

MA Thesis – S. Edwards; McMaster University – English & Cultural Studies

VISIBLE TRACES: READING THE PALIMPSEST IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FALKNER*

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I use nonlinear understandings of the palimpsest in two distinct ways in order to explore both how Shelley constructs a palimpsestic relationship between *Falkner* and *Frankenstein*, and the ways in which this palimpsestic relationship is thematized through the interactions and identities of *Falkner's* characters. In Chapter One, I use the figure of the palimpsest to uncover the untapped affective and philosophic potentiality of *Frankenstein* and *Falkner*, a potentiality that reveals itself only by considering each text as being in an intimate, unabating dance with the other. Chapter Two then ingests the figure of the palimpsest and investigates the ways that *Falkner* engages with what I call the embodied palimpsest of the nineteenth-century woman, whose identity constructs itself through simultaneous acts of effacement and reanimation. Through this kind of reparative reading, I aim to reclaim *Falkner* from its moneyspinner status and to show its layered complexities of storytelling, theme, and philosophical inquiry.

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ABBREVIATIONS

FA *Falkner*

FR *Frankenstein*

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INTRODUCTION

“Not a metaphor of origin”: Mary Shelley’s Palimpsests

In 1985, Mary Poovey writes of Mary Shelley that “the difference between her first novels and her last three are so marked that the seven novels could almost have been written by two different persons” (143). Over thirty years later, the scholarly discussion around Shelley barely moves beyond this understanding with many critics continuing to read Shelley’s first and last novels as drastically different in terms of theme, originality, and societal commentary. Shelley’s authorial progression, from *Frankenstein* (1818) to *Falkner* (1837), charts linearly for most Romanticists and sees each successive text decline in scholarly interest and creative merit. *Frankenstein* is, to many, the most widely read and recognized text to come out of the Romantic period and continues to sustain its popularity in twenty-first century films, videogames, and television shows; this long-standing pop culture obsession with *Frankenstein* and its different incarnations is also reflected in the amount of critical work on the text and its influences that exists in disciplines ranging from the humanities to the hard sciences. Linear position and genre also play into the fascination with *Frankenstein* as the text anchors itself at the beginning of Shelley’s authorial chronology and is commonly understood as the birth of modern science fiction.

The text’s originary status -- as both the origin of Shelley’s fictional career and the origin of science fiction as we know it today -- positions *Frankenstein* in a diachronic relationship with the rest of Shelley’s novels and stands as an impossible standard that each successive text must measure against. The need to use *Frankenstein* as a geiger counter of artistic merit handicaps Shelley’s later novels, especially those classed as

domestic fiction like *Lodore* (1831) and *Falkner*, that seem to depart from the original in genre, theme, and narrative construction. Critical work on *Lodore* and *Falkner* combined equates to less than one-third of the work on *Frankenstein* and considers the later texts as nothing but “moneyspinner[s]” (Seymour 293) that Shelley wrote merely for financial profit rather than creative expression or social and political subversion. Shelley disagrees with contemporary conceptions of *Falkner* as a mere attempt at profit and explains in a letter to Maria Gisborne that she believes *Falkner* to be her best novel mainly due to its clear focus on “fidelity as the first of human virtues” (qtd in Seymour 298), a virtue that Shelley herself vehemently believed in and practiced throughout her life. Furthermore, the theme of fidelity extends beyond the diegetic story of *Falkner* into *Falkner’s* relationship with other texts and with Shelley’s evolving knowledge of identity, perception, and humanity.

It is this notion of fidelity that I take as my starting point for this thesis, which suggests that Shelley’s final novel is not so far removed from her first and instead remains faithful to questions and themes present throughout Shelley’s fictional oeuvre. Additionally, the latent thread of this thesis is that the monikers of “first” and “last” should be done away with altogether in discussions of Shelley’s fiction, as I argue instead that her texts be read nonlinearly, with each text existing before, after, simultaneously, and within one another. Through this kind of reparative reading, I aim to reclaim *Falkner* from its moneyspinner status and to show its layered complexities of storytelling, theme, and philosophical inquiry.

The palimpsest is a figure that provides me with a generative reading of *Falkner* since I suggest that Mary Shelley engages with palimpsestic relationships both between

her texts and within them. In this sense, Shelley's texts and their characters "encounter each other in and on the palimpsest" and it is the palimpsest itself that reveals their "involvement, entanglement, interruption and inhabitation" (Dillon 3). Palimpsests, in their literal form, occur when an older text -- such as a medieval manuscript -- is erased and overwritten by a new text but traces of the original continue to remain visible. The line between beginning and ending blurs once two texts engage in a palimpsestic relationship because the palimpsest itself suggests endless potentiality to the point where terms like "past," "present," and "future" become increasingly intertwined:

The 'present' of the palimpsest is only constituted in and by the 'presence' of texts from the 'past,' as well as remaining open to further inscription by texts of the 'future.' The presence of texts from the past, present (and possibly the future) in the palimpsest... evidences the spectrality of any 'present' moment which always already contains within it 'past,' 'present,' and 'future' moments. (Dillon 37)

Although palimpsests do have an undeniable sense of temporality, with the continual effacement and reappearance of texts throughout time, my thesis hinges on the idea that palimpsests cannot be read nor understood as solely linearly-progressing products and rather must have an emphasis on the paradoxical importance of acknowledging the past while continuing to overwrite it in order to access the potential of the future. The origin or future of the texts within a palimpsest can never have a "predetermined essence" and only "gain what is proper to them in and through their belonging together" (Dillon 51), a belonging together that can never be pinpointed to occur in one singular moment. In other words, the togetherness that the palimpsest creates is nonlinear because it is unbounded, existing without the possibility of closure and remaining

eternally open to interpretation, amalgamation, and recalibration. Additionally, this unboundedness does not just apply to textual palimpsests but also to the way identities form in a palimpsestic fashion. The palimpsest of the mind, as discussed by Thomas de Quincey, “has a psychological reality” that “blurs the very boundaries between internal and external, life and death, presence and representation” (Dillon 31) and exists as a crypt-like structure that stores and maintains memories. In my reading of Shelley, the palimpsest of the mind extends into the body where its nonlinear status challenges patriarchal ideas about what it means to be a woman in the nineteenth-century, a role defined by a linear trajectory from daughter to wife to mother. I use these nonlinear understandings of the palimpsest in two distinct ways within my thesis and explore both how Shelley constructs a palimpsestic relationship between *Falkner* and *Frankenstein*, and the ways in which this palimpsestic relationship is thematized through the interactions and identities of *Falkner’s* characters.

In Chapter One, I use the figure of the palimpsest to uncover the untapped affective and philosophic potentiality of *Frankenstein* and *Falkner*, a potentiality that reveals itself only by considering each text as being in an intimate, unabating dance with the other. Betty T. Bennett, in “Not this time, Victor!': Mary Shelley's Reversioning of Elizabeth, from *Frankenstein* to *Falkner*,” discusses the intricate relationship between the two texts and suggests that “Shelley created in her first and last novels two characters who, like philosophic bookends, reflect, extend, and comment on each other and the works in which they appear” (1), and it is these three palimpsestic elements of reflection, extension, and conversation that I explore throughout my own work. Bennett focuses solely on the characters of Elizabeth Lavenza and Elizabeth Raby and analyzes

the similarities and differences of the two characters as a means to show how *Falkner* exists not as “a reversal or denial of... early Romantic ideology” but as a “reversioning of *Frankenstein* that affirms [Shelley’s] remarkably consistent reformist sociopolitical ethos,” with the latter Elizabeth existing as the former’s profeminist reincarnation (1). My first chapter continues to explore Shelley’s engagement with Romantic ideology from *Frankenstein* to *Falkner* and moves to include a wider range of focal points beyond just Elizabeth -- Rupert Falkner, Alithea and Gerard Neville, and Mary Shelley herself -- in order to establish the evolution of Shelley’s understanding of creativity, humanity, love, and identity. Additionally, I avoid dealing in terms of firsts and lasts and instead invoke the figure of the palimpsest to allow for a more responsive relationship to emerge between both novels rather than positioning *Falkner* as stagnantly trapping *Frankenstein* within the past.

The palimpsest is the ideal figure with which to highlight and interpret this openness between the two texts while also keeping each text’s distinctness intact. As Sarah Dillon explains,

Since the texts inscribed on a palimpsest bear no necessary relation to each other -- one text is not derived from the other, one does not serve as the origin of the other -- the figuration of text as palimpsest does not describe the relationship between a text and its sources. The palimpsest is not a metaphor of origin, influence or filiation; it is not a synonym for intertextuality. (85)

That is to say that I do not use this chapter as an attempt to locate and decipher the intertextual Frankensteinian references in *Falkner* nor to insinuate that *Falkner* relies on *Frankenstein* as its source material; rather, I insist that both texts anticipate and inhabit

one another to an equitable extent and that this complex relationship reveals itself by holding these two seemingly unrelated texts against each other. My first chapter uses the palimpsestousness of *Falkner* and *Frankenstein* to show how Shelley both reworks eighteenth-century theories of affective experience and anticipates Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. Beginning with a discussion on the dangers of Romantic interiority and the creative imagination and ending with Shelley's own conception of what it means to have a lived body, this chapter uses *Frankenstein* as a critical lens that unearths a new generative reading of *Falkner* and a more complex understanding of Shelley's intellectual maturation.

Chapter Two ingests the figure of the palimpsest and investigates the ways that *Falkner* engages with what I call the embodied palimpsest of the nineteenth-century woman, whose identity constructs itself through simultaneous acts of effacement and reappearance. With a sole focus on the character of Alithea Neville, I use my second chapter to suggest that Alithea's ability to only have her story told after her death thematizes Shelley's own struggle with backgrounding her female body in order to access her authorial voice. The physical body reveals itself in this chapter as both the necessary site of identity construction as well as a barrier for women to truly express said identities. The notion of an embodied palimpsest comes out of this paradoxical situation where the body becomes an archaeological site of memories and experiences that must be sifted, effaced, and resurrected within the process of subject formation. Through its discussion of memory, this chapter locates itself in a larger scholarly conversation about the role of memory and nostalgia in the Victorian novels of the early and mid-nineteenth century. Most relevantly, Nicholas Dames' most recent works deal

with themes of temporality, nostalgia, and memory in nineteenth-century novels and suggests that Victorian writers have a hostile relationship with the past:

Memory... is less a valorized theme than a dilemma or a threat, a threat most crucially to the very lessons a novel seeks to impart: the notable absence of explicit remembrance within these texts, as well as the distinct unease surrounding those acts of memory that do occur within them, signals a narrative form struggling to transform the chaos of personal reflection into what is useful, meaningful, able to be applied to the future -- into what *works*. (3-4)

In other words, Victorian authors and their novels primarily aim to “seal off the past” in order to “halt its contamination of the present” (Dames 5) through acts of forgetting and deliberate and calculated decision-making around which past relationships and experiences should or should not become relevant. However, my second chapter argues that Shelley stands out from her Victorian counterparts and, within *Falkner*, overtly denies the idea that the past must remain disconnected from the future and instead claims that attempts to control one’s identity through the manipulation of memory and experience only leads to further oppression within a patriarchal system. By following the body of Alithea Neville, both pre- and post-mortem, I investigate the ways that bodies and memories interact in a palimpsestic fashion and conclude that to fully ignore the influence of the past is to close oneself off from the future.

Overall, my aim within this thesis is to situate *Falkner* as a text with greater potential than just existing as Shelley’s response to the earlier work of her parents and her husband or as a text lacking depth when compared to earlier publications like *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. *Falkner* is, in my opinion, one of Shelley’s most

exceptional texts in both style and substance and severely lacks the critical attention it deserves. By positioning the text in a palimpsestic, conversational relationship with *Frankenstein*, and through a focus on the much neglected yet integral character of Alithea Neville, I hope to reveal some of the text's deeper layers; more importantly, I wish to stress the importance of and provide commentary on how the issues, however latent, of identity, the body, perception, and love within *Falkner* shed a necessary light on a typically invisible version of Shelley as a mature, intellectual, and independent woman whose voice remains just as -- if not even more -- relevant and important to listen to as the voice of the young, naïve, innovative girl who wrote *Frankenstein*.

CHAPTER I:
Ideal Bounds: Affective Experience and Palimpsestic Potentiality from
Frankenstein to *Falkner*

When Robert Walton, within the opening pages of *Frankenstein*, asks, “[d]o you understand this feeling” (7), what exactly is he talking about? It could be a rhetorical question suggesting that his sister, to whom the epistolary question is addressed, cannot possibly imagine nor understand his affective experience during his Arctic expedition, whether due to the gendered differences of their physical bodies, their levels of intellect, or pure environmental separation. On the other hand, it could be an earnest and pleading question, more of a “can you” than a “do you,” with Walton wondering whether, even with all of their physical, mental, social and environmental differences, his sister can indeed truly empathize with him even though their perceptions of the world are not the same.

