time period, depicted the "ideal gender-free society as an all-female world" (Mellor 245), a prospect which even certain divisions of the feminist movement (i.e., liberal) considered unacceptable and counter-productive.

The Gate to Women's Country can be considered Tepper's statement on the issue; her "[reply] to and [reworking] of the central themes of the feminist utopias", as Peter Fitting has called it (33). Beverly Price writes that *Gate* presents a "dystopian [perspective] on contemporary feminism". She notes that "*Gate* examines radical feminism", and juxtaposes those theories and values with another major institution of the twentieth-century U.S.A. (42)—in this case, religious patriarchy. While Tepper portrays many facets of motherhood in *Gate*, the question remains whether Tepper's dystopian nightmare is presented as a satiric commentary on the debate, or whether *Gate* is straightforward in its pessimistic view of gender and determinism. Perhaps my following closer examination of motherhood in *The Gate to Women's Country* will help to clarify the novel's message.

Women's Country consists of a network of towns that have grown up amid the desolated environs of the west coast of North America. The action takes place three hundred years after "a great devastation brought about by men" (*Gate* 301). Women's Country lore states that the society was founded by one woman (calling herself Martha Evesdaughter), who believed that the solution was to breed aggression out of the male race. Her band of women built a walled town, while the few remaining men lived in an adjacent garrison. Households in Women's Country are composed of women, daughters of all ages, boy children and male "servitors". At age five, boys are given to the garrison to be

raised. At age fifteen, they must choose whether to remain in the garrison as warriors, or return to the town and live as servitors. Women and warriors socialize only at the twice-yearly carnivals, when sexual “assignments” are permitted.

At first glance, life in Women’s Country appears ideal. Women are in control of their own lives and their own community. They seem to be given every opportunity for growth and development. In fact, fields such as medicine, engineering and management are now “women’s studies” (78). Women are not considered possessions. In Women’s Country, residents consider the institution of marriage to be “barbarism” (173), and women are no longer identified by their association with a man. In ancient stories, according to the Women’s Council play *Iphigenia at Ilium*, Hecuba was known as “Priam’s Queen”, and Andromache was “Hector’s wife”. And without Priam, “there was no Priam’s Queen” (176). Instead, in Women’s Country, women’s names incorporate the names of their mother and grandmothers, counting descent through the maternal line.

At first, Women’s Country appears to be superior to the other surviving culture. South of Women’s Country exists a small remnant of the old patriarchy, called Holyland. This group is a polygamous fundamentalist sect, run by the male “Elders”. Holyland is depicted as a concentrated example of the worst treatment of women. Female infants are sometimes abandoned at birth, while young girls are traded like commodities and married off to old men. Women are uneducated, and considered solely as sexual objects and baby machines. Violence against women—euphemistically called “chastisement”—is sanctioned by their religion, for its doctrine preaches that women are “the spout and wellspring of error and sin” (210). Now with a shortage of healthy young women, mismanagement and an inability to plan have led Holyland to the brink of extinction.

Beneath the progressive façade, however, Women’s Country also holds a rather nasty secret—reproduction in Women’s Country is hardly a chance affair. The general population is not aware that warriors father no children. Instead, specially-chosen servitors impregnate women by artificial insemination. Only those few who serve on the councils

know the truth. Every town has a local council, largely composed of women who are medically trained. In essence, Women's Country is run by a medical oligarchy, which is also in charge of food distribution, civic planning and the fate of the garrison. These latter-day female Frankensteins maintain their authority through their scientific knowledge.

The religious beliefs of the two societies reflect their orientations. Tepper deliberately contrasts the Holylanders, with their belief in a patriarchal "All Father", with the residents of Women's Country, who look to a new-age "Great Mother" as their deity. The Holylanders are considered "credulous and superstitious" because of their beliefs (277), while in Women's Country, they now say that as "[w]oman proposes, the Lady disposes" (165). The Great Mother is of course a version of the archetypal mother goddess that I have discussed in relation to *Frankenstein*, where the archetypal feminine exists largely in nature images, such as the moon. There was only one deity in Shelley's day, and images of Him (the Father) were strictly in masculine form. Tepper, on the other hand, deliberately re-establishes the mother goddess as a deity, taking advantage of the resurgence of goddess religions in recent years. Tepper also utilizes some self-conscious feminine archetypal imagery, such as Cheron's dream of journeying down "dank tunnels and into echoing caverns" (148), in an attempt to recapture the feminine principle that he has been denied.

The Great Mother has both a generative and a destructive side. Her way is immutable and she does not bargain, and she preaches acceptance, forbearance and mercy, but she is also cruel at times. When Morgot is revealed as a formidable warrior, who wields blades more lethal than the warriors' swords, she takes on the aspect of the "Terrible Mother". She must destroy in order to promote new growth, and the woman who "generates life and all living things on earth is the same who takes them back into herself" (Neumann 149). Goddess imagery, however, is not Tepper's only intertextual narrative technique.

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley takes her epigraph from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and she approaches her source with respect. Her familiarity with a classic, canonical work adds weight and authority to her work. In the 1831 Introduction, Shelley states that every thing must have a beginning, and that that beginning "must be linked to something that went before". Invention, she claims, does not create "out of void, but out of chaos", the substance itself must already exist (8). Shelley obviously wished to add lustre to her own efforts by connecting them to an acknowledged "classic" in the patriarchal mode. Tepper utilizes classic Greek myths and texts in a much different way in that she cites no one individual work by name. The inspiration for the Women's Country play, *Iphigenia at Ilium*, is referred to only as a "millennia-old preconvulsion story" (28). She then combines characters and events from the plays of Euripides (*The Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*), to retell an episode from the Trojan War from a different perspective. Her intention is not to cite an authority, but to criticize and satirize. What began as art for Euripides is now propaganda for the Women's Council.

The Iphigenia play itself is central to the novel's format. *Gate* shifts narrative chronology and perspective, alternating between the present day Stavia and her younger counterpart. The young Stavia grows from a child to the young woman who takes Chernon along on a disastrous scouting expedition to Holyland. The adult Stavia, now giving up her fifteen-year-old son Dawid to the garrison, is rehearsing the play. Pieces of the play's text are interspersed throughout the novel, and often foreshadow, or serve as a comment upon, the action. Tepper's technique allows us to learn the secrets of Women's Country gradually, as Stavia learns them.

Tepper has chosen the ancient Greek civilization as the model behind Women's Country's myths and customs. The choice is appropriate because the Greek civilization helped to erode women's independence. It must be remembered that only adult males could become Athenian citizens: "women, foreigners, slaves, freed slaves and children" need not apply (Worthen 15). Drama, as it developed in Athens, became a male enterprise.

By the fifth century B.C., all of the onstage roles were played by men, while only works by male playwrights have been preserved. "Drama, then, participated fully in Athens' denial of equality to women" (Worthen 18).

The shifts in Athenian drama reflected the changes in the society itself. In the new Athenian economy, "women became a medium of exchange and marriage became an institution of ownership" (Case 112). In Athens, citizenship was dependent upon male offspring, which led to the regulation of women's sexuality, as a wife became the sole source of a legitimate heir. As Thurer puts it, the Athenians had a "fetish for biological legitimacy" (62). Also at this time, the opinion originated that the father was the real parent, while the mother was just the vessel for the male seed. The basis for this belief is found in *The Eumenides*. Orestes, Iphigenia's brother, is put on trial for the murder of his mother, Clytemnestra. He is acquitted because avenging one's father is considered more important than respecting one's mother (Thurer 65). The goddess Athena casts the deciding vote in the case, citing the fact that she was not born of woman. The conclusion establishes that "the mother is not the parent, but the nurse of the child. The parent is defined as he who mounts" (Case 116) We see here that the possibility of the male usurpation of woman's ability to create life was raised long before *Frankenstein*. The rise in importance of the Greek gods Athena and Dionysos signalled the end of the older, more equitable system. According to Case, "Athena represents the end of the dangers of the womb" (113).

The Women's Council play, *Iphigenia at Ilium*, is very loosely based on *The Trojan Women* by Euripides. The differences are obvious and immediate. In the play itself, as performed by the Women's Country council, Greek tragedy has been transformed into farce. The Women's Councils have rewritten the story to suit their own political and propagandistic intentions, with the drama being performed year after year, as "part of the reminders" (28). The play is now a "comedy", with the women "tarted up", the baby a "clown-faced doll", and Achilles with a "great dong" strapped to his body (37-38). The

Councils have degraded the dialogue from formal poetic diction into casual conversation, which emphasizes the artificiality of the old texts. For instance, when Hecuba caustically says “[w]ell old Apollo can go scratch himself...” (169), her earthiness reflects the novel’s insistence that the women are more realistic than the warriors. The presence of the ghostly characters—Iphigenia, Polyxena and Achilles—mimics real life. Women’s Country is “Hades”, where the dead warriors cannot rest, or be forgotten, because the “Damned Few” must remember their ultimate goal.

In parodying the original story, the Council is asserting the inaccuracies of the original poets, who emphasized the male enterprise at the expense of women. Heroic sagas like *The Iliad* do not concern themselves with woman’s sphere. And while male characters such as Achilles and Agamemnon are considered heroes, the blame often falls to the women, such as Clytemnestra and Helen. Feminist theory asserts that, traditionally, history (and myth) has been recorded from the male point of view, with the result that women’s stories have never really been accurately told. In *Iphigenia at Ilium*, when Hecuba asks, is “none of what the poets say is true?”, Iphigenia retorts, “Can a woman believe such nonsense?” (56).

In the original Greek plays there is little dissent or subversiveness on the part of the women. Instead, the female characters appear to support the misogyny. While the Trojan women are sorrowful about being captured, they do not criticize the men who enslaved them. In the Euripidean *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia fearlessly faces death in order to “free” Greece. She rejects Achilles’s offer of help because a man should not die “for the sake of a woman”. She adds: “If it means that one man can see the sunlight / what are the lives of thousands of women / in the balance?” (1880-82). Andromache’s reaction to the murder of her infant son is much different in the Woman’s Council version of the drama than in the original. In *The Trojan Women*, Andromache gives up her child stoically, with no outrage. She even apologizes for her initial emotional outburst, then goes on to hold Helen responsible for the whole mess. In the Council’s version, Andromache “screams”

and “weeps” and “clings to her child”. Instead of blaming Helen, she calls doom upon the messenger, Talthylus, and on “those who sent you here”, meaning all the Greek warriors (33).

The Women’s Country agenda is perpetuated by their repetitive presentation of this text, which graphically presents the plight of women, and limits the male perspective to the “phallogocentric morosity of Achilles” (Pearson 204). Throughout *Iphigenia at Ilium*, Tepper is insistent that the original poets did not hear the women’s voices. It is perhaps unfair that she based her drama on Euripides’ version of events, since other works, such as *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, are far less balanced in their portrayal. As Wendy Pearson points out in her article “After the (Homo)Sexual: A Queer Analysis of Anti-Sexuality in Sheri S. Tepper’s *The Gate to Women’s Country*”, the “Euripidean tragedies...were stringently critical of the negative consequences of war” (207). The use of art as propaganda in Women’s Country also occurs after the “execution” of Marthatown’s entire garrison, when the Council commissions a song “about betrayal of trust and broken ordinances and shame” which perpetuates the “official” version of events (313). However, Tepper does not rely only on art to make her point, her primary emphasis in *Gate* is on science.

Frankenstein is obviously a work of proto science-fiction, as the genre simply did not exist in Mary Shelley’s day. Science fiction did not really develop until the twentieth century, as scientific knowledge rapidly expanded. One could say that part of the criteria for a true work of science fiction is the science behind the story. In *The Gate to Women’s Country*, the science that Tepper brings to the text is genetics.

Whereas Mary Shelley had no way to explain why, with a loving mother and father, Victor Frankenstein grew up selfish and incapable of nurturing, Tepper uses biological inheritance as the basis for her extrapolations. Artificial selection is behind Women’s Country’s plan to breed out violent characteristics, which would “theoretically” mean no more wars. Tepper suggests that aggression can be bred out of the human race almost as easily as a herding instinct can be bred into sheep dogs.

The fact that inheritance is behind an offspring's resemblance to its parents is also stressed in the text. Because of her genetic inheritance from Morgot, who happens to be chief medical officer of Marthatown, young Stavia's "potential as a physician is high" (23). Stavia even thinks of herself as a "smaller version" of Morgot (83). In turn, Stavia's own daughter, Spring, resembles her mother so much that for Stavia, looking at her is "like looking into the mirror of her own past" (7).