Connections between *Frankenstein* and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions of imagination, sympathy, and perception are already an established topic in Romantic criticism. Specifically, many consider the novel to deal with ideas of sympathy raised by two prominent eighteenth-century philosophers: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. In the case of Rousseau, sympathy comes from the ability to wield one’s imagination empirically where the imagination can conjure, and thus sympathize with, images of pain and suffering only of which the mind has first-hand experience and knowledge. Interiority and self-reflection -- defined as the human need to think and rationalize about a person or event in order to truly understand an interaction and its effect on one’s self – take precedence with Rousseau, as the

imagination “locks human beings into themselves” (Jones 277) and sharing in the pain of others becomes reflecting on the pain of the self. For Smith, the imagination also plays an important role in constructing sympathetic feeling but where Rousseau closes the body off from understanding the pain of the other and insists that experience takes place solely in the mind, Smith suggests the projection of the mind into the body of the other: “[Smith’s] sympathizer never quite feels the same sensations as the sufferer: the sympathizer feels those sensations he would feel if he were placed in the situation of the sufferer, not the sensations that the sufferer actually feels” (Britton 8). In other words, both the Rousseauian internalization of the other and the Smithian externalization of the self “destabilize the actual location of the sympathetic encounter” as they consider both the body of the witness and the body of the sufferer as “distinct and impenetrable” (Britton 8) as sympathy comes from sheer individuation. Victor and the Creature demonstrate this notion of impenetrability with their refusal to abandon their solipsistic view of the world that limits their ability to show each other true compassion or to develop any sense of understanding. In this sense *Frankenstein*, through the relationship of Victor and the Creature, interrogates “the legacy of Enlightenment individualism” (Koretsky 242) and “dramatizes the failure of... eighteenth-century conception[s] of sympathy” (Hustis 848) that are borne out of a reflective mind and a closed body.

In *Falkner*, the question moves from one of feeling to one of experience when Rupert Falkner asks the readers of his letter, “Such as I felt, has any other experienced it” (*FA* 166). Rupert’s question does not, as with Walton’s, express a concern for whether another person, removed from his deeply personal set of circumstances, can

feel what he is feeling or put themselves in his position. Instead, Rupert's question talks back to Walton's and, in a sense, answers it with both a "yes" and a "no" – I can understand you, not because I feel what you feel but because I, too, experience the world. Both *Falkner's* answerability to *Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein's* ability to anticipate *Falkner* suggests a palimpsestic relationship between the two texts, in which the figure of the palimpsest and its "persistent figurative power... determines how we view the past and the present, and embodie[s] within itself the promise of the future" (Dillon 9). In *Falkner*, Shelley alludes to this relationship between the palimpsest, the past, the present, and the future, when she writes,

There are periods in our lives when we seem to run away from ourselves and our afflictions; to commence a new course of existence, upon fresh ground, towards a happier goal. Sometimes, on the contrary, the stream of life doubles -- runs back to old scenes, and we are constrained to linger amidst the desolation we had hoped to leave far behind. (15)

The stream of *Frankenstein's* life doubles within *Falkner* as old scenes come back to haunt both the characters and the author herself, while also creating a cathartic openness that allows Shelley to release moments trapped within the former text and recast them in different ways in the latter. These moments – of love, control, and creation – also signify potentiality in two different ways, with the themes of *Frankenstein* both refusing closure and finding their positive development within *Falkner*. In this chapter, I will further demonstrate the palimpsestic relationship between *Frankenstein* and *Falkner*, a relationship categorized by using *Falkner* as a critical lens that, when brushed up against *Frankenstein*, allows each text to unearth a new affective reading of

the other – the other, in this sense, representing both text and the alterity of characters within each text. Through *Falkner*, Shelley explores the potentiality of the themes she introduces in *Frankenstein* while simultaneously thematizing her own philosophical progression into a new understanding of what it means to be human.

The major creative issue within both *Frankenstein* and *Falkner* is the reliance on destructive uses of the imagination, which produce a “doomed trajectory of masculine creation that displaces the female” and is based on “self-reflection” (Pon 37). From the outset, self-reflection and imagination may seem to have nothing in common nor be capable of doing much damage; however, the two are intricately connected: “[The philosophy of reflection] thinks it can comprehend our natal bond with the world only by *undoing* it in order to *remake* it, only by constituting it, by fabricating it” (Merleau-Ponty 32). In other words, self-reflection uses the imagination as a means by which to construct the world, and one’s perception of the world, in accordance with what one wants to see rather than what is actually present. Self-reflection creates a subject that “does not participate in the world” due to the necessity of “destroying what [they] experience” in order to transform the “openness upon the world” into an “ideality of the world” (Merleau-Ponty 51, 63). Reflection and imagination work together to construct stories where only the creator’s limited perspective matters and through which “voices... dictate” and are “played back, assessed and reinflected” until the creator’s “voice is played as if it were that of another” (Clark 16). Creating a perception of the world and those that one interacts with thus acts with the intent to “negate reality, to repair or mitigate one’s own destructive impulses and patch up wounds to one’s narcissism”

(Bronfen 350). Much in the same way, Victor's (re)creation of a body represents the dangerous outcomes of his elision of his own corporeal concerns and of the world itself.

In *Falkner*, Shelley brings up multiple times the complexities of what it means to be a person within the world and how one experiences the world around them, especially through the observations and commentary made by the narrator. One of the most noticeable comments about bodies and perception comes near the end of the novel through the following narrative intrusion:

To the surgeon's eye, a human body sometimes presents itself merely as a mass of bones, muscles, and arteries... and thus there are moments when the wretched dissect the forms of life -- and contemplating only the outward semblance of events, wonder how so much power of misery, or the reverse, resides in what is after all but a sleeping or waking -- walking here or walking there -- seeing only fellow-creatures instead of another. (*FA* 306)

In just this single narrative moment, Shelley does on a micro level what I argue she also does on a macro level: preserve, interrogate, and modify the themes of *Frankenstein* within *Falkner*. The narrator questions the phenomenological understanding of scientists, who view the body as nothing but a material object to manipulate and analyze. Additionally, they reduce the body to nothing but a mere Cartesian machine that performs duties such as sleeping and walking and detaches itself from any meaningful role in the construction of the human experience. Most significant, however, is the notion that scientists only contemplate one aspect *or* another -- the movements of the body or the worldly events -- and never the two simultaneously; this detachment of

the body from its role in perception and from worldly experience is what Shelley critiques most heavily in this passage and also throughout both novels.

The full palimpsestic potential of Shelley's critique is not uncovered in this passage alone and comes only when pressed up against a similar passage in *Frankenstein* that deals with bodily detachment. In the beginning of his narrative, Victor describes his view on bodies and how that view affects his experience in university:

I became acquainted with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body. In my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors. I do not ever remember to have trembled at a tale of superstition, or to have feared the apparition of a spirit. Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; and a church-yard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm. Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses. My attention was fixed upon every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. (*FR* 31)

Within this passage alone, Victor presents a sympathetic view towards human life where the dead body acts as an insupportable object for the complexity and beauty of human emotion; however, placing the passage from *Falkner* on top of this one reanimates previously buried insights. Victor clearly is the wretch who dissects the forms of life that the narrator in *Falkner* refers to, but the ability of the two passages to read one another goes far beyond what is on the surface. The

dissections that Victor participates in occur both literally – through his acts of bodily destruction and reconstruction – and figuratively – through his dismemberment of the body from human experience. It is this figurative scission, more so than the literal act, that is the foundation of Victor’s philosophical problem and ensures the failure of his reanimation project. He describes the churchyard as a receptacle for bodies deprived of life and this description doubles as his subconscious understanding of the human body being nothing but a material receptacle for “life” rather than as an integral part of the life-making process; he wonders how the powerful living human becomes the decaying and corruptible mass of bones, muscles, and arteries that is the human corpse and decides that without mental acuity and emotional complexity the body becomes a worthless, dehumanized object. It is this misunderstanding that explains why Victor views life and death as processes to co-opt and reverse because the dead body is just an empty vessel that is easily reanimated with the spark of life. Victor misses the complexities of what it means to be human and refuses to acknowledge the role his own body plays in constructing his life, which results in him viewing other bodies as closed receptacles as well rather than as key components to affective experience. Victor’s attempt to create fails not because he brings a being back from the dead and subsequently abandons it but because he foolishly believes that he has the power to infuse life into a body when in actuality the body diffuses life into the world. With the help of the passage from *Falkner*, Victor’s initial sympathetic and caring view of human life turns into one of profound naivety and illuminates the message that Shelley seeks to impart on her readers through both

texts: not that the texts are mere warnings against scientific dissection in the name of progress, but that they are mirrors to see the figurative dissection of human life that we participate in every day.

Shelley's personal and philosophical growth between *Frankenstein* and *Falkner* is also apparent in her nonfiction writing and sees the most dramatic change after the death of her husband, Percy Shelley. It is fair to assume that, while Percy Shelley was alive, Mary shared many of his beliefs about subjects such as creativity, imagination and perception. In his essay "On Love," published posthumously by Mary Shelley in 1828, Percy Shelley explains that

Love is... a community with what we experience within ourselves... [I]f we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own; that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's blood. This is Love.
(249)

Within this passage it is clear that love comes not from a relationship with external forces but with the internalization of the other into one's self. Much like how

[t]he fountains mingle with the river
And the river with the ocean, ...
Nothing in the world is single; ...
In one spirit mix and mingle. (P. B. Shelley 1-8)

in the 1820 poem "Love's Philosophy," the Shelleys at this early point in Mary's life view emotional connection not as two beings understanding each other as distinct and separate but as the complete obliteration and consumption of each being into the other.

Upon Percy Shelley's death in July of 1822, Mary became imprisoned within her own philosophy since the only person that had become an integral part of her sense of self was suddenly gone. Without Percy, Mary's body – in its solitariness – shrank beneath the weight of her subjectivity and became simultaneously too small and too big, now being able to occupy so much autonomous space. In a sense, Shelley's freedom became her prison for a time since she had yet to live in or construct a world based solely on her own experiences rather than through the melding of her experiences with those of another. Writing in her journal three months after Percy's death, Shelley expresses the yet unrealized repercussions of this prison-like state of perception: "No one seems to understand or to sympathize with me. They all seem to look on me as one without affections" (qtd in Seymour 213). Leigh Hunt as well, noticing Shelley's interiorization of her grief, writes apologetically on behalf of her cold demeanour to Vincent Novello, that he perceives Shelley as having "excuses of suffering little known to anybody but herself" (qtd in Seymour 219). Although it can be argued that Shelley truly never expresses to anyone the full extent of the pain and loneliness she carried around following her husband's death, she did, only two years later in October of 1824, show the beginnings of her philosophical evolution: "I was loved once! still let me cling to the memory; but to live for oneself alone; to read and communicate your reflections to none; to write and be cheered by none; to weep, and in no bosom... this is misery!" (*Journals* 196). The passage evokes a sense of longing for a connection with a single person yet also marks Shelley's renewed interrogation, already apparent in its infant stage in *Frankenstein*, of the relationship between interiorization, self-reflection and creativity that comes to its full term within *Falkner*.

From the Creature's embodiment of the "troubled middle ground" between "sociability and Romantic withdrawal" (Beenstock 413) to Elizabeth Falkner as a "model of behaviour that strains between two worlds [practicality and transcendence] at once" (Cope 131), Shelley's novels and the characters within them constantly deal with the shifting Romantic and post-Romantic issues of the failures of creativity and the transcendental notion of viewing the self as best when separated from the body. Although authors of the Romantic period slowly move away from Enlightenment empiricism and such rigid understandings of affect, they continue to consider individuality and interiorization as valued traits especially concerning creation. In *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing*, Timothy Clark suggests that Romantic writers idealize and internalize the creative process to an extreme degree that results in the complete ingestion and erasure of other bodies:

Romantic idealization arises partly on the basis of an internalization of all the constraints and forces playing across the space of composition. These become reified or misconstrued as a process referred totally to the individual mind, rather than to a complex event that plays, in multiple ways, across the space between self and other. (28)

It is this move to discover and idealize one's "privileged creative faculty" that results in the quintessential Romantic transcendental subject who views writing not as "the workings of an external agency" but as "the manifestation of hidden 'depths' of the mind" (Clark 11, 29). That is to say that "successful" creation, understood as coming from naturally-existing or divinely-infused abilities of the mind, comes not from

collaboration with, understanding of, or interest in the other but from withdrawal, isolation, and self-reflection.

Shelley's focus on issues of transcendence, imagination and creation within her fiction, however, has roots deeper than a general desire to challenge Enlightenment empiricism and Romantic interiority. In general, Romanticism is still considered a "transcendentalizing idealist, literary movement" that remains "implicitly hostile not only to the feminine... but to physical nature and to the material body itself" (Richardson 2). Female authors of the Romantic period express themselves and experience the world differently than their male counterparts and find themselves in a fraught relationship with their own creative imagination. It is this alienation from the concerns of masculine Romanticism that makes the novel, rather than poetry, an attractive and accessible creative space for women, as the novel affords women "cultural authority" especially in genres -- such as domestic fiction -- that emerge from and establish "a strictly female field of knowledge" (Armstrong 22). Shelley, in both her early and later fiction, presents the traits of masculine Romanticism -- creative imaginations, transcendence, and autonomy -- in their most extreme forms through the embodiment of some of her male characters who are its "unstable, self-deluded products" (Cope 123). More specifically, in *Frankenstein*, Shelley satirizes the dangers of uncontrolled creativity and inspiration and also suggests the "difficulties that the possibility of feeling 'inspired' may have represented" for Romantic women creators (Clark 32).

One of the ways that *Falkner* overwrites *Frankenstein* is through its return to the thematic concerns of imagination and creation and its modification of the role that the permeable body plays in characters' associations with each other and their world;

through this overwriting, readers are able to trace Shelley's philosophical growth as she moves beyond the Romantic ideals that she once shared with her husband and friends. Shelley's personal and creative philosophy undergoes a significant maturation and evolution between the publication of *Frankenstein* and that of *Falkner*. Shelley's objective in overwriting one text with the other is to challenge the "fantasy of autogenesis" that, for Romantics, "negates the need for other people (minds and bodies)" and "demands their elimination from the imagined scene" so severely that all "matter" becomes completely figmented (Horner & Keane 38). In *Frankenstein*, Shelley manifests her concerns with autogenesis literally since Victor both creates life from nonliving matter as well as attempts to make the female body irrelevant through his isolated act of creation -- an act that highlights the irreparable consequences of locating creativity solely within the mind's eye. *Falkner*, although preserving the connections made within *Frankenstein*, presents a more sophisticated, subtle and skilful treatment of the dangers of autogenesis wherein the concern is not so much how one creates life but how one perceives it, with Rupert Falkner bringing ruin upon himself due to his construction of the world and those within it being based around an origination with no cause.

The construction of plot in the two novels is reflective of this philosophical change as well; *Frankenstein* is a story built around events and the characters' self-reflections on those events -- Walton reflects on hearing Victor's story, Victor reflects on his creation of life, the Creature reflects on his exclusion from society, and so on. Victor's stunted perception drives the plot rather than the plot being driven by external forces or character motivations. His limited sense of perception mimics Shelley's own at the time

of writing the novel when, as a young teenager, she relied on an imagination cultivated from limited worldly experiences that reflects the internalized knowledge and concerns of those around her. *Falkner*, however, has a plot that finds its source in its characters and their external relations with one another, as Rupert's character progression does not remain stagnant like Victor's but evolves with and motivates the plot. As the novel progresses through its three acts so does Rupert's understanding of imagination and perception; the story identifies Rupert's goal -- to absolve himself of the guilt he feels over the accidental death of the woman he loves and subsequently kill himself -- and then allows Rupert, and the reader, to confront his weakness -- his internalized and imaginative sense of perception -- through the pursuit of his goal. Rupert then overcomes his autogenetic view of the world and his goal reflects that change as it shifts from a desire to absolve the self to a desire to help others. Once again, this sophistication of plot is suggestive of Shelley's now-sophisticated creative palate, curated from external experience rather than internal reflection.

Shelley expresses an interest in palimpsestousness early on as *Frankenstein* is, in a sense, already in a palimpsestic relationship with another text -- the Greek myth of Prometheus -- especially in regards to a return to and modification of creation. Both Prometheus and Victor complete acts of magnificent creation, producing humankind for Prometheus and the reanimation of corpses for Victor, and while Prometheus feels a "responsibility for his creation" and makes the personal sacrifice of stealing fire from Zeus that results in years of unrelenting punishment, Victor's only concern is "the very act of creation" (Hajdu 61) rather than the result and thus he makes no sacrifices once the act is complete. That is to say, *Frankenstein* preserves the idea that with creation

comes immense personal sacrifice yet tilts the Promethean myth slightly off kilter as Victor ensures his downfall by selfishly abandoning rather than protecting his creation. In “Responsible Creativity and the ‘Modernity’ of Mary Shelley’s Prometheus,” Harriet Hustis makes a compelling argument for the ways that *Frankenstein* “deconstructs the story of Prometheus as a masculinist narrative” through the way each story’s protagonist shows a (dis)possession of “responsible creativity” (845). Hustis writes that

Whereas Prometheus dares to pity an abandoned creation... at great personal cost... his ‘modernized’ counterpart, Frankenstein, fails to exercise such moral responsibility for the single life he creates because he regards creativity as an abstraction. Mary Shelley’s reconfiguration of the legend of Prometheus emphasizes the fact that the responsibilities of a creator for his progeny cannot be conceived of as a debt to be paid or an obligation (or ‘duty’) to be fulfilled; to do so is to misunderstand the creative act in a potentially disastrous manner. (853)

In other words, Victor’s perception of what he creates remains within his own imaginative mind and thus, in ontological terms, his Creature never truly exists nor can demand justice. Overall, the “morality of Prometheus’s actions” comes from his “overtly sympathetic response to [the] abandoned and helpless condition” of humankind whereas Victor avoids sympathetic feelings towards his creation by “insist[ing] on theoretical objectivity” in order to “avoid acknowledging responsibility for the... conflicts” he creates that “when neglected, take on a life of their own” (Hustis 851). I believe that this palimpsestically-expressed concern with creativity extends to the relationship between *Frankenstein* and *Falkner* where it evolves into an amalgamation of the Promethean myth and the Frankensteinian myth (well established by the time Shelley

began writing *Falkner*), and shows not just a binaric representation of acceptable and unacceptable acts of creation but the path to take between them.

Creation of the body within *Frankenstein* begins in the mind. After the introductory letters by Robert Walton, Victor's narrative begins as he tries to explain to Walton how he creates the creature that he is currently pursuing to the farthest reaches of the earth. Although the work takes a physical toll on his body after "days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue," Victor quickly shifts all of his focus into his mind and expels the concerns of his body for the concerns of "bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" (32). Victor becomes overwhelmed by the possibilities opened up to him by his discovery as he admits to Walton that the "discovery was so great... that all steps by which I had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and I beheld only the result" (32); this admission proves that his own body, and its role in the success of the project, is forgotten as all of his "painful labour" (32) is anesthetised by blind ambitions towards an end goal. Victor's internalization does not only affect his own body but the body he plans to create as well since he acknowledges that, because of his blind focus on the successful completion of his project and the subsequent infamy he will garner, he cannot "consider the magnitude and complexity of [his] plan as any argument of its impracticability" (33). Victor becomes a slave to his imagination and describes the climactic act of creation in a curiously disembodied manner, with the creature's reanimation stated simply as: "I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet" (35).

Victor, like many modern readers of the novel who go in expecting a titillating scene of electric currents and writhing body parts that echoes the ones in the

Frankensteinian cinematic universe, is immediately disappointed with his results. He describes the moment as a “catastrophe” and his creature transitions from its “beautiful” dead form into a living “wretch” (35). In this instance, the creature mutates from beautiful to wretched due to the pure unsettling visuality of an animated, stitched together, disproportioned corpse; however, there is also the possibility that, as a now autonomous corporeal life force, the creature can no longer be contained and controlled by Victor’s imagination, which in turn makes the creature monstrous. Everything for Victor suddenly rushes back from the mind to the body as the physical consequences of his endeavour return in the face of the Creature’s sudden materiality:

I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health, I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished... dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space, were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete. (36-37)

The imaginative veil of ambition and success evaporates and Victor feels the repercussions of ignoring his body while still pushing it to the limits through starvation and exhaustion. Victor’s deteriorated body is juxtaposed with the powerful body of the creature, which has now been uncontrollably unleashed onto an unsuspecting world. By successfully animating his internal creation, Victor learns two important lessons: the dangers of materializing what is in the imagination and that his body alone does not dictate reality.

Falkner’s subtle treatment of creation and autogenesis rooted not in scientific progress but in love suggests that perversions of love are in fact at the forefront of both

novels. Love is a difficult sensation to express in all of its intricacies and yet it is those exact indefinable complexities that Shelley seeks to highlight in both *Falkner* and *Frankenstein*. Readers expect *Falkner* – existing in the genre of domestic fiction -- to deal with the theme of love, but rather than showcasing only its redemptive powers Shelley suggests that love is equally reparative and destructive. The narrator of *Falkner* describes Rupert Falkner within the first few pages of the novel as viewing the world as something to undo and remake as they discuss the cryptic event driving Rupert towards his suicide attempt: “Fool! He had foreseen nothing of all this! He had fancied that he could bend the course of fate to his own will; and that to desire with energy was to insure success” (FA 17). The reader does not receive the proclamation’s context until halfway through the novel where we learn about Rupert’s kidnapping of his love, Alithea Neville, and her subsequent accidental death. Rupert pens a letter to explain Alithea’s tragic fate and as the narrative moves back in time the reader learns that, after returning from a decade-long service with the East India Company, Rupert finds Alithea, whom he believes is the love of his life, married to another man. Rupert decides to kidnap Alithea, in an ill-advised move fuelled by his imagination, and “liberate” her from her oppressive husband and thus allow her to finally become the domestic possession of his dreams. However, Rupert’s plan is short sighted when Alithea drowns in an attempt to escape, Rupert buries her in an unmarked, shallow grave, and she is never heard from again. In order to get to that unfortunate end result, Rupert acts on his desire to be with Alithea by any cost and bends not the laws of science but the laws of emotion as he insists that he perceives suppressed attraction and devotion where there is, in reality, only

unrequited love. The narrator of *Falkner* alludes to this overwhelming power inherent in feelings of love when they remark,

Love causes us to get more rid of our haunting identity, and to give ourselves more entirely away than any other emotion; it is the most complete -- the most without veil or shadow to mar its beauty. Every other human passion occupies but a distinct portion of our being. This assimilates with all, and turns the whole into bliss or misery. (319)

Love takes on a multiplicity of meanings within this passage and, depending on who reads it, represents an all-encompassing joyful experience or a severe and debilitating loss of control. Just as the Creature “limits Victor’s... power over creation” and ultimately his “progress” to the point where it becomes obvious that Victor “is not in control of his work, his product, or his... fate” (Comitini 186), so too does love challenge Rupert’s imagination and thus his perception of reality.

Shelley’s return to themes of creation and imagination within *Falkner* establishes a dialectic between the two texts that allows the complex presentation of love in *Falkner* to suggest a more complex reading of love in *Frankenstein*. Retrospectively, Rupert becomes aware of the moment his perception of love begins to change as he writes,

As a man who arrives from a pleasant journey, and turns the corner where he expects to view the dwelling in which repose his wife, his children -- all dear to him -- and when he gains the desired spot, behold it smouldering in ashes, and is told that all are consumed, and that their bones lie beneath the ruins; thus was I -- my imagination had created home, and bride, and fair beings sprung from her side,

who called me father, and one word defaced my whole future life and widowed me for ever. (*FA* 190)

While away with the East India Company, Rupert creates not a literal being from his imagination but figurative ones -- a wife and children -- and confronts reality upon his return to England. The violent rupture of Rupert's imagined family stems from the "complex chiasmatic structure of anticipation and projection" that comes from acts of creation that result not in happiness or fulfillment from the project but with "a frustrating confrontation with what could have been" (Clark 30, 32). Without *Frankenstein*, Rupert's declaration reads as hopelessly romantic and creates a sense of empathy in the reader. However, Victor's literal creation of a new being who he hopes will show him unwavering love anticipates Rupert's own creation of beings to love him and suggests that monsters can only breed more monsters. *Frankenstein* seeps up and through this passage from *Falkner* and makes it highly suggestive about the destructive nature of one who only loves what he controls. Although they may differ in style, Rupert and Victor share a perverse sense of what it means to feel love and what one who feels love is entitled to receive from the objects of their affection. Shelley rewrites the love story between Victor and the Creature, or Victor and another version of himself, in the story of Rupert and Alithea and suggests how dangerous expectations of love can be. Rupert expects his acts of fidelity and love to be repaid to him by Alithea, while Alithea is expected to swoon over Rupert's obsessive dedication. By denying Rupert what is his by right, Alithea becomes the villain of her own love story as she refuses to live out Rupert's fantasy and instead remains with her husband and family in reality.

However, Rupert's story does not end here and he does not stubbornly carry his admittedly flawed beliefs to the grave as Victor does; this time Shelley keeps the narrative going, fuelled both by Rupert's own quest to change and through the more progressive and corporeal perceptions of the world shown by other characters. Shelley uses the destructive forces of love, present in the toxic relationship between Rupert and Alithea, to rewrite the affective relationship between Victor and the Creature and showcase how love, whether unrequited or suppressed, can have disastrous consequences. Both Victor and Rupert travel down their catastrophic paths due to their lofty aspirations and desires that are deluded through a perverse perception of love, delusions that are acknowledged by and have a similar cause for both characters; but these realizations have drastically different effects. Victor seeks love for himself by creating "a new species" that he thinks will "bless" him as "its creator and source" and expects to bask in the glory he garners from the fact that "many happy and excellent natures will owe their being" to him (*FR* 33). In retrospect, however, Victor realizes and admits to Walton the moment where his emotions begin to overtake his empiricism:

No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through... Nor could I consider the magnitude and complexity of my plan... It was with these feelings that I began the creation of a human being. As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hinderance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of gigantic stature. (33)

Victor's problem is not the scientific act of creation but the way in which overwhelming emotions begin to dictate the means by which he creates -- a means that is hurried along too quickly once his imagination takes over and narrows rather than widens his perception of the situation, causing him to cut corners and turn the being of his dreams into the monster of his reality. Although feelings of confidence, excitement, and affirmation are wrapped up within Victor's affective experience of creation, inherent within this passage are Victor's first pangs of love for his creation and the subsequent confusion over these new, exhilarating feelings. This realization marks the moment that Victor begins his descent into becoming one with the Creature, where he projects his love for himself into the being he creates. In the same way that a young teenager feels fear, confusion and exhilaration at the prospect of first love, so too does Victor experience the multitude of emotions that go along with giving yourself to someone fully for the first time. Much like Mary and Percy Shelley, the identities of the lover and the object of affection mangle together in a car crash of affective experience.