Tepper also uses genetics as a explanation for less desirable characteristics, although Pearson takes issue with Tepper's tendency generally to "blame unsatisfactory traits" on the father (223). Tepper implies that Myra's flaws can be attributed to her biological father (Stavia and Myra are half-sisters, having different fathers), who, we learn, was "not a satisfactory sire", partly because "almost none" of his male offspring return to become servitors. Chernon's chauvinistic behaviour, it is also suggested, is due to the fact that he and Myra have the same father (293).

While Women's Country flourishes generatively, Holyland is revealed as a genetic nightmare. In Women's Country, accurate records are kept to ensure the suitability of male progenitors, and care is taken to produce the best offspring and to prevent inbreeding. (The close attention to detail is exemplified in the custom of relocating servitors to different towns.) In contrast, Holyland is becoming more and more inbred, largely because of the Elders' inability to plan. The self-serving Elders killed off the majority of baby girls born during a drought several years ago, while continuing to take several wives each. Holyland is now faced with a severe lack of young women, and fewer chances for successful breeding. More defects are noticeable in each generation, such as "crossed eyes and crazy teeth and funny, squinty-up faces" (207). Obviously, the male Holylanders consider mothers (and women) to be the "Other", an opposing force to be controlled and repressed. This, consequently, would be an appropriate place to look at how mothers are generally positioned in the text.

In *Frankenstein*, Caroline Beaufort exists as only a pale reflection, seen through her son's eyes. Morgot Rentesdaughter Thalia Marthatown is definitely not an object, but a subject in her own right. She is not depicted as only part of a discourse spoken by an Other (Kaplan 3). Morgot is both a mother and a central character, with her own wants and desires, her own agenda and her own problems. She has much to say and does not hesitate to speak on her own behalf. Even after her daughter, Stavia, is grown up and a mother herself, Morgot does not disappear from the action, her primary purpose of raising the main character fulfilled (think back to Caroline Beaufort). Instead, Morgot remains a force in the novel, and her own life continues on, independent of her daughter. We have only to consider other works of science fiction to realize how seldom a central character is depicted who is also a mother.

In *Women's Country*, mothers like Morgot are the main unifying forces in each family, despite the fact that adult daughters usually remain in the same household, along with the daughters' offspring. Without a male parent, or authority figure, mothers must guide, correct and admonish, as well as nurture, protect and comfort (89). This situation is, of course, nothing new in the real world, but an entire society built on this premise is unusual in fiction. The myth of the early modern nuclear family establishes the mother as nurturer and caretaker, while the father is bread-winner, decision-maker and authority figure (Just wait until your father gets home!). In *Women's Country*, however, mothers are the sole authority in guiding their children (or their daughters, at least). For instance, it is Morgot who makes the decision that Myra must leave her household, and she tries to present it as an acceptable alternative that will benefit everyone involved.

Along with the elevated status of the mother in *Women's Country* comes a depiction of childrearing as an activity of some importance. Motherhood is not treated as inferior or unimportant. Girls even take childrearing courses as a necessary part of their education (83). Raising children is not considered to be a trivial background activity, but neither is it woman's sole reason for being. *Women's Country* does make allowances—they do not

send mothers with young children, like Myra, on expeditions (190), but neither are women “just mothers”. Mothering is an activity that happens concurrently with all of the other activities that are required in Women’s Country. A woman is expected to contribute to the community (through her science, art and craft), and continue her education, while she is raising her children. And, as with other activities, a woman is expected to be the best mother that she can be.

While Women’s Country promotes the aptitude of women for a wide range of activities, in Holyland women are considered to be good only for bearing children and catering to the men, and they produce baby after baby until they drop. Women are considered second-class citizens, and have no authority or control. Even an elderly “granny” dares not speak her mind to her grown son, because “there was [sic] things a woman couldn’t say” (209). Women are not even allowed a basic education. In fact, for Elder Brome the idea that a woman “had anything sensible to say ... smacked pretty much of heresy” (275).

By showing that the care and health of babies and mothers is a priority in Women’s Country, Tepper is utilizing symbolism that has been used frequently in science fiction: women’s fertility is representative of the relative health of their society. If the society is healthy, women will deliver normal babies with little difficulty. However, if a society is diseased or unwholesome, women will be infertile, or babies will be born mutated or weak. In *Gate*, the fruitfulness of Women’s Country is contrasted against the miscarriages, stillbirths and birth defects common in Holyland. Having a baby is generally not a life or death situation in Women’s Country. When she hears that Kostia and Tonia’s mother did not survive, Stavia is “aghast at the thought of any woman dying in childbirth” (173). In Holyland, babies are not even given names until they are a year old, because “that’d be right wasteful” (255).¹

While childbearing appears to be routine in Women’s Country, motherhood does not always run so smoothly. Tepper diversifies the portrayal of motherhood, showing that

in *Women's Country* mothers are not always successful, and that mothering is not easy or glamorous. It is a sometimes thankless job, and often hard work. While Morgot and Stavia have a close relationship, Morgot and her other daughter, Myra, clash continually. Myra is a typical teenager. She insists on doing what she wants, seeing who she wants, and rejecting her mother's advice because she thinks her opinions are wrong. Morgot is also no more successful in changing Myra than any other mother of a teenage daughter. Although Morgot tries to show her that Barten is an untrustworthy jerk, Myra does not believe her. Finally, Morgot asks Myra to leave her household, creating lasting ill-will. Myra resents Morgot for choosing "to keep him [Joshua] and let me go" (179). As a result, even the sisters drift apart. After Stavia's return from school, she "found it hard to think of Myra as a sister anymore" (179).

Despite her difficulties, Morgot the mother is presented as a positive example. She is judicious and reserved, preferring to teach by example rather than by direct lecturing, as when she tries to end Myra's infatuation with Barten by taking her out to the gypsy camp to witness Tally's shaming. Morgot never yields control, even when she is obviously shocked and upset when she sees Stavia after her return from Holyland. She leaves the room to break down, and when she returns, her eyes are red, but her voice is "perfectly calm" (280). Due to her self-restraint, Morgot is rarely demonstrative or affectionate. The only time Morgot is shown being solicitous and gentle with Stavia is after her brain surgery, when Morgot sits on the bed and holds her daughter gently, whispering "Shhh, my Stavvy. It's all right" (291). Despite her motherly affection, however, Morgot would have had no choice but to let Stavia be killed if she did not swear an oath of silence regarding her trip, although she does say that she "might choose to go with you [Stavia]" (294). In *Women's Country*, allegiance to the community comes before any other ties.

Despite all the emphasis in *Women's Country* on the need for a lack of romance and sentimentality, Myra experiences a rude awakening once she becomes a mother. According to the text, Myra's "romantic dream of motherhood had been riven into sharp-edged frag-

ments by late-night feedings, constant diaper washing, and a baby who persisted in looking and acting like a baby, not like a young hero" (88). Myra is portrayed as an inadequate mother, and her sons are called "spoiled rotten" (179), undoubtedly because of her "unsatisfactory" genetics. As her sons grow, Myra is torn. She desperately wants to get away from her children for a while, but because they are boys, she also wants to spend as much time with them while she can (191). In Women's Country, a mother is supposed to give up her sons dispassionately and with dignity. Once again, Myra has trouble conforming to her society's expectations.

Because of the Women's Country policy of giving up boys to be raised by the garrison, motherhood is a source of much pain for the mother. The enormous grief involved in bringing a son to the garrison is resurrected with every visit. The pain returns even more strongly if the son chooses to remain a warrior. According to Morgot, "[y]ou worry about his going into battle, being wounded, dying. Every battle means...every battle means someone dies. Maybe your son, or your friend's son" (70). Although the news that her son, Dawid, has decided to remain in the garrison leaves Stavia feeling angry and in pain, she forces herself to go through with the necessary ritual, because she has always "played by the rules" (5). She limits her defiance to informing Dawid "[y]ou are not my son", in order to "[l]et him know, even now, that it cut both ways" (5). In her pain, Stavia still needs to reach out and wound someone else.

In many respects, Holyland is a mirror image of Women's Country. But while childbearing is more dangerous where women are treated like "breeding stock", in both societies motherhood is closely connected with grief. One cannot but speculate whether women in both cultures feel differently about their sons as opposed to their daughters, since both enforce separation of mothers and sons. It would be difficult to build a close relationship with a son who visits only twice a year. In Women's Country, some families "just try to forget about them unless they come home" (11). In Holyland, also, boys are indoctrinated early into the male dominated system. Sons are separated from their mothers

as soon as they are old enough for schooling, and young men live in the “bachelor house”. An enormous sense of superiority results, because the “natural order” sets men above women, in the tradition of the patriarchal world of the Old Testament. Once again, religion is used to legitimize discrimination. A close relationship with a son must be next to impossible in such circumstances. As Susannah says, “you get to love your girl children...” (258). She has no words for boys.

Tepper also suggests that maternal feeling is a necessity for “racial survival”. The tremendous amount of care needed by helpless human infants would suggest that we, as a species, presumably have an innate impulse to nurture, developed over the ages. Septemius comments that the women’s “misplaced nurturing” is the “biggest chink in [their] female armor”, but that it cannot be guarded against, because it is necessary for survival (290). Paradoxically, the “nurturing impulse” is both a necessity, and a potential source of woman’s downfall.

For Susannah in Holyland, her desire to nurture is stunted, but still present, despite her horrendous living conditions. Holyland has no place for sentiment, just like Women’s Country. Reaching out to pat her daughter’s face is considered an “unseemly expression of affection” (200). Yet, even though she desperately does not want to become pregnant again, Susannah gives up the opportunity to receive Stavia’s implant, preferring to protect her daughter, Chastity, instead. To a certain extent, Stavia’s need to nurture informs her infatuation with Chernon. She wants to “mother” him in order to soothe the hurt she (supposedly) caused him: “There’s lots of the Great Mother in Stavia”, says Tonia (229). Stavia’s desire to atone, however, leads to destruction and pain. The power of maternal tenderness extends into the Women’s Council play. Hecuba has a knife in her skirts, which she almost uses on Talthybius; later, she regrets not trying to stab him. “I could have killed him”, Hecuba claims. “I wanted to. I had the knife just for that reason. Yet, at the last minute I thought, he’s some mother’s son just as Hector was, and aren’t we

women all sisters?" (315). The play thus emphasizes women's compassion, in accordance with the Council's agenda.

Just as women are expected to contribute to Women's Country through their chosen endeavors, they are also expected to contribute by producing the next generation. Motherhood in Women's Country is essentially an obligation, and it appears that a woman's choice in the matter is limited. It is noted repeatedly in the text that most of the residents have several children. Septemius comments that they're "prolific" in Women's Country, bearing children "every year or two" (171). He notes that "[s]carce a woman among them has fewer than three or four" (166). In addition, the residents start their families at a relatively young age. Tonia comments that only a very few women do not yet have a child by the time they reach their twenties (188). The assumption that women are supposed to bear children is also reflected in such warriors' sayings as "There's no use or excuse for a childless woman" (143). When faced with the prospect of motherhood, the characters do not react with a great deal of enthusiasm. Myra does not sound very positive when Stavia asks her, "[d]o you want to be pregnant?". Myra replies "Sure. I mean, I have to start sometime, right?" (83). There is nothing in the text to suggest that Myra (or anyone else) has any choice in the matter. Although nothing specifies that a woman must bear children in order to stay in Women's Country, the impression is given that, should a woman opt not to have children, the social pressure to conform would be intense.

Those in Women's Country are actually no better off than their counterparts in Holyland. There, women are treated like breeding machines. Motherhood is horrific and can even be deadly, while bearing children is a duty. In fact, the Holylanders believe that a "true marriage" has not taken place until a baby is produced (201). Elder Brome even considers sending one of his wives back to her family, because there was "[n]o point keepin [sic] a wife who couldn't produce", as if he were talking about a hen or a heifer (205). Girls who are barely mature are married off, and expected to produce baby after baby, preferably male. Susannah wishes that her daughter had more time to mature "before

setting her to breed” (200), while she wails that she, herself, is “too old” to have another baby after eleven pregnancies—and she is only twenty-nine years old (204). Ironically, despite their mistreatment of women, male Holylanders still feel a certain affection towards their own mothers. Since Elder Resolution Brome took over the farm when his own father died, no one has lived in the house where he, himself, was born, because Resolution is not “sure he wanted anybody in Mama’s house” (204).