Shelley shows, through the phenomenological irony of bodily difference and emotional similarity in *Frankenstein*, the dangers of the synchronicity and obliteration that occurs when two bodies "in one spirit mix and mingle." By the end of the novel, the two protagonists' discordances with each other stem from the fact that they share an identical perspective and become both lost and fulfilled in their love for each other. Love within *Frankenstein* is very similar to theories of embodiment from Edmund Husserl who, in his *Cartesian Meditations*, writes that

[P]airing first comes about when the Other enters my field of perception. I, as the primordial psychophysical Ego, am always prominent in my primordial field of

perception, regardless of whether I pay attention to myself... Now in the case there presents itself, as outstanding in my primordial sphere, a body 'similar' to mine -- that is to say, a body with determinations such that it may enter into a phenomenal pairing with mine -- it seems clear without more ado that, with the transfer of sense, this body must forthwith appropriate from mine the sense: animate organism. (113)

In other words, what Husserl refers to as "pairing" is the process that occurs when, upon viewing another who does not necessarily look like me but who I can presume *perceives* like me, my body recognizes another body and thus considers that body as a subjectivity outside of myself. Furthermore, this theory plays an important role in how Husserl thinks about empathy since I can only truly empathize with a body that I feel I can understand. While still a fundamentally important theory to our modern understanding of the body and its role in our lives and subjectivities, Husserl's idea of pairing is still limited especially when applied to experiences of empathy and love in *Frankenstein*. It is the theory of pairing that allows Victor to empathize with Justine, who differs from him dramatically in physical and social status as well as the way that each experience the world, but whom he recognizes as another animate organism; it is the same theory, however, that fails Victor in his attempt to empathize with his creation. Victor cannot relate to the Creature's body nor can the two believe that they share a perspective because neither can "harmoniously fulfill the expectations constitutive of the meaning 'animate organism'" for the other and instead remain "discordant" (Dillon 117).

My chapter does not engage solely with Husserl's phenomenology; however, it is important to introduce his work as not in contrast to, but in succession with, another

prominent phenomenologist: Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I suggest through my work that just as Merleau-Ponty preserves and enhances Husserl's work on embodiment and perception, so too does *Falkner* preserve and enhance phenomenological issues already apparent within *Frankenstein*. Whereas *Frankenstein* aligns itself with Husserl's theories of embodiment, *Falkner* takes on a more Merleau-Pontian sense of what it means to perceive the world and how the body factors into that perception. For Merleau-Ponty the relationship between seeing and perceiving is fraught; reflection masquerades as perception and encourages the belief that to see something is to truly know it and to refuse to see something is to annihilate its existence: "It is said that to cover one's eyes so as to not see a danger is to not believe in the things, to believe only in the private world; but this rather to believe that what is for us is absolutely, that a world we have succeeded in seeing as without danger is without danger" (28). That is to say that the only world that matters, the only world that truly exists, is the world we construct inside of our minds and through acts of self-reflection. The Creature, after narrating the story of their life, attempts to extract some form of empathy from Victor but Victor refuses due to his stunted sense of perception. The Creature "place[s] his hated hands before [Victor's] eyes" and exclaims, "Thus I relieve thee, my creator... thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor" (*FR* 69) and hopes that they can change Victor's perspective and finally receive love and understanding from their creator through the act of covering Victor's eyes. However, Victor's internalized image of the Creature remains unchanging and he "flung" away the Creature's hands "with violence," refusing to "listen to [them]" and "grant [them his] compassion" (69). Understanding perception in this reflective way severely limits one's understanding and turns those

perceived into static rather than mobile beings: “in this way we come to think that to reflect on perception is, *the perceived thing and the perception remaining what they were*, to disclose the true subject that inhabits and has always inhabited them” (Merleau-Ponty 38).

The moment between Victor and the Creature echoes within *Falkner* in a scene involving Elizabeth, Gerard Neville, and (Gerard’s) Aunt Sophy. After returning from a trip to receive information about his mother’s (Alithea) disappearance and possible death, Gerard sits with Elizabeth and Sophy and shares what he has learned: “His person they could not distinguish, for they were in darkness; ‘I am here, and I will tell you now all I have heard. I will sit at your feet: give me your hand, Sophy, that I may *feel* that you are *really present* -- it is too dark to see any thing” (*FA* 140 emphasis mine). Here, obscured vision comes not after a narrative ends but before it begins and instead of covering the eyes of the listeners, all parties involved are in the same dark space together. Even though Gerard knows what Elizabeth and Sophy look like, as he has an internalized image of them always already constructed in his mind, he does not rely on that reflective image alone to define the two women and instead aligns their worldly presence with his ability to perceive them through physical touch. The scene alludes to Shelley’s matured sense of what it looks like to make connections, be open, feel safe, and truly trust another being without becoming them, especially when considered both in conversation with and an evolution of similar scenes in *Frankenstein*. Merleau-Ponty, in this same sense, does not suggest that reflection must be terminated altogether since we are egocentric beings who cannot avoid consuming the world we live in and the people we live with; instead, he suggests that reflection “must suspend the faith in the

world only as to see *it*, only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us” (38). To do so, reflection needs to “seek in the world itself the secret to our perceptual bond with it” rather than internalizing the world in order to seek ourselves (38).

Much like in *Frankenstein* where “it is clear that ‘selves’ cannot exist without others” due to “Victor’s self-involvement [being], by his own admission, his downfall” (Koretsky 251), Rupert, for the majority of *Falkner*, views the world as internally constructed and refuses to acknowledge his relationships with other people. Although some critics suggest that Rupert’s “autonomous... role in the process of [his own] psychological development” (Cope 136) propels him to overcome his grief regarding Alithea’s death, I am convinced that it is only when he finally abandons his autonomy and accepts the fact that he alone does not determine the world around him that Rupert can perceive the true consequences of his selfish actions, process his grief and finally change. Before he gets to this redemptive point in his narrative, however, Rupert’s detached relationship with anything outside of himself is contrasted against the openness of Elizabeth. Rupert spends the majority of his time in the novel accompanied by Elizabeth, his adopted daughter, and Merleau-Ponty sums up the divergence in the two characters’ means of perceiving the world when he writes,

Every effort to comprehend the spectacle of the world from within and from the sources demands that we detach ourselves from the effective unfolding of our perception and from our perception of the world, that we cease being one with the concrete flux of our life in order to retrace the total bearing and principle articulations of the world upon which it opens. (45)

The key to understanding the fundamental difference between the pair is comprehension from within. Rupert overanalyzes the people and events in his life to the extreme and renders them completely unintelligible or turns them into distorted delusions. Elizabeth, on the other hand, flows through life effervescently and seeks to understand herself not through internalization but through remaining open, empathetic, curious, and humble. The narrator, in a reminiscent moment, alludes to Rupert's and Elizabeth's conflicting philosophies:

When they read of the heroes of old, or the creations of the poets, [Elizabeth] dwelt on the moral to be deduced, the theories of life and death, religion and virtue, therein displayed; while [Rupert] compared them to his own experience, criticised their truth. (*FA* 84)

When reading about the experience of others, Elizabeth enhances her own understanding of the world and remains open to opinions and perceptions that differ from her own whereas Rupert centres himself in the experience of others and fixates on deciphering what is and is not true based solely on his solipsistic view.

Once again Shelley uses *Falkner* to rewrite the affective relationships of *Frankenstein*, with Rupert and Elizabeth's reparative relationship being the fully realized potential of what could have been between Victor and Clerval. Clerval -- Victor's closest and cherished friend -- has a similarly positive effect on Victor as, a few days after his disastrous act of creation, Victor "grasped [Clerval's] hand, and in a moment forgot my horror and misfortune [and] felt suddenly... calm and serene joy... [S]urely nothing but the unbounded and unremitting attentions of my friend could have restored me to life" (*FR* 37-39). I read "unbounded" as a representation of Clerval's openness to his friend,

his ability to absorb Victor's pain without the necessity or urge to reflectively understand his situation. Victor and Clerval sit together, grasping hand in hand, as the physical and emotional intimacy between the two friends begins to have a transforming effect on Victor; however, the effect is short-lived as Victor, foreshadowing the mountain scene with his creation, metaphorically pushes Clerval's hand away and instead remains blinded as "[t]he form of the monster on whom [he] had bestowed existence was for ever before [his] eyes" (39). In the end, Victor's inability to let Clerval's love permeate and heal him leads to both the characters' untimely and unnecessary deaths. Elizabeth, like Clerval, has "unbounded, undisguised sympathy" (*FA* 160) towards her friends and family. Elizabeth, however, knows when not to give too much of herself away and admits near the end of the novel that "she found it impossible to comfort" Rupert in his "gloomy and self-absorbed" state (240). Elizabeth's openness to those around her combined with her knowledge of when to step away and not project herself or her perceptions onto the experience of others allows Rupert's character to evolve, as by the end of the novel, "hope and sympathy with his fellow-creatures, and natural softening feelings, replaced the gloomy bitterness and harshness of his past reflections" (308) and the father-daughter pair live happily ever after.

Through these affective movements, Shelley's sense of humanity matures beyond Romantic conceptions of interiority, self-reflection and sameness and, through her evolving phenomenological understanding of life apparent in the changes that take place between *Frankenstein* and *Falkner*, comes to settle on something akin to what Merleau-Ponty calls the "lived body." For Merleau-Ponty, the lived body is

[P]reeminently immanence and transcendence: it is the subject of perceptual experience and a possible object of perception. Indeed, it is only because it is a worldly object that it can perceive worldly objects: pure consciousness cannot *touch* anything. The body can touch things, but it can touch things only to the extent that it is touched *by* things: to touch something is necessarily to feel the touch of the thing on oneself. (Dillon 105)

That is to say that the lived body is neither singularly an immaterial mind that exists outside of the world nor a fully present physical being capable of interacting with the world but must be both things at once and in balance. Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of the lived body as being a constant dance between the body, the soul, and the world: “The union of souls and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary degree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence” (88-89). In “The Lived Body,” Jennifer Bullington refers to this dance as the “intertwined mind-body-presence,” writing that

Where there is a body, there is a personal world, an opening upon the world which is unique. This uniqueness has to do with our life as mind, as persons, with the fact that we have a language, history and culture and can ask questions about our own existence. Likewise, there is no personal life or mind without a body... or a body without a soul... There is no world (as perceived) without a human to experience it, and there is no human experience that is not of the world. Thus, we cannot discuss the body as if it were something cut off from both mind and world.

(27)

Shelley begins to play with this mind-body-presence in *Frankenstein* and fully embodies it by the time she writes *Falkner*. Shelley moves from seeing the body as a vessel for emotional creation, self-reflection and individualism to comprehending “the body as a bearer of a dialectic” (Merleau-Ponty “Structure of Behaviour” 204) intimately intertwined with the mind and the world, and this movement is nowhere more apparent than in her 23 February, 1822 journal entry:

[F]rom nothing, nothing comes... the most contemptible of all lives, is where you live in a world and none of your passions or affections are called into action. I am convinced I could not live thus, and as Sterne says, that in solitude he would worship a tree, so in the world I should attach myself to those who bore the semblance of those qualities which I admire. But it is not this that I want; let me love the trees, the skies and the ocean, and that all encompassing spirit of which I may soon become a part -- let me, in my fellow creature, *love that which is*, -- and not fix my affection on a fair form endued with imaginary attributes; where goodness, kindness and talent are, let me love and admire them at their just rate, neither adorning, or diminishing. (*Journals* 169-170 emphasis mine)

Here, Shelley admits that she does not want to live in a world where the only people and objects she can create meaningful relationships are those that she can “pair” with, to bring back Husserl’s term. Instead Shelley rejects the ways of life that limits emotional or bodily connections to those that showcase qualities she can admire and decides rather to live an open life in which she loves that which is rather than that which

is only in her mind.¹ In this journal entry that follows the publication of *Frankenstein* and precedes that of *Falkner* by almost fifteen years, Shelley begins her journey into becoming a truly permeable being, one whose lived body “comprehend[s] the world” just as the world -- its trees, skies, oceans, and all encompassing spirit -- simultaneously “comprehends [her]” (Merleau-Ponty *PP* 408).

The distinct moral apparent in each novel, not to suggest that *Frankenstein* and *Falkner* only have one lesson each to teach, directly engages with the two ways of living a life that Shelley introduces in her 1822 journal entry -- loving that which you recognize or loving that which is. In his review of *Frankenstein*, Percy Shelley identifies the moral of the story to be,

Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn; let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind -- divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations -- malevolence and selfishness. It is thus that, too often in society, those who are best qualified to be its benefactors... [are] changed, by neglect and solitude of heart, into a scourge and a curse. (qtd in Ferguson 110)

Loving that which you recognize is apparent here as fate is completely founded upon whether or not the other people in their lives approve of them and thus show them affection. Although Percy Shelley detects many of the problems that stem from a division from society and the world, his statement presents relationships as being unidirectional rather than as reciprocal, open experiences. The pitied being becomes

¹ Although a gendered reading of the changes in Shelley’s phenomenology is a generative venture, I elude the topic in this paper in order to avoid essentializing the gender binary of women as open and men as closed.

the “refuse of his kind” solely because of the judgemental treatment he receives from others, treatment that further suggests that those who refuse to conform to the normative notions of what society considers acceptable are eternally doomed to a life of maliciousness and loneliness.

Falkner inverts this moral and instead suggests that those who attempt to imaginatively construct and control others are the true malignancy of society and that only those who embrace each other’s differences and love what is can truly be happy. This change is summarized by Melissa Sites who writes that, in *Falkner*, the moral becomes one of “utopian domesticity” where

[W]omen are not restricted to the home, nor is the home considered merely a retreat or haven for men. Relationships are based on bonds of true friendship, not necessarily on romantic/marital entanglements or familial blood ties. Both men and women shoulder the responsibilities they bear toward their intimates rather than pursuing glory, ambition, or individual rights; this attitude of responsibility is not insular but turns outward to affect the larger community through benevolent actions and by example. Men and women, educated as equals, work together to create justice according to individual judgement, not the expectations of the unreformed world. (149-50)

Shelley embodies her personal and philosophical growth towards a more external and open sense of existence and of understanding humanity in this turning outward and signals her final movement into truly loving her present self, a self defined by looking out hopefully to the future rather than getting lost in the desires and imaginings of the past; thus, Shelley’s identity, authorial or social, is no longer stagnantly trapped in the past.

Similarly, the narrator of *Falkner* notes that this desire to alter the past leads to a dangerous process that threatens one's sense of identity:

It is indeed vain thus to regard to past -- not only is it unalterable, but each link of the chain, producing the one that followed, seems in our instance, to have been formed and riveted by a superior power for peculiar purposes. The whole order of events is inscrutable -- one little change, and none of us would be as we are now.

(FA 320)

Victor follows this dangerous trajectory and looks back to the past, wishing to relive it. Even after days of narrating and “examining [his] past conduct,” Victor remains unwavering in his convictions and does not consider himself “blameable” for what he has done and remains unrepentant as, on his deathbed, he advises Walton and his crew to “be steady in your purpose [and] ... return as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their backs on the foe” (155). However, Rupert, by the end *Falkner*, sees the past as something he must face and then leave behind or else risk the possibility of becoming trapped in it forever. As Mrs. Raby remarks in the closing pages of *Falkner*, “except as a lesson or a warning, we ought not to contemplate the past, but the future certainly demands our attention” (320).

CHAPTER II:

“These unseemly bones”: Women, Corpses, and Palimpsestic Bodies in *Falkner*

The body itself is imagined as an archaeological site which preserves the experiences of the past.

Nicola King, “Memory, Narrative, Identity:
Remembering the Self”

By acknowledging that the dead body is not a uniform entity but one that can hold a multiplicity of meanings and therefore *be* different things, we move towards the concept of the dead body as a social agent.

Sheila Harper, “The Social Agency of Dead Bodies”

Mary Shelley’s bodies never truly disappear. Whether it is her own female body that dictates the way she lives or the fictional bodies she creates that cross-permeate between texts, Shelley never seems far from concerns of the body’s sustainable and regenerative power. In her 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, Shelley writes of Victor’s relationship to the Creature’s body,

[Victor] would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life (168)

The line between Victor and Shelley blurs as she admits that, like Victor, she “could not so easily get rid of [her] hideous phantom” (168). The Creature’s body haunts Shelley before its conception -- as a dreamed image that inspires the novel -- and after its birth, as a character that refuses to die after being co-opted and used as a social and political

allegory. Most importantly, however, the Creature embodies Shelley's own past, a past "when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in [her] heart" (168). For both Victor and Shelley, the Creature's body becomes an archaeological site that harbours ineffaceable remnants of their earlier selves and experiences, remnants that they both want to forget yet are integral to the people they have become. In this regard, Shelley understands the body as a palimpsest where experiences layer over time to create one's sense of self. Perceiving the body as a palimpsestic entity illuminates its "retentive function" in the creation of identity where although death -- both literal and figural -- is necessary for the creation of a palimpsest it also ensures the "positive success of subsequent resurrective activity" (Dillon 26). In other words, the body, as an active producer of identity, cannot ever truly disappear because its multiplicity of layers and experiences always remain just below the surface, ready to rematerialize. The body becomes both the creator of and limit to our worldly experiences and, in some cases, must be physically destroyed in order to unleash its full ontological potential. In this chapter I suggest that *Falkner* engages with the figure of the palimpsest in this ontological way; an engagement, I argue, that creates an embodied palimpsest in which identities -- authorial, textual, and narrative -- are both maintained through and overwritten by death, a death that is necessary in order for stories to be told. With the help of both literary studies and anthropology, I follow the body of Alithea Neville through its construction, reanimation, destruction, and decomposition in order to highlight the fraught and multiple ways that we create bodies as social and material agents during the nineteenth century, both pre- and post mortem.

Throughout Shelley's fictional oeuvre there is a clear focus on bodies -- whether that is questions of the body as being defined either as fully articulated or fragmented and (re)assembled in *Frankenstein* or, as in *The Last Man* (1826), concerns with how bodies interact with and are vulnerable to the environment around them. In her novels, as well as short stories such as "The Mortal Immortal" (1833) and "Transformation" (1830), Shelley positions the body as an integral part of who her characters are and as a material object that determines their existence in the social world. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler suggests that "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (2). That is to say that bodies, although fully constructed as physical and tangible objects, only become visible as acceptable subjects through the ability to properly perform what is expected of them from the hegemonic power structure within which they exist, whether that be based on gender, sex, ethnicity, social status, etc. Extending her earlier work on gender and performativity, Butler continues on to write that

Indeed, the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility to cultural articulation... These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation. (8)

In this context, grounded in Foucault's discussions of biopower and the surveilled body in *The History of Sexuality*, the gendered body requires both allowances and

disallowances in order to exist and it is the constant threat and resistance of what is dangerously taboo that constitutes a fully socialized subject. Additionally, those bodies that refuse to materialize within the constructs of normative power structures and cultural expectations cannot be fully effaced, as their alterity must exist as a space upon which the rules of what makes a “proper” body are held up. For those interested in reading bodies, Butler reminds us that

It is important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as it will be to think about how and to what end bodies are *not* constructed and, further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary ‘outside,’ if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter. (16)

The body, as presented in visual or literary texts, is a fraught site of power negotiations as it lies at the intersection of social, culture, and personal representations of the self. The fictional body, as both the “cultural articulation of an absent human corporeality and the real insistence of bodily presence,” emphasizes the “vexed role the body plays in Western culture” (Bronfen ‘Discontents’ 109-110) as it simultaneously “articulates... the absence of the real body and its transformation into a cultural value, which the depicted body merely stands in for” (111). In other words, the fictionalized body is both mimetic and metonymic in that it amplifies the spectralization of bodies in the “real” world but can only achieve this by mimicking that spectralization, as authors use bodies to reinscribe or challenge cultural norms. As Elisabeth Bronfen explains,

Images of the body not only serve as the screen for fantasies of plenitude, integrity and protection; they also function as the medium for formulating and perpetrating

cultural prescription and forbidding, and as such come to figure as the site at which a given culture can repeatedly renegotiate its privileged collective self-representation as well as its hegemonic values. ('Discontents' 112)

Thus, any critics dealing with representation of the body must directly engage with the “complexity... of the body and the identity it bears” and realize that any figures of the body -- both real and fictional -- are inherently “unstable, contingent, [and] caught in a process of constant renegotiation” (Bronfen 'Discontents' 117).

In “Romanticism and the Body,” Alan Richardson presents an overview of how the canonical belief of Romanticism as being a “transcendentalizing, idealist literary movement” that is opposed to “the material body itself” is slowly changing in the twenty-first century (2). This change occurs in part thanks to a new scholarly focus on a wide breadth of authors in the Romantic period, including women writers and writers deemed as racially or ethnically “othered” -- two groups for whom the body plays an integral role in the formation of their subjectivity and authorial identity. Ultimately, the Romantic body can no longer be ignored in favour of the mind or the spirit, especially in the ways that it inhibits or prohibits social and political agency:

The body in the new Romantic scholarship belongs equally to nature and to culture, a material locus, permeable to the environmental surround ... and a discursive construction, framed within a welter of contending theories and ideologies and represented in ways that reveal its political uses and its social embeddedness. (Richardson 7)

Although the body is beginning to receive ample attention in Romantic scholarship, for both female authors and their characters it has been almost entirely relegated to

discussions of fertility, child-rearing, and the maternal body. Scholarship on bodies in *Frankenstein* is almost exclusively bound up with allusions to the maternal², with Victor's quest to create life and his destruction of the female creature representing his fear and subsequent usurpation of the female body. Female authors, such as Shelley and her mother Mary Wollstonecraft, have been credited with having "over-fertile imagination[s]" that are weighed down by their bodies and prevents them from achieving the transcendental creativity associated with masculine Romanticism (Keane 38). Due to this "body-bound" status, Romantic women writers, according to Angela Keane, yearn to efface their own bodies, and the bodies of others, from both the creative process and their creative product but are unable to due to a "corporeal compulsion" that constructs women as sympathetic, sentimental beings tied to functions of pregnancy and motherhood (39). Overall, critics of Romantic women tend to constrict those women's bodies, and the bodies in their novels, to a single social role -- that of the mother -- or to their potentiality to become mothers.

Shelley's relationship with her body – both literal and textual – is much more complex and represents her interests in the particular ways that female bodies embody the figure of the palimpsest and the fraught relationship between having a body and having a voice. Charlotte Sussman suggests that Shelley's fiction shows her "interest in what makes women want to be forgotten" and that this interest "can be read as representative of the strong cultural prohibitions around women telling their own stories" (180). Within these stories, Sussman continues, is the evidence that nineteenth-century women's lives are constantly embroiled with "emotional traumas" that can only be

² Rubenstein (1976), Youngquist (1991), McWhir (1990), Gilbert (1978), Poovey (1980), Bewell (1988), Mellor (1988).

resolved through casting the female body into oblivion (180). However, it is my belief that Shelley does not advocate a forgetting or erasure of life experiences, traumatic or otherwise, and the female body itself but instead supports a palimpsestic overwriting of certain elements with others in order for stories to reach their fullest potential. In other words, genderless voices must overwrite gendered bodies to a point where the body remains an integral part of the story-making process due to its ability to retain the past in a way that makes it accessible for the future. The novel becomes an ideal site for women to deploy this palimpsestic experiment between body and voice, private and public, as “the public text” of the novel, “separated from the body,” can escape social control and thus female authors can venture into themes and spaces not normally accessible to women through their body alone (Lanser 34). Furthermore, the genderless authorial voice, which typically manifests itself through ambiguous narrators like the one in *Falkner*, “carrie[s] fuller public authority” than the socially “(dis)qualified” female body and allows women writers to “claim broad[er] powers of knowledge and judgement” than their day-to-day social lives allow (Lanser 18-19).

However, Shelley does not forget nor abject her physical body in order to acquire new forms of power through storytelling but instead palimpsestically overwrites the body and positions it as “the locus of experience and meaning construction” where “narrative practices still rest in bodily practices” (Bamberg 17); Shelley thematizes this process of overwriting and preserving the body through the story of Alithea Neville and the necessity for her character’s body to die and become backgrounded in order to release her authorial voice. Elisabeth Bronfen sums up the relationship between death and storytelling when she writes,

Set against mortality and oblivion, narrators also consume death. Absent from the world and therefore “dead” as a social person, feeding off previous “inanimate” texts, producing fictions that in turn are alive in the realm of the imaginary but immaterial in respect to social reality, storytellers are positioned in an intermediary site between life and death. Their power of imagination is like a vampire, feeding off this exchange, for they rely on a preservation and production of “dead” figures - the teller’s and the listener’s temporary social death and the uncanny presence as absence that fictions embody. Or, to reverse the analogy, storytellers are like revenants in that the liminal realm between life and death inspires and produces fictions. (349)

Bronfen’s passage is the perfect allegory for the experiences of a nineteenth-century female writer who, in order to express their creativity, must consume death in one form or another. Much like Bronfen’s narrator, women like Shelley are absent and dead within patriarchal society where their body conditions the terms of their existence and their narratives remain out of their control. Similarly, the female body materializes as an autonomous, living being within the imaginative realm of fiction – where men take on the guise of female narrators or place women on pedestals as muses or domestic angels – yet remains immaterial within social reality unless it abides by strict rules and proscriptions. Female writers must embody this revenant-like absent presence within their fiction and can only achieve this liminal status through a palimpsestic death of the body where their spectralized selves are “only constituted in and by the ‘presence’” of selves from the past, “as well as remaining open to further inscription” (Dillon 37) of their future selves. In other words, the embodied palimpsest of the female writer does not

close off the body from experience but remains open to all of the layers of experience found within the body, an openness that allows women to tell their narratives through the death of their socially constructed selves.