Eventually, part of the power behind Women’s Country is revealed to be their sheer numbers. The councils encourage large families as a source of strength. More communities have been established as populations have grown, and now their towns are “pushing at the desolations” (166). We learn from Septemius that in Marthatown alone, there are perhaps fifteen thousand women, children and servitors, and only four thousand warriors (166). Later, Morgot reveals to Michael that “[i]t is part of our governance to see that [the women] always greatly outnumber the men” (302). As a matter of fact, the same sort of threat by numbers also arises in *Frankenstein*. Victor’s reason for destroying his female creature is because he envisions that “a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (165). The concept of numbers equalling strength is intriguing, since in so much science fiction, from mid-century on, overpopulation is often a perilous threat. A congested Earth plays a role in works such as *The Caves of Steel* (1954) by Isaac Asimov, where “eight billion people crowd into eight hundred automated cities” (Clareson 110), or John Brunner’s *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968). Tepper also depicts the threat of overcrowding in her other fictions. In *Beauty*, for instance, man has exhausted the earth’s resources by the twenty-first century. In *Shadow’s End*, “Firsters” colonize planet after planet until they reach “critical population level[s]” (78).

Septemius informs us that there are almost four times as many women and servitors in Marthatown than there are warriors. The question, then, is how, from a presumably equal number of baby boys and girls, such a population disparity is maintained. There are

no additional garrisons, independent of the towns. The answer is that large numbers of warriors, every generation, must die in battle. Chernon “infects” the entire garrison with his subversive ideas when he returns from Holyland. As a result, the Council orders that, in the upcoming battle, “none of those from Marthatown are to return at all” (311). When we learn that the Women’s Councils arrange for the reduction of garrison populations by manipulating the warriors into fighting, we realize that Women’s Country is not only practicing selective breeding, but is also actively engaging in the mass destruction of warriors. (Perhaps a type of phallicide?) The wrongs that Women’s Country commits against its women are more subtle than those it commits against the warriors, but they still exist.

One of the novel’s themes is the slavery of women. The “sister-wives” of Holyland are essentially slaves to their husbands. The Trojan women in the council play have been enslaved by their Greek conquerors. Morgot considers the gypsy, Vonella, to be “no better than a slave” (47). However, the residents of Women’s Country are also slaves—slaves to their society. In Women’s Country, the residents have little freedom, less choice and only an illusion of control. The violations that this “feminist dystopia” commits against its residents are worth examining in more detail, particularly those which deal with motherhood.

The young Stavia points out to Joshua that “[a]ny male rabbit can make babies!” (96). The statement is also applicable to women. Any woman can bear a child; however, not all women make good mothers. When Mary Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*, the idea that a woman had a choice about childbearing was unheard of. Women were expected to marry and have children. As recently as the 1950’s, child-care experts suggested that “motherhood was a necessary developmental stage for all women” (Thurer 256). Tepper, however, is writing in the late twentieth century, during the post-feminism era. In recent years, the Women’s Movement has struggled to achieve equality for women, and the freedom to choose whether or not they want to bear a child. In *The Roots of Roe*, Gloria

Steinem states adamantly that “reproductive freedom is a basic human right”. Withholding that right is unjustifiable. While it is important that women who choose to be mothers are afforded respect and support, it is just as important to realize that not all women have a maternal inclination or desire. In “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Hélène Cixous tells women “[e]ither you want a kid or you don’t—*that’s your business*”. And she counsels that “if you don’t have that particular yearning, it doesn’t mean that you’re in any way lacking” (1100-01). The hostility evident in *Gate* towards patriarchy and its effects suggest that Tepper abhors the stereotypical view of women as baby machines—which is why the enforced reproduction found in Women’s Country is especially troubling. In a later work, Tepper sets out a stance that may be closer to her own opinion. In *A Plague of Angels* (1993), Night Raven relates the beliefs of the utopian community, Artemisia:

Some women are good breast mothers, some are not. Some persons care for toddlers well. Some are good at educating older children. To insist on bearing children if one is not healthy, to insist on rearing children when one is unskilled at it, or on educating when one is ignorant—why, that is what animals do! (347)

In essence, the residents of Women’s Country have no real control over their reproduction. The secret of Women’s Country does not uphold Morgot’s comment that Myra “had chosen to have three children” (191). Myra may have certified her intention to take part in carnival, but her pregnancies were arranged by the medical community. In Women’s Country, a woman’s decision to engage in “assignments” essentially means her acquiescence to becoming a mother, since the general population is unaware of the existence of birth control. (The irony is that Women’s Country does have contraceptives, but they are used at the discretion of the medical leaders.) After carnival, the women are then impregnated without their knowledge or consent. As a result, most women do not know who is really the father of their children, and the decision whether or not to conceive is

taken out of their hands. Sterilizations are also regularly performed in order to prevent “unsuitable” women, like Myra, from breeding (290).

Life in Women’s Country can be very difficult because of its rigid gender roles. Jenny Wolmark points out that the walls surrounding Women’s Country, which serve to symbolize the repressive nature of the society, also “invoke ideas of limitation” (95). Custom demands that a woman contribute to the society and continue her education, as well as bearing children. She must give up her sons to be raised in the garrison, and then face the possibility of their being killed in battle, all the while behaving in a “womanly” manner. As well, there are all of the ordinances to learn and to follow; and the possible consequences for breaking the ordinances even include death (294). The gypsy Vonella explains why she left Women’s Country: “Too much expected of you all the time. Studies and work and crafty things—no more time to yourself than a dog with the itch. Somebody after you all the time to cook better or weave better or be responsible for somethin’” (47). Her sentiments are echoed by the child Stavia, who sometimes feels overwhelmed by the demands. She has tantrums because “they were always expecting her to do something more or be something more until it didn’t feel like there was enough of her left to go around” (14). Stavia realizes that her sister, Myra, might have been happier “if she had been allowed to do nothing but dance” (179), but by the time Stavia is an adult, she has been indoctrinated so thoroughly into the ways of Women’s Country that rebellion, or even skepticism, is impossible. Jean Pfaelzer says that any system or discourse which is based upon “hierarchized” oppositions “returns us to both the patriarchal system of values and the patriarchal system of perception” (286). The strict segregation found in Women’s Country, and the strict requirements for residents are regressive, not progressive.

Women’s Country assumes that all women have an enormous capacity for sacrifice and stoicism. Women pray for their warrior relations to return through the gate, yet there are no factions that urge changes to the ordinances—no outrage or outright rebellion. This is because, although occasionally “some group of women begin to play the fool” (290), we

discover that dissenters and troublemakers do not last long in Women's Country. Barten, Chernon and Vinsas are all killed in "battle", while Michael, Patras and Stephon are assassinated. While Myra, an "unsatisfactory" mother, receives only a questionable hysterectomy, it seems that the murder of women would not be beyond the council.

Women's Country assumes that everyone is alike, that all women are "warm-hearted and competent" (Jonas). However, not all women are independent, responsible, resourceful or intelligent. "Tepper's text treats sex and gender as inalienable", according to Pearson, and "being born female leads to specifically female modes of behaviour..." (210). Women's Country shows little consideration for those who do not conform to the preferred "mode". Myra, with her love of dance, is depicted as the exception to the "womanly" resident. But, as Stavia notes, "what good would a woman be who could only dance?" Myra's efforts at her science and craft are "halfhearted", according to her sister (179-80), and usefulness is a prime consideration in Women's Country. Myra is also a "throwback" when it comes to her relationship with Barten. She is unlike the other residents, who presumably are content to socialize with their warrior lovers twice a year and run their own lives the rest of the time. Myra, who believes whatever Barten tells her, is the type of woman who "needs" a man in her life. According to the text, she turned to him "[a]s though she were nothing on her own. As though she needed him to be anything" (180).

What exists in Women's Country is a sharp Madonna/Whore dichotomy. Either you are a "womanly" resident of Women's Country, obeying and working your entire life long; or you leave and, as Joshua puts it, become a "whore" (91). The only women who live outside the walls are the prostitutes in the gypsy camp, and gypsies are considered "unfit" for breeding (142). The only exceptions are Tonia and Kostia, Septemius's psychic nieces. While they are depicted as commendable young women, itinerants such as they are considered "mere wanderers" (94), and the two young women willingly give up the nomadic life to join Women's Country and "live in a civilized manner", as Stavia puts it

(233). The choices for women in Tepper's world are extremely limited—conform to the ordinances of Women's Country or take your chances out in the dangerous world beyond the walls.

Ironically, despite the fact that the women appear to have a fair amount of sexual freedom, the residents of Women's Country are still considered immoral by the men. While warriors profess to honor those women who are the mothers of their sons, privately they view the residents as little more than sexual objects. While warriors may "beget an occasional girl", they do not consider themselves fathers of daughters. Michael tells his men, "you've got to use girls for what they're good for" (69). In the warriors' eyes, the women are not sexually free, they are promiscuous. "Everybody in the garrison knows that you women do it with everybody", Chemon tells Stavia. "Sometimes three or four different men during a carnival. How do you know who the father is?" (246). Despite assertions to the contrary, women still receive no respect from the males, and any strides towards selfhood have been undermined.

While Tepper has tried to assert women's right to sexual pleasure, there are other problems with the carnival system, aside from the warriors' view of women. Pearson specifically criticizes Tepper for the novel's regulation of women's sexuality. The twice-yearly carnivals impose restrictions that Pearson finds unnatural and unrealistic. She calls it a textual "unresolved contradiction" that the councilwomen seem to assume "that all women's sex drives are both containable and unimportant" (212). A society that recognizes that "libidinal need" is "normal" and "useful" (*Gate 76*) must also realize that the urge may strike more than twice a year.

Pearson also takes issue with the assumption that all the women will "automatically desire the strutting macho warriors and totally ignore the presence of those sensitive new-age telepaths, the servitors". She goes on:

They [the women] are clearly expected to be blinded by hormones at the onset of puberty and to behave foolishly, and no allowance is made for

personal difference, either in object of desire or in the degree to which adolescent hormones turn perfectly reasonable girls into boy-crazed idiots. Not only are there no lesbians allowed in Women's Country, but there is also no allowance for any woman who might prefer asexuality or auto-eroticism or who is not sexually attracted to macho warriors. (210)

Indeed, women are considered odd if they are not interested in participating in carnival. The young Stavia tells Beneda that because Michy's mother "almost never takes part in carnival", she "doesn't like sex at all!", and "is a very strange person" (58). Cixous makes a point similar to Pearson's, concerning the diversity of women's sexuality: "what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes..." (1090). While there will certainly always be women who are blinded by infatuation, it is exceedingly reductive to assume that all women will react the same way. There are no absolutes.

In addition to the restrictions placed on heterosexual women, Pearson notes that Tepper completely discounts the possibility of homosexuality within Women's Country. One of the results of the Feminist movement has been the acceptance of a range of human sexuality. In fact, several ground-breaking feminist works of science fiction have depicted alternative sexuality, including *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, by Marge Piercy. Yet, aside from Pearson's claim that *Gate* enforces "compulsory heterosexuality" (217), Tepper does introduce homosexuality only to assert that it no longer exists. In a rather odd entry, unique because of its egregiousness (Pearson 200), Tepper asserts that homosexuality is a hormonal "aberration", a so-called gay syndrome, which is now corrected before birth. According to the text, "[t]here were very few actual HNRMs—called HenRams—either male or female, born in Women's Country (76). Pearson finds Tepper's "solution" threatening and hostile, and claims that certain passages of *Gate* are "overtly homophobic"

(200). Nevertheless, the lack of a range of sexuality once again limits one's options in Women's Country.

It is ironic that in a society where the council conducts its business so covertly, the inhabitants must declare their status so visibly. Residents, itinerants and gypsies alike must wear temporary stamps to testify to their health. However, only warriors are permanently tattooed, or "branded", with their garrison affiliation (108), as if they were livestock. The fact adds a chill to Morgot's statement that "[w]e let our warrior bulls believe they father sons" (293). More than one reader has had the impression, like Pearson, that all warriors are "nasty, violent, treacherous and cold-blooded" (203). Yet one must consider whether the warriors are "devious and dumb" (Jonas) because of their genetics, or because of their environment. The warriors live like caged animals, with vast amounts of wasted time only briefly interrupted by "brief orgasms of emotion" (183). No wonder they are restless and bored. The warriors are deliberately kept ignorant of anything but war, sports and honor. If they, like the women and servitors, were allowed to pursue "physical, mental and intellectual excellence" (Price 43), they might have developed differently.

Pearson claims that Women's Country consists of "a race of mothers who are quite willing to sacrifice their unsatisfactory warrior sons for their ideology" (220). I disagree with her assumption somewhat, because those mothers are not privy to all the facts. Yes, the women watch as the warriors go off to battle, but they believe that their skills and training will keep their sons safe. The mothers believe that their sons are walking into an "honorable" fight. They do not know that the warriors face a more certain death than they envision, because the councils fix the outcomes ahead of time.

While my focus is primarily on motherhood, Tepper's premise has established a lifestyle for the children's fathers in Women's Country that deserves comment. We have gone from an extraordinary absence of mothers in *Frankenstein*, to an almost complete suppression of fathers in *The Gate to Women's Country*. While the servitors actually

father all of the children, their contribution, their identity as parent, “has no relevance” in *Women’s Country* (114).

The situation would appear to be as black and white, as easy to distinguish as the bearded warriors and clean-shaven servitors themselves. Yet the ethics behind the situation are not so simple. The servitors are expected to use their psychic gifts for the good of *Women’s Country*, yet the councils do nothing to counter the general opinion that servitors are “cowards and tit-suckers” (38). Their position in the household is comparable to that of a governess in the nineteenth century—not just a servant, yet not a member of the family. After all, Joshua’s room is (symbolically) separate from the rest of the house, “at the corner of the courtyard” (90). Tepper tries to avoid the mistakes of earlier feminist works, where the portrayals of men “seem almost ludicrous in their reliance upon sex-role stereotypes” (Mellor 250), but Tepper depicts “highly competent, calm, judicious men” like Joshua (288), only to have them live as celibates, since they do not take part in carnival. “[L]ibidinal need” (76) is recognized as natural for women and warriors, but apparently not necessary for servitors. Pearson assumes that the servitors have no sex drive (203), but the text neither supports or disproves her assertion.

We are given the impression that some servitors—at least the ones we meet in the text, Joshua and Corrig—have “romantic” relationships with the women they serve, yet they cannot carry on a physical relationship, or acknowledge their affections publicly. As Pearson points out, a sexual relationship between a woman and a servitor would not only be impossible to keep secret in the close quarters of *Women’s Country*, but would also “disrupt the sexual paradigm” that insists that women are attracted only to warriors (212). Scenes between Stavia and Corrig imply a romantic type of intimacy that is full of affection, but we must assume that they maintain a proper citizen/servitor distance. Stavia’s initial reaction to Corrig’s presence has distinctly erotic overtones: “She gave him a surprised look, meeting his eyes, letting her own drop away. My, oh my, but this was an unexpected man, here in her own house. Imagine his having read her need and intention so

easily" (181). Later, Corrig comforts her when she is pregnant, confessing "I have this consistent hunger for you, Stavia". He reassures her that "There will be a girl child. Yours and mine" (297). Tepper is suggesting that what women really need is a man who knows exactly what they want. Yet we are expected to accept that Corrig and Stavia share many of the elements of a long-term relationship without the physical intimacy.

Worst of all, however, the servitors father children that they can never claim. Joshua is Stavia's biological father, as well as one of her caregivers, yet he does not even hug her until she is almost a teenager. When Stavia confides to Joshua that she has been bending the ordinances, Joshua moves to embrace her, "pulling her to him and crushing her against his hard chest. For a moment she was frightened, old stories of mad servitors darting through her mind like crazed swallows, but then she felt his hand on her back, patting her, as though she had been one of the donkeys" (135). The awkwardness of this moment highlights the tragedy of a father who is forbidden to acknowledge his own daughter, and to receive from her the recognition due to the man who fathered her—to at least place him on an equal footing with her mother, especially since both raised her. It is unreasonable that these men must live this way. As Cixous says, "[w]hich castration do you prefer? Whose degrading do you like better, the father's or the mother's?" (1101). Neither is an appealing option. Women should not escape from oppression by standing on the backs of men.

Tepper also supposes a universal obsession with male offspring among the men. This may be partly why the Women's Country system is so successful. Most warriors, whether they can remember their encounter with the woman or not, are presented with male children. The text states that "almost every warrior had at least one son" (143), which is presumably all that is needed to keep them satisfied and unquestioning. The desire for sons is found in every garrison. According to Kostia, their warrior father was "typical of his class". He wanted sons, and left their mother when "he saw we were girls" (197). Part of Chernon's reason for wanting to be alone with Stavia is so that he will have a son he is

sure is his (246). The same obsession is found in Holyland. “Could be that was just enough...”, muses Elder Brome about his fourteen sons (205). Even the servitors are not immune. Before he kills Michael, Joshua needs to identify himself, not as Morgot’s “true love”, but as “the father of her sons...” (305). However, the implication that all men have a need for sons is just as stereotypical as believing that all women want to be mothers.

In considering the reductive elements in *The Gate to Women’s Country*, it seems that the root objection regarding such control over the rights of others is that it does not matter whether it comes from the dominant patriarchy, or from a female oligarchy, it is still control and it is still troublesome. To Fitting, the council’s domination implies “that most of the women cannot be trusted to make enlightened decisions or to act in their own best interests” (43). The Women’s Councils are the “wheels of Women’s Country turning beneath the city, turning silently” (120), and their control is especially disconcerting precisely because it is so stereotypical—women are once more secretive and manipulative. As Fitting points out, the women have adopted the very same methods which originally led them to separate themselves from the men (44). Like the other works of feminist science fiction that Veronica Hollinger examines, *Gate* privileges the “feminine order over the masculine, but [does not] question the construction of these gender oppositions in the first place” (232). As a criticism, or examination, of the patriarchal system, *Gate* certainly does “raise questions about the cultural acceptance of violence and the subjugation of women” (Pearson 218). However, the “radical” feminism that replaces the patriarchy is sanctioned in the novel because Tepper has positioned Women’s Country as the only justified option.

Beverly Price realizes that the Women’s Country system is untenable, that the “Damned Few” are actually “murderers and aggressors”. However, she believes that Tepper depicts Women’s Country as a “failed, potentially destructive [institution]” (Price 43). I do not agree that Women’s Country comes across as “failed”. *Gate* is calculated to present the thriving Women’s Country as the only viable option. Despite the fact that there is a persistent connection made between Women’s Country and Nazi Germany (the

“tattooed”, encamped warriors as Jews, women and servitors as Aryans), it is very subtle. This situation may seem unpalatable to us because, according to Thurer, after the Second World War freedom became paramount, and “subordinating the individual to the good of the whole became dramatically unfashionable” (248). Nevertheless, whatever critique of radical feminism that exists in the text is overshadowed by its positive presentation. I agree with Pearson that, partly because *Stavia* is not presented as a “critic of her world”, the inclination is “to read the novel as essentially serious” (207).

Tepper’s intention may be to highlight the flaws inherent in both the “patriarchal dystopia” of Holyland and the “radical feminist dystopia” (Price 43) of Women’s Country, suggesting that the answer lies somewhere in between. However, she provides Women’s Country too much support in the text. Holyland is the only other society depicted, and the conditions for both sexes are so horrid there that it only serves to make Women’s Country seem more palatable in comparison. Tepper includes the detail that the servitors’ psychic gifts “just appeared. Like a gift” (289), letting the women keep one step ahead in spying on the garrisons. Tepper also emphasizes the bonds between women, implying that sisterhood is a positive marker. In Holyland, there is no solidarity between the “sister wives”, they are kept separate and weak, while in Women’s Country, women have a wide support network of relatives and friends. However, the greatest endorsement that Women’s Country receives is from Septemius. As the outsider, he is in the best position to make an objective assessment of its “secrets”, but he simply sees its problems as the “inevitable conflict between personal and societal needs and desires[?]”. He claims that “[a]s a system, it doesn’t work badly, does it?” (217). He and his crew then proceed to become good Women’s Country citizens, effectively ending the independent lifestyle that once existed outside the walls, and leaving life in Women’s Country unchanged.

My argument might best be supported, however, by mentioning that Tepper later deals with a similar situation in another novel, but handles it differently. In *Shadow’s End*, Tepper contrasts the technological “Alliance” against the ecologically balanced inhabitants

of Dinadh. To begin with, the “Firsters”, who destroy other life forms in the belief that humans are primary, appear to be the sole dystopian element. It is not revealed until late in the novel that the Dinadhi have a secret just as horrible—the patriarchal male leaders have agreed to worship an alien life-form in exchange for using the wombs of Dinadhi women to incubate their offspring. Both cultures are portrayed as flawed, and, ultimately, changes occur to improve both societies. Tepper’s later work is more subtle and less strident in its condemnations.

In conclusion, there is one more factor to consider in my assessment of *The Gate to Women’s Country*. I have noticed that reactions to the novel are often strongly divided along gender lines. Males often react with horror at the alternatives depicted, while women are left musing that it doesn’t look too bad. For instance, Gerald Jonas accuses Tepper of having an “antimale bias”, and he evidently dislikes the “eunuchlike servitors”. Judy Simmons, on the other hand, states in glowing terms that *Gate* “reaffirms the absolute rightness of our struggle to liberate humanity from the macho politics of death”. It is only by looking deeper that one begins to question the text’s assumptions about gender roles, sexuality and motherhood. Whether one hates or loves what Tepper presents in *The Gate to Women’s Country*, the novel’s value is in how it sparks opinions and debate. While Tepper pays greater attention to the concerns of the mother, it comes at the expense of the father. The brand of feminism in the text is, naturally, based on Tepper’s own opinions. Certainly, no similar assumptions about Tepper’s life and psyche informing her fiction can be made as with Mary Shelley. However, it is useful to know that Tepper raises “various minor and rare breeds of domestic livestock and poultry”, and that she worked in the administration of Planned Parenthood for many years. Of all of her novels, *The Gate to Women’s Country* is the one that is born most out of Tepper’s frustration with the vagaries of human sexuality. While Tepper’s depiction of motherhood is, of course, light years beyond Mary Shelley’s portrayal, Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* will be seen to advance the topic even farther.

Chapter Three

Breaching the Boundaries:

Future Mom and Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*

I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch, who would create such another as I have been. I shall die. I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me, or be the prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched. He is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish.

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

It's not just that "god" is dead; so is the "goddess".

- Donna Haraway

Marge Piercy's vision of the future in *He, She and It* (1991) hinges entirely upon multiplicity. Piercy's novel is highlighted by a variety of options that avoid hierarchies and judgments. Piercy acknowledges that Donna Haraway's essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs", was "extremely suggestive" as she wrote *He, She and It* (431). Just as Haraway "places special emphasis on the sf notion of cyborgs as an image of transgression of conventional boundaries" (Booker 343), so Piercy builds a world in *He, She and It* where the transgressing of boundaries is accentuated. In addition to depicting a range of societal options, Piercy also questions traditional notions of motherhood by divorcing procreation from "mothering"—suggesting that the two can be mutually exclusive. Eschewing twentieth-century stereotypes of "mother", Piercy insists upon a variety of maternal depictions. *He, She and It* is set only eighty years into the future, but the world of this novel seems far more futuristic than that of *The Gate to Women's Country*.

The world of *He, She and It* is highly extrapolative. From current events and conditions, Piercy creates a “potentially realizable world” which seems more likely than Women’s Country. Piercy’s future is fashioned in the mould of what Mellor terms a “concrete utopia”, in which the author attempts to pinpoint social ills, rather than to indulge in wish-fulfillment (242). In the novel, Shira Shipman, who works at the Yakamura-Stichen Multi (Y-S)—one of twenty-three giant corporations that have “divided the world among them” (3)—has just lost custody of her son, Ari, to her ex-husband, Josh. Shira returns to Tikva, the “free town” where she was raised by her grandmother, Malkah, to accept a job offered by Avram, a local scientist and an old acquaintance. Once home, Shira discovers that her job is to socialize a cyborg whom Avram and Malkah have jointly created. Avram has built the cyborg, Yod, to function as a weapon for the defense of Tikva but, as everyone soon discovers, Yod has his own opinions and desires.

Several social groups make up the world of *He, She and It*. The multinational corporations control most of the world. The particular Y-S enclave where Shira works is a self-sufficient domed city in the middle of the Nebraska desert. Y-S is well-organized, offering employment, advancement, and safe, clean housing; but it is also hierarchical, patriarchal, controlling and, ultimately, a brutal opponent. Employment in one of the multitis is for only the fortunate few. Most “Norikans” (from what once was the U.S. and Canada) now live in the “Glop”, the unregulated urban sprawl that stretches “south from what had been Boston to what had been Atlanta” (6). In the Glop—which has no government, only the loose control of a number of gangs—there is no security, little education, and the only food is processed from vat-grown algae. Only a small number of the remaining population live in a free town. Tikva, like all the free towns, has remained independent only because it produces goods needed by several multitis. In Tikva’s case, they produce “chimeras”, programs which protect a company’s computer data in the “Base”. Tikva is depicted as relatively utopian, with real food, a democratic government, and a sound relationship with nature. It is only after Shira has lived in the Y-S enclave that

she comes to appreciate Tikva's "tolerance of human variety, of age, size, sexual typology" (247). And there is still one other group. Most of the Middle East has been wiped out in the "Two Week War" and is thought to be uninhabitable, but Shira and Malkah are introduced to Nili, a woman from an unnamed "joint community of the descendants of Israeli and Palestinian women who survived" the war (198). The women have adapted to the high levels of radiation, and now live in caves underground. Because there are no men in their society, the women reproduce by cloning; they are technologically advanced, and live communally.