Falkner's plot intimately ties to the erasure and resurrection of bodies as the titular character negotiates his feelings of grief, revenge, jealousy, and obsession over and through the living and dead body of Alithea Neville. The novel begins with a suicidal Rupert Falkner whose life is saved by young Elizabeth Raby, an orphaned child whom Rupert adopts and raises as his own. Although happy in his rejuvenating relationship with Elizabeth, Rupert is visibly haunted by actions of his past, the truth of which reveal themselves halfway through the novel. His secret turns out to be that he is responsible for the kidnapping and accidental death of his first and only true love -- Alithea Neville -- and Rupert reveals the story in an expansive letter in order to come clean to both Elizabeth and her suitor, Gerard Neville (the grief-stricken, revenge-obsessed son of Alithea).

Rupert's narrative letter, which will be the focus of this section, explains how the catastrophe that befalls Alithea comes to be, a narrative that is only made possible through Alithea's physical death. Alithea, like many nineteenth-century women, finds herself trapped and voiceless in the domestic realm where her stoic husband ignores her and her jealous former lover attempts to control her. She does not have the power to tell her own story and instead becomes a background character in the stories of the men in her life. However, due to her tragic death Alithea is able to overwrite her material, feminine body and finally have her voice heard. Alithea's tale is one of reckless imagination and dangerous obsession that begins when Rupert and Alithea meet as

children. After some time, Rupert, who is turned down by Alithea's father for her hand in marriage, decides to join the East India Company to become a more substantial man worthy of Alithea's hand. While in India for twelve years, Rupert explains that he wrote to Alithea constantly, "pouring [his] soul out on paper" and "conjur[ing] her to preserve herself for me" (FA 187). The preservation Rupert requests is different than the preservation Alithea will later go through in order to overwrite her body through death and have her narrative told. Preservation here aligns with keeping Alithea firmly inside the private, domestic realm as Rupert expects her to remain the virginal young girl that he leaves behind. However, upon his return to England, Rupert finds out that Alithea has not preserved herself for him and instead has married another man, which turns Rupert's lengthy dream of domestic happily-ever-after into a nightmare.

Rupert's problem shifts from losing Alithea to needing to become her saviour as a friend informs him that Alithea's husband is a jealous, tyrannical monster and that Alithea "has withdrawn herself from the world, and buried herself alive at his seat in the North" (101). It is here that Rupert's ambitions are reignited, as he is overcome with an overwhelming desire to release Alithea from what he perceives of as a death-like state and reanimate her into the happy, social being from his dreams: "I rushed from my friend's house... my passions were awake, my fierce, volcanic passions! ... I knew what I desired, what I intended, and what... I henceforth steadily pursued. There is, perhaps, no more dangerous mood of mind than when we doggedly pursue means, recklessly uncertain of their ends" (192). The first step in Rupert's plan is to visit Alithea in her home to see for himself the degraded state her husband places her in. Before he visits her, Rupert already has expectations for what he will see:

I grew mad as I looked on her, and felt the sweet, transporting influences that gathered round; here indeed was the creature whom I had loved through so many years, who was mine in my dreams, whose faith and true affection I fancied I held for ever; and she was torn from me, given away... to a base-minded thing, from whom she must shrink as from an animal of another species. (195)

Rupert sees Alithea and becomes almost drunk with madness as his perception of her begins to delude in order to align with his expectations. It is this moment in which Rupert starts to both question Alithea's authority over her own narrative and appropriates that narrative to suit his desires. Alithea is, to Rupert, not a material, autonomous being but one whose body and life he can mould to suit his deluded perceptions and selfish needs. Rupert's language reveals how he views Alithea as having no control over her own life and actions. Instead of believing that Alithea makes her own decision to not be in a romantic relationship with him, Rupert assumes that other men have made the decisions for her – whether that is her husband tearing her away from him or her father giving her to someone else.

Although Rupert tries to control and appropriate her narrative, Alithea does attempt to assert her own agency during his visits and the failure of her assertion showcases the need for a palimpsestic overwriting of her domestically-bound body. Additionally, although Rupert mediates Alithea's narrative through his own, Alithea's defiant voice is still heard but only after her physical body no longer remains. Rupert's main argument to try and convince Alithea to leave her husband is that she is no longer the woman that she used to be or at least is no longer the woman that he expects her to be. To that accusation she asserts, "I do not deny... that repinings have at times

entered my mind... [b]ut I have reproved myself for this discontent, and you do very wrong to revive it” (196). Rupert is unsatisfied with her answer and insists that she is “being degraded by the very duties which she was devoting herself, body and soul, to perform” and that “she must be free” (196). Alithea requests that Rupert drop his unfounded concerns about her and wishes for them to “be friends... such as we once were, brother and sister” (196), otherwise she will ask him to leave and forbid him from ever seeing her again. His loss of domination and control over this situation infuriates Rupert as he explains in the letter:

Would you not think that these words had sufficed to cure my madness, and banish every guilty project? ... [E]very scheme I mediated was riveted faster, every desire to make her my own for ever, more fixed and eager. I went on to urge her, till I saw every feature given token of distress; and at last she suddenly left me, as if unable any longer to bear my pertinacity... I was indeed insane. (197)

Even as Alithea’s discomfort manifests itself visually on her face and through her body, Rupert persists and tells her, “it was my firm conviction that her mother had intended us for one another, that she had brought her up for me, given her to me, and that thus she was indeed mine” (198). It is only after her voice, rather than her body, remains that Rupert realizes his mistakes and finally hears what she has to say. In the moment, however, Rupert takes his verbal manipulations too far as Alithea’s “eyes flashed fire” as she tells him, “my mother... brought me up for a higher purpose than even conducting to your happiness” (198) and refuses to see him ever again.

Alithea’s refusal to leave her husband and become the preserved object of Rupert’s domestic dream life pushes him ever farther into his delusions as he decides

that he must have her by any means necessary. Although Alithea clearly asserts to him that she is happy in her current position as wife and mother, Rupert refuses to believe her, silences her voice in favour of his own, and continues his quest to make her act as he expects she should, a quest that ends in tragedy:

The rest is disaster and endless remorse. What moved me to this height of insanity -- what blinded me to the senseless, as well as the unpardonable nature of my design, I cannot tell; except that, for years, I had lived in a dream, and waking in the real world, I refused to accommodate myself to its necessities, but resolved to bend its laws to my desires. (201)

Patriarchal social rules blind Rupert and he assumes that Alithea's body should be his by right; his devotion to Alithea since childhood makes him believe that she should repay his devotion by marrying him and providing him with children who, along with herself, will worship him as a faithful husband and father. In Rupert's eyes, Alithea refuses to materialize herself in an acceptable fashion, as *his* wife and the mother of *his* children, and therefore he continues to try and make her properly behave.

In order to transform Alithea into the social body that he desires, Rupert puts the final steps of his plan into motion: kidnap Alithea, remove her from her husband and her children, show her how much happier she will be once she is free and can see her oppressive marriage for what it is, and, out of overwhelming gratitude, devote herself and the rest of her life to loving Rupert. Rupert and his acquaintance Osborne drive a carriage to Alithea's house and under the guise of meeting her one last time to say goodbye, Rupert tricks Alithea to see him and pulls her into the carriage, leaving her

young son screaming after her as the three of them speed off. The kidnapping scene is incredibly visceral and thus deserves to be quoted in full:

At that moment [of pulling Alitheia into the carriage] the storm burst over us; but the thunder was unheard amidst the rattling of the wheels. Even her cries were lost in the uproar; but as the thickening clouds changed twilight into night, the vivid lightning showed me Alitheia at my feet, in convulsions of fear and anguish. There was no help. I raised her in my arms; and she struggled in them without meaning, without knowledge. Spasm succeeded spasm; I saw them by the flashes of the frequent lightning distort her features... I pressed Alitheia to my heart in agony, vainly hoping to see the colour revisit her cheeks, and her dear eyes open! Was she already a corpse? I tried to feel her breath upon my cheek; but the speed of our course, and the uproar of the elements, prevented my being able to ascertain whether she was alive or dead. And thus I bore her -- thus I made her my bride, thus I, her worshipper, emptied the vials of pain on her beloved head. (203)

Full of flashes of lightning and bodily contortions, this scene acts as Rupert's reanimation of Alitheia -- transitioning her from what he thinks of as a situation of living death to the bride of his dreams. This scene also reanimates a similar moment in Frankenstein between Victor and his mother, in which Victor dreams he is embracing his fiancée Elizabeth who then mutates into the rotting corpse of his mother. Alitheia transforms not from one person into another or from a living being into a corpse but into a social death, trapped both in Rupert's crushing embrace and the expectations he places upon her. In this moment, the corporeality – the material, fleshy body – of Alitheia becomes apparent to both Rupert and the reader. Alitheia goes through a myriad of

physical changes as her features distort themselves as she writhes in Rupert's arms from pain and fear, and eventually collapses from exhaustion with pale skin and closed eyes. Rupert proclaims that, in this moment, he bore Alithea, which gives the sense of the scene's overtones of labour and (re)birth with Rupert as the creator of new life.

The allusions to birth and creation continue upon the group's arrival to their remote location -- a small cabin beside the sea -- where Rupert carries Alithea's unresponsive body inside and continues his attempts to revive her. Rupert brings her inside the cabin and sets her on the floor where she "lay motionless" as he finds his "canteen" that "contained the implements for striking a light, and tapers" in the hopes of "discover[ing] that [his] victim still lived" (204). Alithea, still contained in her social body, is inarticulate and incoherent after her rebirth with the only sounds manageable being the odd times that she "groaned and sighed heavily" from the floor (204). In his attempt to get Alithea to regain consciousness, Rupert "chafed her head and hands in spirituous waters," which alongside the help of some smelling salts finally revives her:

She opened her eyes and gazed wildly around, and tears gushed from under the lids in large, slow drops... The livid streaks which had settled round her mouth and eyes disappeared; her features lost the rigidity of convulsions, a slight colour tinged her cheeks; her hands, late chill and stiff, now had warmth, and voluntary motions of her own. (204)

The similarities between Alithea's mode of revival and the Christian rite of baptism cannot be ignored, with Rupert bathing the head and hands of his creation and giving her the name of bride. Through this ritual, Alithea's body is purified of what Rupert believes to be the toxicity of her marriage and thus once again becomes the beautiful,

virginal being from his imagination regenerated by him and for him. Rupert also goes through a rebirth of sorts when he proclaims, at the sight of Alithea's health, that "I felt a new man, I felt happy. In a few short hours I should receive her pardon" (205). For Rupert, the damage of his deed is now complete as the body of his creation remains docily under social and physical control.

The pair's troubles are not quite over as Alithea succumbs to her tragic fate shortly after Rupert's scene of relief; a fate that signals Alithea's move from elided, material body to a more powerful, authorial voice. This movement also spurs new concerns with death and how we deal with the bodies of the dead, and these concerns echo eighteenth- and nineteenth-century needs to isolate the dead. It is the bodily acquisition of power, awe, and fear via death that will shape the next section of this chapter as I trace the ways in which Alithea's death affords her powers that she never was allowed to possess during her life, the reasons why those powers are acquired, and how they manifest themselves within the text. Following the Reformation, the boundary between the living and the dead became "impermeable" and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this need to separate these spheres strengthened due to the "scientific-rational approach" to solving problems that insisted on upholding dualistic beliefs through "segregation and classification" (Howarth 128). At its culmination, the boundary between life and death exercised itself through scientific rationalism as it attempted to seek out "victory over death" exhibited through the need and "desire to exercise control over mortality" (128). Shelley pushes the late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century desire to control mortality to its most extreme form in *Frankenstein*, with Shelley potentially using the text as a warning against what the future could look

like if the science of mortality is not kept in check. However, by the 1830s, when Shelley wrote and published *Falkner*, views on death and the dead went through significant changes, most notably the increased popularity and necessity of funerary rituals.

Ruth Richardson, in *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, chronicles the birth of popular death culture in nineteenth-century Britain and the multiplicity of roles that the human corpse plays in said culture. Unlike the culture of the Enlightenment where there was no trace of the living within the dead, this new culture of death openly believed that elements of life lived on within the body for some time after death and that there was an active seepage of each realm into the other; a seepage that is shown clearly by the passing of the Anatomy Act in 1832:

The significance of the human corpse in popular death culture at the time of the Anatomy Act seems to have been coloured by a prevailing belief in the existence of a strong tie between body and personality/soul for an undefined period of time after death... [This belief] gained added power from confusion and ambiguity concerning both the definition of death and the spiritual status of the corpse. The result was an uncertain balance between solicitude towards the corpse and fear of it. (Richardson 7)

The Anatomy Act -- established in an attempt to criminalize the illegal obtainment of corpses for dissection, which also happens to be the means by which Victor gathers the body parts to make his creature -- implies a societal concern with the questionable morality of scientific progress and a move to acknowledge the corpse as having spiritual powers worthy of respect and protection. The corpse, as mentioned previously, also could now cause feelings of fear, anxiety, and uneasiness in the living, as the “corpse’s

uncertain metaphysical nature” makes it impossible to tell whether the soul remains in the body after death or if it is “disembodied” and remains “hovering around the haunts of the living” (Richardson 16). Ultimately, as Richardson notes, by the mid-nineteenth century the dead body went from being an object of erasure and separation to a subject that is suddenly endowed with large amounts of power: “In the popular culture of the British Isles... death was believed to work some paradoxical magic -- for after death the body possessed powers the living person never had, and commanded awe, even fear, when the living individual never may have done so” (17).