The various groups are not depicted in starkly black and white terms. Each group is presented as having something to offer. The Glop appears to be a futuristic nightmare, with unchecked violence and rampant overcrowding, especially in relation to the living conditions at Y-S; however, "for Piercy it is the very orderliness of these enclaves—as opposed to the mess of the Glop—that represents the real dystopia," pronounces Booker, "because this orderliness is indicative of a rigid corporate structure that leaves no room either for individual freedom or for the possibility of eventual change" (345). Eventually, it is the Glop that becomes a "potential source of social and cultural revival" (Booker 344), as the Coyote gang, led by "Lazarus", seeks to unite workers; in essence, they wish to form a trade union. Nili's all-female society at first appears socially radical and militaristic, but they have also made significant advances in medical engineering, which they are willing to share. At the novel's conclusion, Malkah makes the long journey overseas in order to be "augmented" with new eyes and a new heart (417). Her voyage emphasizes the links that can be forged between previously-separate entities, and the fact that no one site in the novel exists as a unified whole.

In *He, She and It* we return, intertextually, to the theme of creation begun in *Frankenstein*. Piercy compares the cyborg, Yod, to the Creature brought into being by Victor Frankenstein. In chapter seventeen, entitled "The Son of Frankenstein", Gadi, Avram's son, first introduces Yod to Shelley's story. After he reads the novel, Yod

concludes that “I am, as Gadi said, just such a monster. Something unnatural” (150). Yod persists in identifying with Frankenstein’s creation, even using the creature’s image in the Base (Boris Karloff from the 1931 film version), and keeping a copy of the novel among his possessions. Whereas Mary Shelley once used the “classic” text, *Paradise Lost*, to add authority to her work, *Frankenstein* is now the canonical reference, but the status of such works has changed drastically in the interim. The idea of a “canon” of great works has been exploded in the postmodern age. As well, the notion of “high art” or “literature” has also been challenged. Rather than appealing to *Frankenstein* as a “great” work, Piercy emphasizes that *Frankenstein* has now become, and still is in *He, She and It’s* future, a part of our popular culture. Yod reads first the original novel, then views other versions: novels, books of cartoons, “flat projections” of films and even “stimmies” (150). By invoking *Frankenstein*, Piercy aligns her novel with the history and tradition of science fiction as a whole.

Intertextuality in general has been important to science fiction, and *Frankenstein* is only one of several works in Piercy’s intertext. Booker comments that Piercy’s own work is “considerably enriched by dialogues with other texts” (342). Unlike Mary Shelley, Piercy has an entire genre, with an ample history, to look to for inspiration. Piercy admits that she has “freely borrowed” from the inventions of cyberpunk writer William Gibson (for example, Piercy’s Glop mirrors Gibson’s “Sprawl”) (431). Booker believes that the images and motifs in *He, She and It* represent both a nod to Gibson’s work, and a reinforcement of the critiques that Gibson has received because of his “lack of attention to feminist concerns” (344). Piercy also has a history of women’s authorship to look to, specifically feminist science-fiction works of the recent past. For instance, the amazonian Nili is suggestive of Jael from Russ’s *The Female Man*. Piercy also has her own previous work to build upon and rework, particularly *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). Tikva can be seen as a descendent of the utopian Mattapoisett, while Shira’s dependence on Ari is reminiscent of Connie Ramos’s fixation on her daughter, Angelina. *He, She and It*, in

comparison to *Woman on the Edge of Time*, “contains a much larger portion of dystopian images”, according to Booker. Nevertheless, the overall mood of *He, She and It* is “in many ways far more positive than that of its predecessor” (337). Piercy does not limit her references to science fiction, however; she also makes use of other texts and histories. Jewish folklore, most importantly, is the source for the story of the golem. In some respects, notes Radu Florescu, the “Jewish Golem resemble[s] Mary’s conception of Frankenstein’s monster” (304).

He, She and It, like the other two novels under discussion, has a unique structure. Shelley’s novel is a series of frames, with Walton’s narration the outer frame, Victor’s story contained inside of that and the Creature’s tale at the very centre. *The Gate to Women’s Country* alternates between the present, as the adult Stavia gives up her son and rehearses the Iphigenia play, and the past where the young Stavia grows from a child to age twenty-two. *He, She and It* alternates between the story of Shira and Yod in the present, and the story of the golem in sixteenth-century Prague. In both novels, the secondary tale comments on the action and serves to broaden the scope of the text.

In *He, She and It*’s parallel plot, Malkah tells Yod the story of the golem, a creature from Jewish folklore. Piercy’s source is the “best-known” version of the legend, according to Florescu (303). The golem, Joseph, has been created by the Rabbi Judah Loew in order to defend Prague’s Jewish ghetto from Christian persecution. The golem story, as told by Malkah, collapses the past and the “future”. It is a simulacrum (Haraway), not a realistic representation but a simulation; and it is both history and myth, reality and appearance, truth and illusion. Ultimately, there are three artificial men whom Piercy puts forth for comparison and contrast: Frankenstein’s creature, the Rabbi’s golem, and Malkah’s cyborg.

Both the Rabbi and Malkah express doubts about their activities. From the beginning, the Rabbi suspected that his creation of the golem was “usurping not only the power of the Eternal but the power of women, to give birth, to give life” (60). While

Judah believes his inspiration comes from a dream, and his purpose is to save his people, he still questions his own intentions. He wonders whether his vision was truly from God, “or from his own ego, his desire to prove himself as learned, as holy, as powerful as the rabbis before him...” (29). Malkah, too, has doubts about her intentions. She tells Yod that she is not sure “to what extent I am guilty of great folly and overweening ambition for my role in your programming...” (18). In *Frankenstein*, Victor has no such noble purpose, other than the fulfillment of his own ego; and he does not question his undertaking until it is too late. That both characters have doubts about their actions may serve as a commentary on Frankenstein’s rashness, as Percy challenges the creation of a sentient being for selfish reasons.

The reader must also remember that in Malkah’s re-telling of the golem story, the character of Chava, the Rabbi’s independent granddaughter, is historically suspect. Percy’s tale of sixteenth-century Prague is so intriguing and vivid that it is easy to forget that Chava exists in Malkah’s twenty-first century version of the story, and that it is questionable whether a young woman of that era could have been so independent. Yet Chava’s story can also be considered as Percy’s attempt to re-make women’s history, as does Tepper’s version of the Iphigenia story. That Malkah has told the story before, but in altered form (17), is an indication that the story is always new, and not stagnant like *Iphigenia at Ilium*. Chava’s story has its own truth, Wolmark would say, and reflects how postmodernity has led to the “erosion of the distinction between experience and knowledge” (110). Malkah is myth-making, and her story “reverse[s] and displace[s] the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities” (Haraway 94). In Malkah’s world, Chava can be a widow who refuses to remarry, because “[m]arriage is not in [her] own best interest” (369), preferring instead to devote her life to midwifery and the male-dominated pursuit of the “life of the mind” (290).

Of all the sources that Percy draws upon, *Frankenstein* is perhaps the most important for my purposes. In that work, Victor Frankenstein unhesitatingly usurps the role of

the woman in creating life; a life he then rejects just as impetuously. In *He, She and It*, on the other hand, Yod's successful creation hinges on the combination of both Malkah's and Avram's contributions—the coming together of Avram's hardware and Malkah's software. All of Avram's cyborgs before Yod had been unsatisfactory. Chet, Yod's direct predecessor, was inappropriately violent and had killed Avram's lab assistant (180). According to Malkah, her software is the necessary ingredient for Yod's "birth":

Avram made him male—entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence. The world has barely survived the males we have running around. I gave him a gentler side, starting with emphasizing his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connection..." (142)

In this instance, Malkah's contribution is more crucial to the project than Avram's; but Piercy depicts several reproductive strategies, some of which do not require men.

While many male cyborg-fantasies of the 1980s wished to control reproduction by making women unnecessary (Kaplan 211), Piercy's version of the future does not necessarily eliminate the male. While Victor Frankenstein tried to eliminate mothers, and Women's Country limited fathers to their physical contribution, Piercy depicts a range of valid reproductive choices. Despite the fact that Nili's cloned "sisters" have thrived without men, even they would not reject the possibility of reproducing the "old-fashioned" way, since part of Nili's mission is to find out what men are like. While fathers do not play a large role in caregiving, Piercy is merely extrapolating from the present reality of single-parent households. In her metaphor of the cyborg, Haraway suggests that cyborgs are the "illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism", but that "illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" she claims; their "fathers, after all, are inessential" (68).

Fathers are a rare commodity in *He, She and It*, especially in the caregiver sense of the word. Piercy, like Tepper, does not appear to see any need for the so-called "tradi-

tional” nuclear family—father, mother and (often multiple) offspring. Only Riva (and Malkah) had real “fathers”; Shira’s father was a “test tube” (191). All three were then raised without a father figure in the household. There was no man involved even in the conception of Nili’s cloned daughter. While Shira has an “old-fashioned” marriage and conception, she is an exception. Hannah, one of Shira’s contemporaries in Tikva, does not want to know who the father of her baby is because she wants to be “her daughter’s only parent” (425). The only father who is depicted to any great degree is Avram, who is a patriarch in the grand old tradition.

The lack of a father does not seem to have been harmful to any of the characters. Shira, while curious about who he was, does not appear to feel a lack in not having a father, and neither does Riva nor Nili. In fact, the absence of mothers is much more critical. Neither of the characters whose emotional growth seems the most retarded—Gadi and Josh—had mothers in their teen years (3, 10).

As I noted with regard to *The Gate to Women’s Country*, the health of the society is to some degree reflected by the fertility of the women. In Shira’s world, leftover radiation and toxic chemicals have “left most people infertile without heroic measures to conceive” (116). Yet the novel lacks the sense of blame and the pessimistic outlook that often occur in other works. Many people of Shira’s generation feel that there is a sort of justice to human infertility. Most educated young people speculate that “[p]eople had gone too far in destroying the earth, and now the earth was diminishing the number of people. Perhaps when the earth had come back into balance, reproduction would become again the simple matter it seemed to have been for their ancestors” (116). Because of the use of new technologies, the problem of infertility does not seem insurmountable.

Piercy’s depiction of childbearing reflects how firmly she has embraced technology; more so than other feminist science-fiction writers, including Tepper. Many feminist writers, especially of utopian fiction, are “hostile” to technology, and place it in contrast to “a highly sensitive, ecologically balanced, and mutually fertile relationship between woman

and nature” (Mellor 248). It is Haraway who argues that feminists and others would “do better to contest the realm of technology”, rather than to abandon it to the “white-male-capitalist establishment” (Booker 343). In this spirit, Piercy does not hesitate to make narrative use of a variety of childbirth technologies.

While the ability to bear children is prized, giving birth is also “viewed as somewhat primitive” by the inhabitants of Shira’s world (116). In the Y-S enclave, Shira is considered unusual because she “conceived the ancient way and bore the baby to term” (192). Shira remarks that many women at Y-S induce labor in the eighth month to avoid stretch marks, or take advantage of other technologies. According to her, at “Y-S they used to say every baby has three parents nowadays—the mother, the father and the doctor who does all the chemistry” (191-92). Infertility has affected Tikva as well. Shira tells Riva that “[h]alf the kids in this town are born from petri dishes or test tubes” (191). Riva, Shira’s own mother, took advantage of technology, conceiving Shira through a sperm bank and artificial insemination. Because Nili’s culture is exclusively female, in order to reproduce they clone themselves and “engineer genes” (198). The range of technologies reflects Haraway’s assertion that “[s]exual reproduction is one kind of reproductive strategy among many”, each with its own “costs and benefits” (81).

Most importantly, Piercy also suggests that there need not be a tie between human procreation and being a mother for, as Mellor points out, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* Piercy “separates the function of reproduction from the function of child-care and mothering” (255). In Piercy’s earlier work, Luciente’s potential future world has given up the genetic bond. Children are not the biological offspring of their three mothers. Genetic components, chosen for their diversity, are mixed in a laboratory, and fetuses are then developed in artificial “brooders”. Women gave up the power of reproduction, according to Luciente, because “as long as we were biologically enchained, we’d never be equal” (*Woman* 102, 105). Piercy does not include the same radical situation in *He, She and It*, but she does suggest that a separation of biology and nurturing need not be detrimental.

Shira, who was raised by her grandmother, confesses to Yod that she feels alienated from Riva. He replies, “[t]hat she gave birth to you has little relevance in the present” (311). As long as one has been nurtured, it does not matter if the caregiver is biologically related. Affinity—a connection by choice, not by blood—is important (Haraway 72). For Piercy’s characters, it is the quality of the mothering that counts, not the biological connection. Fathering, in the caregiver sense, is now the “optional accessory”, nice but not necessary.

In *He, She and It*, bearing a child does not necessarily mean that one must be a mother. Piercy depicts a variety of mothering options; refusing to rank them hierarchically so that each can be seen as a potential choice, because she recognizes that each woman is different. Piercy’s depictions of women are unconventional—as are her depictions of motherhood. Booker states that *He, She and It* “features a number of strong female characters who avoid conventional stereotypes (both patriarchal and feminist)” (346). Piercy’s challenge to gender roles can be compared with Tepper’s approach in *Gate*. Stavia is captured by the Holylanders and must be rescued by Joshua and the other servitors. Shira, on the other hand, is the one who accomplishes Ari’s rescue. Wolmark claims that “what are often held to be the innate characteristics” of femininity are revealed by Piercy to be “cultural fictions” (127). Shira is the conventional wife and mother, who intends to raise her son herself; her mother, Riva, on the other hand, is “a warrior, not a mother” (192), and does not have the temperament to raise a child. Consequently, she left Shira to be cared for by Malkah. Malkah is a definite maternal figure, having raised both Riva and Shira; however, she is more pragmatic and less obsessive than Shira. Nili is also a caring mother, but her culture raises children communally. While she takes pride in her daughter, she feels little or no possessiveness towards her. This variety of mothering options reflects Haraway’s claim that there is no such state as “being” female (72).

Just as Piercy affirms women’s right to be mothers or not, depending on personal inclination, she also insists that women, and mothers, have the right to be sexual, and have the right to a range of sexuality. Here, as in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy’s utopian

perspective is based on “the multiplication of sexual choices” (Khouri 56). Like Tepper, Piercy does not see the need for traditional monogamous marriage. Unlike in *Gate*, however, in *He, She and It* marriage is still an option; despite the fact that Piercy extrapolates from current divorce rates by making marriages at Y-S businesslike arrangements based on five or ten year contracts (4). Piercy, nonetheless, depicts a wide range of sexual options. Malkah has never married, preferring, over the years, to enjoy a series of heterosexual lovers. She “always was curious about the taste of a new man” (75), but never let any one get too close. While others, such as Avram, may assume that older women are “asexual” (174), despite the fact that she is now in her seventies Malkah refuses to abandon her sexuality until she decides it is time. Indeed, Malkah tells Shira that she finds “human male prejudices against older women rather limiting to human development” (353). Riva, who “[n]ever felt sexual toward men” (191), and Nili are lovers. Nili’s women are like Russ’s Whiteawayans—because their society is single-gendered, lesbianism is the norm. Nili also decides—somewhat reluctantly at first—to “experiment” with Gadi. Kaplan claims that “what representations still cannot produce is images of sexual women, who are also mothers, and who, in addition, have fulfilling careers” (183). Unfortunately, as far as *He, She and It* is concerned, she is correct. Although Nili and Shira are career-oriented, neither of them is seen actively caring for their child. Piercy comes close with Malkah, but she is no longer an “active” mother.

Shira is Piercy’s example of the conventional mother. Her early infatuation with Gadi mirrors Stavia’s reliance on Chernon, and Shira’s reason for marrying Josh—because she thought she “could make him happy” (11)—sounds like Stavia. At first, Shira’s custody battle with her husband is familiar, because it is such a contemporary problem. Eventually it is revealed that Ari and Shira are actually pawns in Y-S’s war on Tikva. In fact, Y-S is using the child as a tool against its mother—a sort of emotional blackmail. Through Ari, they believe that they will be able to manipulate Shira into cooperating: and it is true that Shira is devastated when Ari is taken away from her. Shira tells her grand-

mother that “[h]e’s precious, Malkah, he’s life itself to me. I must have him back. He carries my heart in him” (7). Shira, we discover, does not feel complete without her son. She is unable to stop thinking about Ari: “She wondered what he looked like now. She wondered what he ate, what he wore, what he played with. She could not bear to imagine how he thought about her, what they told him, what they didn’t tell him” (254). Y-S is mistaken, however, in underestimating the lengths to which Shira will go in order to get him back.

Ari is Shira’s highest priority, ahead of even Malkah or Yod. Shira insists upon seeing Malkah’s work logs, so that she can be certain Yod will pose no threat to Ari. Shira justifies her concern by saying “[i]f I risk myself with Yod, that’s one choice, but my son’s another matter” (350). When Shira is finally reunited with Ari, she feels that she “would rather die...than leave him again” (333). Gadi comments on Shira’s ferocity, as he wonders, “[w]ho would have expected maternity to give you fangs and claws?” (356). Shira’s concern for Ari seems excessive to some. The counselors at Y-S recorded that Shira had exhibited an “*overanxious maternal link*” with Ari, as well as a “*childish emotional dependency*” on her grandmother, Malkah (280). Shira’s close connection to Ari and Malkah, while important to her sense of identity, is also a weakness that can be used against her.

Shira is so devoted to her son that she is willing to accept the fact that Yod killed Josh while they were reclaiming Ari. Instead of blaming Yod, Shira tells herself that she “had chosen to sacrifice Josh to her desire for her child”. She thinks: “I wanted my child, I wanted him back more than I wanted anything else in the world. As long as I live I must bear the responsibility and the guilt for the choice I made to take him back. Yod killed, but I let him” (339, 340). Shira accepts the guilt because of Ari.

It is not surprising that Malkah’s story about the golem should have many parallels in Shira’s present. Shira and the rabbi’s granddaughter, Chava, are in similar circumstances. Both are young mothers who have been separated from their sons; yet Chava has

a more independent (or resisting) outlook. Shira insists on being reunited with her son at any cost. Chava, on the other hand, is content to have her son raised by her in-laws. Chava was a dutiful wife and mother, but after her husband's death she realized that she had given up all of her own dreams of intellectual pursuits. While Chava "frequently misses" her son, Aaron, "[g]iving him over to them [her in-laws] was the price of her escape" (315). In Shira's world it is possible for a woman to "have it all"—a successful, fulfilling career and a family—but not for Chava in her time.

While Shira feels the need to sacrifice everything for her son, her mother has different priorities. It is through her depiction of Riva that Piercy asserts the idea that not all women are suited to be mothers. Riva is an information pirate and a renegade warrior, but Piercy defuses any stereotypes of the female "spy" as young, sexy and glamorous. Riva is also a departure from the (usually male) cyberpunk "hacker", who is often a "street-wise rock 'n' roll [hero] who wear[s] mirrorshades" (Wolmark 114): she is an "ordinary forty-five- or fifty-year-old woman" whose "baggy middle-aged" looks make her "close to invisible" (303, 192). To Gadi, in particular, while Riva resembles the few remaining "poor women", she swaggers around, acting "like a general reviewing his best razors" (305).

Riva made a deliberate choice to bear a child, but she had no intention of "settling down" and raising her daughter. Even in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy defended the then-radical idea that mothering is not compulsory and that it is not for everyone. As Luciente explains to Connie, "[i]f person didn't want to mother and you were a baby, you might not be loved enough to grow up loving and strong. Person must not do what person cannot do" (101). Riva is not condemned in the text for her choice to leave Shira with Malkah, but her depiction may be considered unappealing for other reasons. Kaplan notes that in most 1980's depictions of mothers, "choosing career over mothering" is not seen positively (199). Malkah has been a good mother to Shira, allowing Riva to keep her independence, Shira to receive a good upbringing, and Malkah to raise a child when she

had the time and experience. In this instance, the solution seems to have worked out to everyone's advantage. It is her coldness that is Riva's most negative trait. While Nili and Yod are both combinations of organic and mechanical components, it is ultimately Riva who has the least "human" compassion or feeling.

Nili comes from a communal society, and she chooses to stay and give what help she can in Tikva because, as she says, "personal ties are important to me", and she feels a connection with Malkah and Shira. When she tells Riva "I'm staying to protect your family", Riva reacts with a grimace: "I've spent my life eradicating those reactions", she replies (407). Riva fakes her own death, not seeming to care that Malkah grieves for her and is in pain. When Shira questions her, Riva's only response is, "I thought you'd have a more convincing funeral that way" (305). Riva is also coded as "male", as Piercy is challenging conceptions of gender. It is men, thinks Malkah, who "so often try to be inhumanly powerful, efficient, unfeeling, to perform like a machine" (340-41). Because of Riva's coldness, Shira's relationship with her mother is awkward and unsatisfactory.

Riva has seldom seen Shira, so now they are strangers to each other. An upset Shira asks Yod "I'm flesh of her flesh. How can my own mother be so alien?" (311). When the seventeen-year-old Shira last saw Riva, she appeared to be a "dowdy prematurely middle-aged woman" who was "fussy" and nervous. Shira's "impression was that Riva would have been overburdened raising a gerbil" (14). Riva's return is unexpected, and Shira is shocked to discover that her mother is a dangerous information pirate. Shira and Riva are unable to bond, and have little in common. Riva sees Shira's life choices as "[c]onventional and timid", and she does not see much of herself in her daughter (194). Riva cannot even remember the sex of her own grandchild. "[L]et's see, it's a boy?" she asks, leaving Shira convinced that "Riva had asked only to make polite conversation, without the slightest real interest in herself or Ari" (189). Coming so soon after Riva's return, Shira then finds Riva's "death" difficult to accept. "Shira felt as if she had taken a

spiny ball into her body which remained in her tissues, giving an occasional sharp twinge” (300). When Riva reappears, Shira is angry and confused.

Guilt shivered through Shira for her anger with her mother, but she felt emotionally abused. She could hardly complain to Riva about her being alive, for if she herself were a warmer, more caring daughter, she would be overjoyed at her mother’s reappearance. Instead she felt muddled. (304)

Nevertheless, Shira is not shattered by all these revelations because, in her heart, she knows that she is just as much Malkah’s daughter.

Shira in her role as Ari’s mother is central to the story, but Malkah is also a decidedly maternal figure, while retaining her own identity. Malkah might be seen as an example of what Thurer calls a “new kind of mother”, just starting to appear in novels: “the mentor, the one who guides her children to independent adulthood. She is no angel, however. She makes mistakes; she is not wholly fulfilled by her experience; she is ambivalent about her children. In sum, she is real” (299).

Malkah’s depiction is unusual both because of her age and her devotion to her work. Piercy demonstrates that an older woman can still be productive and respected despite organizations such as Y-S, where women “over forty who were not techies or supervisors or professionals or execs were let go if they were not the temporary property of a male grud” (6). At this time, Malkah’s career is a large part of her life. She and Avram are “among the most respected scientists (or, as Malkah preferred to be called, designers)” (40). Piercy, like Shelley, suggests that science should be tempered by human feeling, including creativity, and asserts that Malkah’s work is both science and art. (In contrast, it could be said that his Creature is repulsive because Victor Frankenstein lacks an artist’s eye.) Malkah values her creativity, which has not diminished with age—in fact, it has grown. While she cannot avoid certain deficits that come with aging, Malkah does not view growing older as a negative. “What is physical aging to a base-spinner?” she thinks. “In the image world, I am the power of my thought, of my capacity to create” (161). In

fact, Malkah says that “since I passed sixty, I have been twice as creative, longer-sighted, more daring, building on a grand scale more dazzling webs” (163). In cyberspace, Malkah’s age matters as little as her sex, which is important because cyberpunk is primarily a male genre, and many of the “cyber cowboys” are male. In contrast, the only scenes relating to Morgot’s (or Stavia’s) profession in *Gate* are in relation to the main plot—Morgot examining the whores and Stavia examining Septemius and his crew. Neither of them expresses any enjoyment in her career, more proof that duty counts highest in Women’s Country. The idea of a woman having a career at all is still very new. Not so long ago, female occupations were limited to nurse, teacher or secretary. In *Frankenstein*, it would be impossible to imagine women working—even though Shelley herself, as author, was a rare exception.

Malkah’s work is largely the creation of deceptions, and a tendency to tell lies and keep secrets extends to other areas of her life. Still, her deceptions do not make her a “bad” person. Malkah’s work involves the creation of “chimeras”, or “pseudoprograms”, which are “structures that protected Bases by misdirection” (45). Many of the misdirections she establishes in her own life are, in fact, beneficial. For instance, the fact that she falsified her medical records in the Base is partly what saved her from dying when she was attacked (145). She created a false family custom for Shira, claiming that tradition dictated that the firstborn be raised by its grandmother. She undoubtedly did this to save Shira from feeling abandoned by Riva. Malkah also neglects to tell Shira about Riva’s true profession, as well as the true nature of her own relationship with Yod.