Alithea’s death occurs after Rupert leaves her alone in the cabin and, unbeknownst to him, she attempts to escape by swimming across a river. While the actual death scene is not present within the text as it occurs outside of Rupert’s purview, his realization of Alithea’s fate and her subsequent burial scene is; and Shelley writes this moment, much like the kidnapping scene, in a very kinaesthetic fashion. As he looks out onto the river, Rupert notices something “peculiar” bobbing up and down in the waves, a white object that makes him wonder “was it real; or but the mockery of a human form” (207). Rupert rushes to “the river’s brink” and “strained [his] eyeballs to catch sight of the same fearful object,” quickly realizing that the object is indeed “the form, the no longer living, the dead body of Alithea” (207). Readers can not only picture Alithea’s body moving with the waves in the river but also Rupert’s physical and emotional panic, the feeling and pain of strained eyes finally catching sight of something and bringing it into focus. Upon realizing that it is Alithea in the water, Rupert plummets his own body into the river in an attempt to save her:

I felt a substance strike against me; instinctively I clutched at it, and grasping her long, streaming hair, now with renewed strength and frantic energy I made for shore... she had returned to me from the gates of death the night before, and I madly deemed the miracle would be twice performed... [W]e endeavoured by various means to recall the spark of life: it was too late. She had been long in the water, and was quite dead. (207)

Rupert's explanation of getting Alithea to shore is firmly rooted in the corporeal and is actually quite horrific upon close reading. In the hopes of controlling Alithea once again, Rupert lets his body take over and rushes into the water where Alithea's head slams against his body and, letting his bodily instincts overpower him, he grabs a fistful of her hair and frantically drags her body to shore with her "long, streaming hair" acting as a rope. No longer is this the Alithea of his imagination whom he clutches in his arms during her post-kidnapping convulsions but a lifeless object that Rupert pulls to shore like a child pulling a ragdoll. The doll imagery aligns with the idea of viewing women's bodies as empty vessels that passively wait to be positioned and played with by the society in which they live, as well as the idea that women are voiceless puppets who require to be spoken for rather than speak for themselves.

Rupert's actions towards Alithea continue to be curious in what is the oddest portion of his explanatory letter and even perhaps of the entire novel, a moment that becomes the most crucial for Alithea's palimpsestic overwriting: her burial. After getting Alithea's body to shore and failing to revive her, Rupert and Osborne decide to bury the evidence of their wrongdoings, an act that Rupert even admits may be quite hard for readers to understand as he prefaces the scene by writing, "[w]hat then I did, may, I

now conceive, appear more shocking to my countrymen, than all that went before” (208). Before revealing what he did with Alithea’s body, Rupert continues the suspense and provides multiple excuses to explain away his choice of burial practice:

I knew little of English customs... I now know that when one dies in England, they keep the lifeless corpse, weeping and watching beside it for many days and then with lingering ceremonies, and the attendance of relations and friends, lay it solemnly in the dismal tomb... To hide the dead with speed from every eye, was the Indian custom. (208)

Rupert blames his behaviour on his only interaction with death being when he was working for the East India Company, despite his experiencing the death of parents, relatives, and friends while still in England and observing the customs enacted, which seems to suggest that Rupert is hiding his real motivations for his burial choices from his readers. Shelley herself could also be including criticism against this new wave of English funerary practices as Rupert takes an almost mocking tone in his description of the British customs of keeping a lifeless corpse on “lingering” displace for days in order for the living to cry and mourn over the body before placing them in a “dismal tomb.”

However, Rupert does not end his excuses there as he anticipates his readers’ horror at his actions and exclaims, “Should I take the corpse of Alithea, wet with the ocean tide, ghastly from the throes of recent death, and bear her to her home, and say, here she is... I bore her away, behold my work! ... Or should I destroy myself at her side, and leave our bodies to tell a frightful tale of mystery and horror” (208). Rupert’s exclamations here are incredibly telling as he mentions three specific issues that reveal insights into his motivations. Firstly, he scoffs at the idea of returning Alithea home in

the state that she is currently in -- wet, ghastly, and dead. The current iteration of Alithea is the farthest from the social, domestic angel that lives in Rupert's dreams and the idea of presenting her to anyone, especially to his own memory, abhors him and only works to challenge his ideas of her identity. On the subject of identity, the second telling phrase is Rupert's proposal that upon returning Alithea home the first words he would exclaim are, "behold my work." In what sounds like the anxious proclamation of Victor Frankenstein after his creature has become menacingly unleashed upon the world, in this expression Rupert admits his fear of a similar fate for his own creation. Rupert moulds Alithea into what he believes is the object of his deepest, most passionate desires, but his creation ultimately leads to his destruction when she is prematurely released back into the world. Lastly, Rupert expresses his anxiety around controlling the narrative surrounding himself and Alithea's relationship when he suggests that perhaps he should have killed himself and left their bodies to decompose together, their story remaining a horrific mystery. If his excessively-digressive letter tells the reader anything it is that Rupert is fixated on crafting his own story, and the story of Alithea's death, down to the last detail and could not have let that creative control pass on to whomever came across their bodies.

Compared to its elaborate prefatory remarks, the burial scene is quite succinct. After Rupert sits and "feast[s] [his] eyes with the sight of [his] pale victim" and once Osborne returns with the required materials, the two start the process:

[A]bove high water mark, there was a single, leafless, moss-grown, skeleton tree... close to it we dug a deep grave. I placed the cushions in it, on which her fair form, all warm, and soft, had reposed during the preceding night. Then I composed her

stark limbs, banding the long wet tresses of her abundant hair across her eyes, for ever closed, crossing her hands upon her pure, death-cold bosom; I touched her reverently, I did not even profane her hand by a kiss; I wrapped her in a cloak, and laid her in the open grave... Then we filled up the grave, and scattering dry sand above, removed every sign of recent opening. (209)

For someone who, at the time, claims to have not known anything about English funerary customs, Rupert actually follows many customs quite exactly. Displaying and enacting correct funerary ritual, according to Ruth Richardson, comes from a “profound latent dread” regarding “haunting and disturbed or incomplete remains” and the idea that “if due respect be given to the dead” then the “comfort of the mourners would be assured” (17). Rupert displays three aspects of “correct” funerary rituals of the time in his burial of Alithea: viewing, touching, and wrapping the corpse. While Osborne is away gathering the required materials for the burial, Rupert sits and stares for quite some time at Alithea’s corpse as she lies sprawled at his feet. Once in the grave, Rupert gently caresses Alithea’s body before he wraps her up in a cloak -- or, what is referred to as a “winding sheet” (Richardson 20) in typical funerary practices -- and refills the grave with dirt. All of these culturally common funerary practices, specifically the viewing and touching of the corpse, are considered acts that are performed not out of respect or love for the person who has died but for the benefit of those still living:

Explanations of the customs [of touching/viewing the corpse] collected by folklorists are many, among them that it acted as a preventative of bad dreams; it removed the fear of death; otherwise the mourner would be haunted by the dead person, or dogged by ill-luck; that is was an act of sympathy with the mourners; it

signified that the toucher/viewer bore the deceased no grudge; and... that by the act of touching, the toucher gained the dead person's strength. (Richardson 25)

In other words, the funerary customs shown by Rupert towards Alithea "represent a deliberate breach of the pollution barrier surrounding the corpse" (Richardson 26) and speak more about his concern for himself than his devotion to the woman he loves.

Although he goes through the necessary steps to bury Alithea's body, Rupert does not succeed in fortifying himself and her family against the posthumous powers of the corpse, powers that Alithea receives after a palimpsestic overwriting of her material body. Throughout the novel, Rupert constantly laments about the "phantom" of Alithea that seems will "haunt him with remorse to his latest hour" (FA 25) and how he is "from place to place... pursued" by Alithea's "upbraiding ghost" (210). Whether it is "lost and dead," "stretched dead" (17), or "pale and senseless at his feet" (25), that final image of Alithea's corpse before burial is never far from Rupert's mind. It is interesting that the former vision of Alithea that lived in Rupert's imagination is completely usurped by the vision of her dead body, a usurpation that suggests the new autonomous, vocal power that Alithea accrues after her death. Rupert can only picture Alithea, while she is alive, as the social being he has been taught to expect women to be – docile, obedient, and passive. This picture of Alithea changes after her death as a new layer of her identity forms that both challenges Rupert's perception of her and allows her enhanced power over him. However, Rupert still tries to relegate Alithea to a subjected position in his mind, this time literally positioned as lying on the ground beneath him. She moves, within Rupert's narrative, from an object to the abject, with the recurring image of her being that of a grovelling body distorted through fear.

Alithea occupies three different identities throughout the majority of the text, identities that exist as post-mortem palimpsestic creations that attempt to trap Alithea within the social sphere and efface the complexity and agency of Alithea's newfound autonomy. Her shifting identities differ depending on who is doing the constructing and all amount to one-dimensional characterizations that can be classified easily within the Madonna/Whore binary. When it comes to Rupert, as already mentioned, her identity is quite unstable as she fluctuates between many things but the main image remains the virginal object of his domestic desire. As for Sir Boyvill -- Alithea's husband -- and the majority of the couple's relatives and acquaintances, the circumstances behind her disappearance remain suspect and she is presented as an adulterous deserter of her domestic station:

That word [adulterer] turned the tide of public feeling; and she, who had been pitied and wept as dead, was now regarded as a voluntary deserter from the home. Her virtues were remembered against her; and surmises, which before would have been reprobated almost as blasphemy, became current as unbounded truths. (111)

Finally, for Alithea's son, Gerard, who witnesses her kidnapping, she remains a devoted angel-of-the-house mother for whom he will dedicate his entire being in order to prove her innocence and seek revenge. Much like Alithea's disembodied spirit haunts Rupert with debilitating guilt, so too does she weaken Gerard through his obsession to find answers, as he explains that grief over his mother's disappearance has "been [his] companion since [he] was nine years old" (80). Ultimately, for Gerard, it does not matter what he hears, is told, or reads about his mother's kidnapping and suspected death; he

will not be satisfied nor will his quest for revenge be over until he is reunited with her body: “Images of her death are for ever passing before me; I think of the murderer with a heart that pants for revenge, and of my beloved mother with such pity, such religious woe, that I would spend my life on that shore seeking her remains, so that at last I might shed my tears above them, and bear them to a more sacred spot” (143). In other words, Rupert robs Gerard of his chance to both properly mourn over his mother’s death and to take rightful control over her corpse and the place where it should reside.

In this sense, the three men use Alithea’s corpse, or lack thereof, to assert their own agency over her living identity by appropriating her into whatever narrative is suitable to and beneficial for them. One of the most powerful aspects of the dead body is its ability to appear as a “material relic” with a “single meaning,” an ability that allows those who outlive the dead to project their own meanings onto the dead with the dead unable to “talk back” and contest those meanings (Hockey, Komaromy & Woodthorpe 11). That is to say, Alithea’s corpse cannot speak for itself and is instead relegated to the status of immobile, static, material object whose silence “lends authenticity to whatever meanings are imposed upon it” (Hockey, Komaromy & Woodthorpe 11), whether that be loving mother, lost love, or unfaithful wife. Elisabeth Bronfen makes a similar argument about the role that the female corpse plays in literature, art, and film, as she suggests that the female body, especially in death, acts as an object for others to reaffirm and solidify cultural control: “Over her dead body, cultural norms are reconfirmed or secured, whether because the sacrifice of the virtuous, innocent woman serves a social critique and transformation or because a sacrifice of the dangerous woman reestablishes an order that was momentarily suspended due to her presence”

(181). In Alithea's instance her death represents the sacrifice of the virtuous and the dangerous with Shelley potentially critiquing this dichotomized view of women and suggesting that every woman embodies both sides, in life and death.

Shelley herself, while still very much alive, embodied both of these gendered characteristics as she was the virtuous widow and daughter who never remarried and devoted her life to the curation and publication of the work of both her husband and her father, and was dangerous due to her association with Wollstonecraftian feminism, Godwinian political radicalism, and Shellyian beliefs about religion and marriage. Even after death, Shelley, much like Wollstonecraft, has had her identity pigeonholed into certain fixed categories that shift depending on the cultural climate and the people using her body for their own agendas. A quick Google search of Mary Shelley's name shows just how a person's identity is shaped -- mainly through the control of the body's narrative and insertion of that body into narratives that fit current goals -- after their death in ways that remain completely outside of their control. Just as Wollstonecraft is commonly heralded in popular culture as "the mother of feminism," so too is Shelley awarded the title of "inventor of science fiction," a moniker that deludes the complexity of her life as a nineteenth-century woman and severely distorts her work as a writer. For those outside of the literary academy, Shelley's identity begins and ends with *Frankenstein* or with her relationships to other figures of literary celebrity, like Percy Shelley and Lord Byron, as features on or biographies of her life focus mainly on her "tragic" childhood and the tumultuous summer of 1816 that led to *Frankenstein's* inception. It is almost as if Shelley ceases to exist in the popular imagination after the publication of *Frankenstein*, with her body frozen in the mind of its consumers in the

nineteenth century as the dangerous woman attempting to write about male concerns; who becomes a weapon of twentieth-century feminism's fight against masculine oppression; and, finally, emerging in the twenty-first century as a static symbol of female creative genius.