Malkah might be brilliant and independent, but she is not invincible. She experiences doubts and has vulnerabilities, such as the depression she sinks into after the Base attack.¹ In that case, the solution is to give Malkah “something alive to care for”, so she is soon making “mother-cat noises” to two new kittens (156).

While Malkah is no longer a mother, her maternal side shows through, but only occasionally—such as with the kittens. She loves her daughter dearly. When she first

arrives, “Malkah sat beaming at Riva as if she were the sweetest sight in the world” (192). Yet both Malkah and Nili exhibit the sense that they are mothers—but only in relation to their children. According to Kaplan, it is patriarchal culture that has fixed the concept “Mother” to a woman’s “being-in-the-world”, instead of “permitting it to be a mobile part of [her] being that comes and goes depending on whether [she is] in relation or not to the child” (41). Now that Malkah’s children are grown, she relates to them more as a friend than a mother.

While Malkah is confident about her abilities in her career, she is critical of her mothering skills. While Shira has no complaints about her upbringing—she considers Malkah’s a “benign household” (3)—Riva and Malkah were always at odds. Malkah used to wonder what she had done wrong, and she still insists that she was too impetuous when she had Riva. “When we’re young”, she says, “we have babies by caprice” (228). Malkah believes that she had “been a poor parent and a fine grandparent” (22), because her abilities had improved by the time Riva gave her Shira to raise. Malkah was forty-five at the time, and says: “I’d had enough time alone to think how much better a job I could do now I was so much smarter and kinder” (242). Still, Malkah feels some residual guilt that she had replaced Riva as Shira’s mother so easily (195). Malkah may have been more anxious in her younger days, but now she is more pragmatic and laid-back about mothering. When Shira tells her that a “mother without her child is a cart trying to run on three wheels”, Malkah replies: “So a three-wheeled cart is a wheelbarrow, and it works perfectly well” (74). Interestingly, Malkah does not believe in child-care advice. She says “That stuff, it changes every twenty years one hundred and eighty degrees. It’s nonsense. You just do the best you can” (349).

While Malkah no longer behaves like a mother in relation to Shira, her house, a machine acting like an organism, still nags and offers unsolicited advice. While Malkah’s “enhanced” house computer, with its own “personality”, has been Shira’s “other mother” (53), it can never replace the real thing. Because Malkah programmed the house, it is both

a part of her, and not, at the same time. Shira still finds it difficult not to think of the house as alive, because “it knew so much about her and it freely uttered opinions and judgments” (40). The house takes an almost immediate dislike to Yod. When Shira first brings him home, the “house [does] not answer immediately”, and she “could not help feeling that the house was disapproving of her request” (89). The house explains by saying, “I do not understand a computer who pretends to be a biological life form” (186). Afterwards, whenever Yod visits, the house refers to him disparagingly as “that machine” (362). The house is one of many examples in the text of the blurred line between the biological and computerized, and it is also part of Haraway’s “cyborg world”, in which people are “not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines...” (72).

The depiction of Nili is also calculated to cross boundaries and destroy stereotypes. On the one hand she is a trained assassin and warrior whose physical abilities are beyond those of most people. As Malkah says, “[h]er expectations of herself are unlimited. She is strong without excuses or apologies” (419). Malkah admires Nili’s confidence. “She is arrogant in refreshing ways”, says Malkah, “so convinced that if anyone can do anything physical, so can she” (287). Yet Nili is also uncertain about the prospect of physical intimacy with a man. For a brief moment, she seems more like a young girl than a grown woman. As Yod describes the heterosexual process to her, Nili keeps “grimacing and making rude noises”. Finally, Yod reports, Nili “said she didn’t want to experience any act I’d described” (278). Nevertheless, Nili, too is a mother who misses her six-year-old daughter. At first, Shira cannot even picture Nili as a mother. It is finally Nili’s ease with Ari that convinces her that Nili is a mother in more than “name only” (374). Nili has accepted this assignment because she was the “best equipped” to travel, yet Nili still misses her daughter. She says: “We all have to pay for our choices and our situation. Don’t you?” (362). Nili’s softer side is ultimately what distinguishes her from the stony-hearted Riva, and makes her more human, like Yod.

Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg questions the dichotomy between organism and machine (82), and is evident throughout *He, She and It*. As a cyborg, Yod is "a mix of biological and machine components"; but "[s]ide by side with Yod, Nili actually looked more artificial" (70, 222). With her blood-red hair and well-muscled body, Nili takes great pleasure in acting the assassin and practicing her martial arts; revelling in her finely honed physicality. Both Riva and Nili are "extremely augmented", with "considerable internal circuitry for combat and communication" (187), but whether Nili is a machine or human, Riva says, is "a matter of definition" (191).

Piercy also connects the programming with which Yod is supplied, with the "programming" that humans undergo—the force of "nurture" as opposed to nature. Yod reminds Shira, "[a]ren't you programmed too? Isn't that what socializing a child is?" (322). Later, Shira refers to the inner drive which makes her "sacrifice anyone and anything to Ari" as her "maternal programming" (410). "Programming" is perhaps an extreme way of re-stating Chodorow's theories about the reproduction of mothering, but it is also another example of how Piercy suggests the crossing of boundaries.

Bernie Heidkamp's analysis of the alien "mother" in two different science-fiction works suggests a gendered reaction. In one example, the "daughter" (female) is accepting from the start, but in the other work, the "son" (male) resists the mother. There is no alien mother in *He, She and It*, but there are different reactions to the "infant" golem, and to Yod, by the various characters. Women tend to be more accepting of the artificial men, while men tend to be distant. While the Rabbi is cold to Joseph—he says to him, "[y]ou are not a man" (112)—Chava is sympathetic. She suspects what he really is, and thinks "[a]ll children are made...by a mother and father. So poor Joseph has only a father, one who does not cherish him. Am I to think the less of him for that?" (113). Yod, too, is treated differently by various individuals. Their opinions are in evidence before the final engagement, when Avram demands that Yod undertake a "suicide" mission in order to decimate Y-S. Avram believes he can simply "manufacture" another cyborg, but Malkah

and Shira consider it murder. The exception is Riva, who sides with Avram against Shira and Malkah in encouraging Yod, as a “soldier”, into one final “battle” (408-09). Perhaps these reactions are divided along gender lines because the men are threatened by a male “alien”, suggesting that they too can be artificially created.

That Yod has both a mother and a father is the key to his success, yet he does not think of either Avram or Malkah as his parent. Avram provided Yod’s hardware, while Malkah was in charge of Yod’s “interpersonal programming” (76). The result is that Yod “transgresses not only the conventional boundary between human and machine, but between male and female as well” (Booker 347). While Yod sometimes calls Avram “Father”, he does so only as a “feeble attempt to establish a bond that may preserve me”. Since Avram has destroyed all eight of his prior “siblings”, Yod wonders, “[h]ow do I know he won’t decide to scrap me?” (93). Yod does not really think of Avram as his father, rather he considers him more like his judge, because their relationship is so unequal in power (120).

Avram’s name deliberately evokes the biblical Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, at God’s command. Avram also has one son, since he refuses to think of Yod as his offspring, but Gadi is an utter disappointment to him: “[s]omething went awry”, Avram says, “and I swear he should be scrapped the way you scrap an experiment that you have poured years and credit into and finally you cut your losses!” (97). Ironically, God promised Abraham a multitude of descendents, but Avram is destroyed along with Yod and the possibility of replicating him.

From the very beginning, Malkah had an insight into birth and creation that Avram lacked. “Malkah had imagined the terror of coming to consciousness. Avram never had” (351). She introduced a delay in the start up of Yod’s systems in order to compensate, but the moment of Yod’s “birth” was still a painful experience. As Yod tells Shira: “The moment I came to consciousness, in the lab, everything began rushing in. I felt a sharp pain, terrible, scaring. I cried out in terror” (119). It could be said that Avram designed an

adequate “machine”, but it was Malkah who gave him a “soul”. Rather than Frankenstein’s usurping of God’s creative function, Avram is the “scientist” who is unable to replicate the ability of god-like woman. While the “gentler” traits that Malkah gives Yod are what make him useful, it is ironic that his emotional side leads Yod to be too desirous of being fully human, and too aware of how much he falls short in his own eyes.

Shira and Malkah’s physical relationships with Yod must be considered in the context of Haraway’s manifesto. Aside from the fact that Yod is not a human male but a cyborg, both grandmother and granddaughter have a somewhat-incestuous sexual relationship with the same individual.² While Malkah’s contribution of software makes her Yod’s “biological” mother (so to speak); after he is “born”, she does not act maternally toward Yod, nor does Yod think of her as his mother. Yod tells Shira, “I have no mother or father” (120), and he refers to Malkah as his “friend” (94). Malkah claims that Yod “is not breaking any Oedipal taboos, for he was not born of woman. He was not born at all...” (162).

Yet the reader, at least, sees Malkah as Yod’s “biological” mother. It is her programming that has enabled Yod to be who he is, and Malkah is justifiably proud of him. The golem story that she tells Yod is a “bedtime” story; one that she also told to Riva, Shira and Gadi when they were young (17). Avram even denied Malkah access to Yod, claiming she was a “bad influence” (94), in the same way that Josh took custody of Ari away from Shira. While Malkah may not view Yod as her son, she knows implicitly that there is something in her relationship with Yod that Shira will not approve of. Malkah warns Yod that Shira would think it is “indecent” for them to have become involved at all (173). Indeed, when Shira discovers the truth, she calls Malkah a “liar and a leech” (353).

One can also view Malkah and Yod as the mother goddess figure and her youthful lover (who is often her son). Thurer cites several mythological examples (Isis and Osiris, Venus and Adonis, Ishtar and Tammuz), noting that the point of the union is not offspring, but to produce “vegetation and fertility throughout the land” (31). Within the relationship,

the goddess “actively and explicitly enjoys him [the lover] sexually”. According to Thurer, the “message is that sex—even nonmonogamous, incestuous, nonprocreative sex performed by a mother—is good!” In Piercy’s variation, however, the son—who traditionally is the god who dies and is re-born, symbolizing the “cyclical nature of the harvest” (31)—is pointedly not revived.

Shira, too, denies being a maternal figure to Yod. Like the golem and Frankenstein’s creature, Yod is a “mere baby in the world” (83). He gapes in curiosity at every new thing, and is in need of guidance. Yet Shira emphatically tells him, “I am not your mother” (73). She immediately notices Yod’s desire for knowledge, but Shira tries not to “think of it as a kind of overgrown child to whom she was acting as governess” (86). Shira, however, is the one who helps Yod learn how to make his way in the outside world. The question is then whether, by acting as Yod’s teacher, Shira is not a maternal figure as well. She does act as Yod’s mother in the sense that she is responsible for his social behavior. As we have seen in *Gate*, mothers often have a responsibility to guide and admonish their offspring—which Shira does. We would consider a mother remiss today who feeds and clothes her child, but does not teach her right from wrong, and it is Shira who corrects Yod when he errs, as when he uproots a rose bush that had hurt him (90).

The sexual relationships between these characters can be viewed as another example of how Piercy tries to transgress conventional boundaries; in this case by invoking the incest taboo. She takes her cue from Haraway, who advocates characters who “refuse the reader’s search for innocent wholeness...”. Yod’s relationships are also part of his “feminization”, which means “leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex” (98, 86). Piercy deliberately leaves the situation unresolvable, as both Malkah and Shira are—and are not—Yod’s mothers. The relationships are also a way of questioning ideologies, because for Haraway, a cyborg world might also be a place where people would not be afraid of “contradictory standpoints” (72).

Ultimately, Malkah comes to realize that Yod's creation was a mistake on the grounds that it is immoral to enslave a conscious being. The "lesson" of *Frankenstein* was that Victor was not wrong in making his creature; he was wrong in not taking any responsibility for his creation. The conclusion that Malkah reaches in *He, She and It* is similar. "[W]hat overweening ambition and pride are involved in our creation of conscious life we plan to use and control...", she reflects (393). Malkah comes to believe that it is wrong to create a thinking being, even one's own biological child, with selfish expectations. What "Avram and I did was deeply wrong", Malkah adds. "As it is wrong to give birth to a child believing that child will fulfill your own inner aspirations...so is it equally wrong to create a being subject to your will and control" (418). Haraway calls for "*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (66). Possessiveness is why Nili's community, where life is communal and mothers avoid ownership of their children, is also positioned as a positive force.

The "cave of dancing women", the "womb of religion" located in the "sacred desert" (419), is where Malkah finds new growth and hope. In Nili's world, children are raised "by several mothers". Rather than asserting her own power by stating that she named her daughter, Nili says "[t]hey call her Varuda" (362). According to Malkah, Nili is the "right path". "It's better to make people into partial machines" she says, "than to create machines that feel and yet are still controlled like cleaning robots" (412). The communal child raising evidenced in Nili's community also appears to have definite advantages. As part of Thurer's consideration of the Israeli kibbutz, where children once lived apart from their parents, she concludes that "[c]ommunal child rearing may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it certainly can qualify as a form of good mothering" (239). The viability of the community is seen in the unity of seemingly unreconcilable opposites—Israelis and Palestinians—as well as in its landscape. Malkah reports that the desert has become an oasis—"much animal and plant life has come back", and there is both rain and butterflies (420).

Piercy thus insists on certain freedoms for the individual “newborn”, without denying the mother her own selfhood. We have gone from an absence of the mother and the usurpation of her powers in *Frankenstein*, to the father becoming the Other in *The Gate to Women's Country*. In *He, She and It*, no one is the Other. Piercy's depiction of the mother is built around multiplicity, and she tries to move past twentieth-century stereotypes of the mother as self-sacrificing, empathic, or dominating. Piercy challenges traditional notions of gender, and tries to subvert the dichotomies that have allowed patriarchal domination. By extrapolating from current trends, she reveals what traits she considers valuable—tolerance and freedom of expression. What Piercy is ultimately advocating is acceptance of human variety in all its forms.

Conclusion

Mary Shelley had no idea that her “hideous progeny” would go forth and spawn a host of descendents, with each modern work of science fiction able to lay claim to Shelley as its foremother. Despite claims to the contrary, Mary Shelley “founded a genre which was to continue a preoccupation with the creation, continuation, variation, and destruction of life through “unnatural”—scientific, technological, and intellectual—means” (Spector 22). *Frankenstein* has endured because it is much more than just a monster story, despite the fact that many stage and film versions of the story have adapted and simplified Shelley’s novel beyond recognition. *Frankenstein* continues to resonate because it raises questions about personal and social responsibility.

As a genre, good science fiction is known for invoking a world “out there” while also looking inward to the here and now. What the three novels that I have discussed have in common is a social conscience. Intergalactic spacecraft, robots and time travel devices are all popular topics for speculation, but scientific advances—both actual and those still in our imaginations—must be considered with an eye to responsibility to both us and to our planet. All three works share “a sceptical analysis of the extent to which a scientific or technological manipulation of organic life can be ethically justified” (Mellor 245). The three authors urge accountability, primarily in areas of particular concern to women, such as reproduction and childcare, but also on a wider scale. Clemens discusses the “social damage inflicted by industrialism” (105) that is at the root of Shelley’s social commentary. Both Tepper and Piercy, in all their fictions, caution us to consider the ecological future of our planet, as well as where the drive for profit will lead our corporate society. Interestingly, one of the first reactions to the recent news heralding the first animal cloned from an adult cell (Dolly the sheep), was American President Clinton’s announcement that there would be no federal funding to further cloning research. Others called for debate on the ethics of cloning. Yet now that cloning is a reality, it seems unlikely that any government

will be able to halt its progress. It should also come as no surprise that science fiction has been writing about cloning for many years (Broege 201-03)—see, for example, Joan D. Vinge's *The Snow Queen* (1980). Good science fiction reflects the anxieties and fears of the society at large, while speculating on alternative futures and extrapolating from current trends.

In relation to the other two authors, Mary Shelley's vision is neither utopian nor dystopian, but a tightly-focused image in small scale. *Frankenstein* concerns itself primarily with the actions of one individual and takes place in the realistic recent past. Shelley is not creating an entire world, as do other writers. Much of the feminist writing of the twentieth century has involved utopias and dystopias. According to Pfaelzer, the "author who invents a utopian space invokes a creation myth in which he or she becomes progenitor, preserver and potentially destroyer of a new world" (283). Tepper and Piercy are comfortable creating new worlds and entire universes, to a degree that Shelley never dared.

Shelley's novel was reportedly born out of a waking dream, and first published anonymously. The mother, as depicted in *Frankenstein*, reflects her status in society—silenced, repressed, sentimentalized and unable to act on her own desires without the intervention of her offspring. Despite the number of motherless characters, the mother in *Frankenstein* may be abject, but she is never absent. The mother returns through avenues not initially suspected, as Caroline makes her presence felt through the locket that little William wears. The only way for a mother to be heard in the nineteenth century, for her to express her own repressed emotions, was to transfer those emotions onto her "monstrous" offspring, and live through him. Shelley's desire to create fictions caused her much anxiety, so it is no accident that Victor is described as a "guilty artist" (Spector 21), as he cobbles together his creature. Mary Shelley found a voice in the frustrated artist/scientist who sought glory through his creation, as well as in the enraged rejected creature who was the product of his desire.

In Pfaelzer's discussion of what Elaine Showalter calls "The Wild Zone", she states that muted groups, such as women, "mediate their belief through whatever forms the dominant structures allow". If the relationship between the dominant and muted group is pictured as "partially overlapping circles", the Wild Zone is the space that exists outside the dominant boundary. Shelley wrote in this "Wild Zone", since she had to speak "through" the dominant ideology (287-88). *Frankenstein* is positioned in that non-overlapping space, which is also why it is a truly original work.

The Gate to Women's Country suggests what might happen if the beliefs of radical feminism were taken to extremes. Within Women's Country mothers have asserted their authority and appear to be a locus for power, but they are actually dominated by the medical oligarchy. Tepper may be trying to advocate a middle way somewhere between patriarchy and radical feminism; but I believe she deals with the issue more effectively in other works. Beverly Price rejects the "simplistic notion" that "gender stratification" is something that one entire group (men) does to another group (women). She points out that upper-class women cooperated with upper-class men in discriminating against various groups (41). In *Gate*, Tepper blames the earth's "devastation" on the men who "did whatever they had to do, pushed the buttons or pulled the string to set the terrible things off" (301), then shows women stepping in to clean up the mess the men have left behind. Wolmark notes that Women's Country reproduces, rather than problematizes, gender relations, in that it is "based on relations of gender domination and inequality, with the balance tipped in favour of women not men" (81-82).

Piercy tries to go beyond "essentialist" notions of women as defined by their biology. She challenges stereotypes of what the mother is, rejecting the idea that there is one definition of mother, and that mothers are all alike. Curiously enough, despite her efforts to not fall into stereotypes, all of the novel's major female characters *are* mothers. Piercy has not included a female character who has rejected motherhood entirely. Piercy owes a great deal to Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg, which is why the sites of the greatest

potential growth in *He, She and It* are on the margins (the Glop and Nili's community). According to Booker, Piercy's adoption of technology and her use of Gibson's cyberpunk ideas "can be read as a literary equivalent" of Haraway's argument (344).

With each novel, I have looked at what position the mother holds in the text. Mothers are absent, or clearly the Other, in *Frankenstein*. Victor is the subject and central character, while the female characters play passive supporting roles in the background. In *Gate*, mothers have a much greater role, but they are also viewed dualistically, as both subject in the text and as objects to the male characters. In *He, She and It*, the mother is definitely her own subject, and her centrality is never in question. Malkah even tells part of the story through her first person narration of the golem myth, and discusses her own feelings in chapter nineteen, "Malkah's Bed Song".

The mother has often been ignored or marginalized in depictions and, until recently, has received little scholarly consideration (Kaplan 3). So little attention has been paid to mothers that in 1996, after one hundred years of movie making, Albert Brooks was still able to obtain the title "Mother" for his most recent film. The mother remained an object in the background for some time. In the twentieth century, depictions of the mother increased in frequency, but, as Kaplan notes, motherly paradigms were primarily limited to the "angelic", self-sacrificing mother or the evil, dominating "witch" mother (13). Yet the mother is a force to be reckoned with. Recent depictions are making efforts to reject stereotyping, but in general, motherly representations still have a way to go.

On the one hand, the lack of mothers in *Frankenstein* is usually remedied, or rendered unimportant, by the presence of a father; on the other hand, in both *Gate* and *He, She and It* fathers are secondary to mothers, and are often absent entirely. Even in the future of *He, She and It* little has changed, in the sense that women are still responsible for bearing and caring for the children. Perhaps certain feminists have reconsidered their earlier desire to reject motherhood entirely as a patriarchal construct. Piercy is not depicting such a drastic change in reproduction as she did in *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

It is difficult for women who came of age in the 1970s to imagine a world where employers openly limited job openings to “young men”, and where birth control was illegal. But the steps that the women’s rights movement has taken towards equality are far from secure. In her discussion of recent trends, Kaplan notes that two series of groundbreaking photographs by Lennart Nilsson, which were published in *Life* magazine, showed the actual moment of conception, as well as the developing foetus in the uterus. In these photos, Kaplan claims, the female body is displaced and “nowhere in sight”. The woman is once more the “repressed vessel”, the mere carrier of the miracle baby (203-04). It would be a step backwards for woman once again to lose her selfhood, and to once more become the Other to her child.

Pfaelzer notes that the French feminists, in particular, consider “speaking, reading, and writing [to be] “subversive activities” (283). She adds that the creation of a feminist utopia is an act of “literary hubris”, but actually, any written work by a woman can be considered so. Not surprisingly, Shelley was reluctant to identify herself as an author, but her very act of writing was a subversive act. In a sense, Victor’s Creature—who amazes him by actually coming to life—is like Shelley’s novel itself. Once in existence, her work was beyond her control and its presence was almost an embarrassment. *Tepper* and *Piercy* do not have any such conflicts.

Speaking, reading and writing play an important role in all three works. All of *Frankenstein* is documentary, as it is the journal of events kept by Walton, and the Creature reads books, learns to write, and copies letters in order to “prove the truth of [his] tale” (123). In *Women’s Country*, it is no accident that women control the “important” books, leaving the warriors “Romances”, “Sagas” and volumes on “Designs for armor” (78). While, at first, Yod has trouble with “metaphorical thinking”, Malkah encourages him to read novels “as a way to understand human interactions and responses” (86, 117).

All three authors include in their works what might be considered their statement about the creative process, particularly about writing (science) fiction. Not surprisingly,

Shelley rejects the idea of a precedentless creation. She claims that "Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it" (8). She has the following to say about her "hideous progeny":

Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. (Intro. 8)

In the larger sense she is absolutely correct, because the later writers works' are influenced by what went before them. Intertextuality has played an important part in science fiction, especially once female science-fiction writers had a history of writing to look to.

Tepper and Piercy are able to assert confidently their right to be authors. Tepper's philosophy of writing may be encapsulated in Septemius's comment about his "magic": "If it has no science, it fails....If it has no craft, it bores, and if it has no art, it offends" (*Gate* 171). Piercy, too, claims creative power for herself in a way that Shelley would not have dared. According to the text, "[c]reation is always perilous, for it gives true life to what has been inchoate and voice to what has been dumb" (67). Piercy, like Malkah, is "a woman who spends her working days creating fictions and monsters" (25).

It must be stated that this thesis in no way reflects the depiction of the mother in science fiction as a whole. Science fiction has been, and still is to a certain degree, a male-dominated genre; one with a "solid tradition of ignoring or excluding women writers" (Wolmark 1-2). There are, of course, other female authors, not necessarily feminists, and many more male writers of science fiction who have dealt with the problems and opportunities that appertain to reproduction and mothering, but how they handle the subject must necessarily be saved for another time and place.

End Notes

Chapter One - *Frankenstein*

¹ William's death occurs when Victor has been away for six years. The text states that his most recent "little wife" was five years of age (66), meaning William cannot be much older than six or seven, making him just an infant when Victor's mother dies.

Chapter Two - *The Gate to Women's Country*

¹ A similar approach can be seen in other science fiction works. For example, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), by Walter M. Miller, Jr., the "Flame Deluge" has left a long legacy of infertility and large numbers of mutants, who are called "children of the Fallout" (16). In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the few fertile women are forced to serve as surrogate mothers for the powerful elite. In *Millennium* (1983), by John Varley, women of the far future also have difficulty having healthy babies, because of the vast amounts of pollution.

Chapter Three - *He, She and It*

¹ In his review, Malcolm Bosse criticizes Piercy because her "brilliant" characters also "behave like rather ordinary characters, exhausted by domestic and romantic problems". However, intelligence or genius does not guarantee infallibility in all areas of life, or suggest that the individual does not have the same problems that others experience. W. A. Mozart was an undisputed musical genius, but he could not hang on to money to save his life—he spent whatever he earned on high living and was buried in a pauper's grave. There are, undoubtedly, many other such examples.

² Another potentially unsettling element to Yod's sexual relationships is the fact that sex with him is sterile, since he cannot make a woman pregnant (168). This may also disturb Christian traditionalists, since the point of sex, in religious doctrine, is supposed to be exclusively for procreation. The idea of sex entirely for pleasure may then be unsettling.

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