While Shelley clearly could not know about the posthumous trajectory of her body and literary celebrity, she did experience an aspect of that control during her life and that, combined with the lack of popular interest in any texts beyond *Frankenstein*, exhibits how important it is to pay critical attention to the ways *Falkner* uses Alithea's body. Alithea, through death, becomes placed into what Bronfen calls "the immobile and petrified realm of eternity" where "[t]he dead beloved does not grow older, does not alter or become different, is no longer unfaithful" and thus as "eternal being" becomes its "survivor's sole possession" (189). In other words, Rupert's actions surrounding Alithea's corpse and his decision to keep her burial site a secret from all others that know her allows him what he believes to be complete control and absolute ownership of her identity as he can now fully transform her into the woman of his dreams while also keeping her in what he believes is her rightful symbolic place. Furthermore, Bronfen writes that "the feminine corpse serves as the figure at which personal fantasies and collective symbols revolving around submission to the norm can be enacted" (193), which indicates that dead bodies act in a similar fashion to the lived female body as both exist as the perfect material vessels for the projections of those in power. However, in death, the female corpse becomes a vessel without agency and access to resistance that comes to be a completely empty identity to be moulded or destroyed in the hands of others.

In the case of *Frankenstein*, the destruction of the female creature fits nicely into Bronfen's theory with Victor using its body to negotiate his own anxieties about where he fits into the cultural hegemony and his fear that "future ages might curse me as their pest" (*FR* 119). Although it is a fear of its reproductive possibilities that is most commonly cited as the primary reason for Victor's destruction of the female creature, there is also the lingering patriarchal fear of a woman becoming "a thinking and reasoning animal" that "might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation" (*FR* 118-119). Alithea is this fear made manifest as she refuses Rupert's attempt to claim her as his own based on the pact of domesticity that is decided for every woman before her birth. By thinking and reasoning by and for herself, Alithea threatens the social ownership and control that Rupert believes he has over her and is owed by her, and it is this threat that culminates in Alithea's death where her corpse can be appropriated and subsumed into the version Rupert creates.

Rupert, however, does not consider the repercussions of his actions, particularly concerning the burial of the corpse, and this shortsightedness allows Alithea to embody the palimpsest and have an authorial voice. Through its ability to hover over the boundary between life and death, the female corpse remains slippery and unable to be fully under the control of the living:

"[L]iminality generates myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art. It is crucial, however, that regeneration solicited by death also requires the termination of the phase of liminality, the redrawing of boundaries and a recreation of unambiguous concepts. Death is not considered real... until the funerary ceremonies are duly completed. (Bronfen 'Over Her Dead Body' 198)

That is to say that because of the lack of proper burial and the inability for her family to control her body in a contained area, Alithea's death allows her to remain unbounded and unambiguous, which is what grants her power over Rupert, Gerard, and Sir Boyvill. It is well known in anthropological theory that the disposal of a body "outside customary public space can evoke concerns about its symbolic 'safety'" (Hockey, Komaromy & Woodthorpe 4) and thus corpses require "careful management" in order to rescind their ability to "evoke powerful responses" (12). Management such as this, which Hockey, Komaromy and Woodthorpe refer to as an "institutional response to... disruptive bodies" (15), mirrors the nineteenth-century need to place troublesome bodies -- the sexual deviant and the criminal, for example -- under surveillance and political control. In the case of the dead body, institutions like funeral homes and cultural enforcers in the form of undertakers came to rise in 1830s England under the guise of removing the "possibility of assault upon and disrespect towards the dead" as well as to avoid the "deliberate mutilation or destruction of [the dead's] identity" (Richardson 29). However, these institutional controls functioned to contain the identity of the corpse in an appropriate manner and to restore the body "materially, to its status as a (relatively) safe container of death" (Hockey, Komaromy & Woodthorpe 15). Ultimately, with these contexts in mind, Alithea cannot be transformed into a mythic symbol of undying love, virtuous motherhood, or domestic failure while existing in a liminal, spectral space, a space that can only be terminated through appropriate burial and containment of the corpse.

The process of spectrality is intimately tied with the safety inherent in both knowledge and custom, as explained in Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*:

Now, to know is to know *who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies -- for it must stay in its place. In a safe place... Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has* to *know* who is buried where -- and *it is necessary* (to know -- to make certain) that, in what remains of [them], [*they*] *remain there*.” (9)

It is when the corpse exists outside of its safe place, when the *who* and the *where* are no longer concrete, that the spectre gets a body and, subsequently, its power. Much like the non-presence of the corpse in its proper place, the spectre is also a figure that plays with presence and corporeality as its visibility and thus existence is predicated on its immaterial materiality:

The specter is first and foremost something visible... it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood... it is not tangible... The specter is not simply someone we see coming back, it is someone by whom we feel ourselves watched, observed, surveyed, as if by the law... [i]t is someone who watches or concerns me without any possible reciprocity... [it] is the right of inspection itself. (Derrida & Stiegler 38-41)

Derrida terms this spectral phenomenon, through a reading of *Hamlet*, as the “visor effect,” in which the spectral body of Hamlet’s father remains hidden yet apparent in his armour while also being able to flip up his visor and look out interrogatively at the living. The spectre, for Derrida, much like the palimpsest, represents an immaterial, absent being that disrupts the world of the living through its indefinable ability to (dis)appear, a (dis)appearance that must be acknowledged and responded to by whomever falls under its gaze. The answerability required by the spectre is where the corpse of Alithea draws

her power; without ever being seen in the conventional sense, her spectre absently haunts the entire plot of the novel and plainly haunts Rupert himself, asking both the reader and the characters of the book to justly respond to her and for her.

Alithea's spectrality, however, cannot last forever as Sir Boyvill and Gerard move to exhume and reclaim her body after finding out the location in Rupert's letter. After reaching the burial site,

[t]he men went on with their work in silence... the sand was thrown up in heaps... Mingles with the sand they threw out pieces of dark substance like cloth or silk, and at length got out of the wide long trench they had been opening. With one consent, though in silence, every one gathered nearer, and looked in -- they saw a human skeleton. The action of the elements, which the sands had not need able to impede, had destroyed every single vestige of a human frame, except those discoloured bones, and long tresses of dark hair, which were wound around the skull. A universal yet suppressed groan burst from all. (*FA* 231)

Once everyone has had a look at the unearthed skeleton, Gerard quickly throws a cloak across the remains in order to conceal them from unauthorized view as Sir Boyvill exclaims, "Do you know, my friends, who lies there? Do you remember the night when Mrs. Neville was carried off? ... On that night she was murdered, and was buried here" (231). Sir Boyville's revelation shocks the crowd, for whom Alithea's remains have "become an object of curiosity and interest" (231), and immediately mourn for the woman in their memories: "Several remembered the lady, whose mouldered remains were thus revealed, in the pride of youth and beauty, warm of heart, kind, beloved; and this was all left of her! these unseemly bones were all earth had to show of the ever

sweet Alithea” (231-232). The revelation of Alithea’s bones immediately changes her position in the eyes of her husband and the public as she transforms from an adulterous wife who irreparably tarnished the reputation of her family to a sweet, young, innocent mother who was tragically ripped from her beloved domestic station. Sir Boyvill removes Alithea’s spectral agency and Rupert’s social agency by revealing her body to the onlookers, as Boyvill becomes the owner of her body and the authoritative author of her narrative identity.

Once again, a man reduces Alithea to a one-dimensional, patriarchal stereotype that only accrues value due to her remembered beauty and her adherence to a culturally-sanctioned position; a reduction that is made clear in the scene where Sir Boyvill identifies her body in front of a jury:

[T]he men looked in; the skull, bound by her long hair -- hair whose colour and luxuriance many remembered -- attracted peculiar observation; the women, as they saw it, wept aloud... As further proof, among the bones were found a few ornaments -- among them, on the skeleton hand, were her wedding-ring, with two others -- both of which were sworn to by Sir Boyvill as belonging to his wife. No doubt could exist concerning the identity of the remains; it was sacrilege to gaze on them a moment longer than was necessary -- while each beholder, as they contemplated so much beauty and excellence reduced to a small heap of bones, abhorrent to the eyes, imbibed a heart-felt lesson on the nothingness of life. (237)

The onlookers identify Alithea’s body based solely on two things, her luxurious hair and her wedding ring, both of which act as a material symbol of what it means to properly perform femininity and, as these are the only visible objects left of her, they will eternally

define her. The women weep and the men tremble at the repulsive sight of death and, unlike Victor's creature who cannot revert to or be remembered as the identity of its former selves, Alithea can be relegated to memory and left perpetually frozen as whatever static image the mourner chooses to conjure. With her hair -- no longer the means by which her lifeless body is dragged to shore -- acting as a remembrance of her beauty and her wedding ring as remembrance of her undying fidelity, Alithea's identity is cemented within those two symbols to the point where "[n]o doubt could exist" about who she was and who she will always be.

Historically speaking, the scenes of Alithea's exhumation are quite interesting and deal with many issues prevalent around death and decomposition in the nineteenth century. At this time, the human skeleton quickly became distanced from the "human" part of the equation through an "emphasis on detachment" and "muted responses to deceased bodies" borne from the growing scientific inquiries into anatomy and pathology (Hallam 478). Emphasis on detachment, however, did not prevent anatomists from projecting cultural preferences onto their specimens, with one nineteenth-century instruction manual stressing the need for bones to have "one of the greatest ornaments of a skeleton -- a fine, white ivory complexion" (qtd. in Hallam 482). There is an obvious undercurrent of colonial rhetoric apparent in this statement but I am more interested in the ways that women and bones fall victim to the patriarchal gaze. The tangled web of what is considered beautiful and presentable is exactly what causes a dissonance between the memory of Alithea and the state of her exhumed remains, and, in the same manner, explains the abhorrent reactions shown towards the creature in *Frankenstein*. The creature fits neither into societal standards of what living beauty is nor standards for

the dead, which makes it impossible for it to materialize in an acceptable fashion and thus it must remain pushing against the boundary for those that do.

In Alithea's case, her bones appear dirty and discoloured and cause revulsion from those who gaze on them but the material objects of her corporeal performativity -- her hair and her wedding ring -- tether her to a past in which she does appear in a digestible fashion. Her bones, however, act like the creature in that they threaten this preferred image of her and insinuate the palimpsestic possibility of darkness, complexity, and subversiveness lurking within the human body and thus must be remanded and "interred in the family vault" (*FA* 238) to control their dangerous potentiality. Overall, the character of Alithea -- from Rupert's constructed love object to culturally sanctioned decomposed subject -- allows readers to consider the ways in which domestic bodies come to be seen and heard through their (im)materiality, and how, ultimately, corporeal issues are always-already "issues of identity, belonging and return that are unavoidably inflected by relations of power" (Hallam 484).

AFTERWORD

As I have demonstrated in my thesis, *Falkner* – although Shelley’s final and most critically neglected novel – houses an enormous amount of untapped potential waiting just below its “domestic fiction” surface. By beginning what can be an extensive investigation into the ways that Shelley’s fiction interacts in a palimpsestic fashion, I have suggested that nonlinear reading is a key to unlocking a deeper connective tissue between Shelley’s novels; a connective tissue that, rather than viewing the novels as cascading down a pyramid with *Frankenstein* remaining at the top, proposes that the texts exist in a central nervous system of ideological critiques, philosophic inquiries, and societal subversions, with each text endlessly firing questions and responses to the others. Furthermore, exploring the ways that Shelley’s palimpsestic relationship with her own body and identity mirrors the palimpsestousness of her texts opens up a new exploration not only of reading her novels nonlinearly but of whether or not they can be read as novels at all, or should rather instead be understood as sites of complex negotiations between memory, autobiography, social identity, and imagined possibility.

What kind of other future possibilities open up by using the figure of the palimpsest as a theoretical lens to investigate nineteenth-century authors and their literature? Throughout this thesis, two things are made clear: an exploration of the complex palimpsestic relationships between texts allows for a comprehensive understanding of the genealogy and evolution of an author’s knowledge and experience; and, that the palimpsest is not only reserved for discussions about physical texts but can be pushed further to investigate the ways in which people suffer under

oppression, understand memory, construct identity, and choose to represent those processes in their fiction. Much like my own reparative endeavor to rescue Shelley's later fiction from being overlooked and underappreciated, so too can the figure of the palimpsest -- by showing the complex entanglements of multiple texts -- bring other undervalued texts and authors to the surface. For example, in what ways do Elizabeth Hamilton's satirical observations of Scottish peasant life in *Cottages of Glen Burney* overwrite and extend her concerns of British imperialism and class warfare in *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*; how does Anne Radcliffe's *Gaston de Blondville* recast the supernatural elements of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in a way that forces a reconceptualization of justice, morality, and truth in both novels?

The palimpsestic relationship between texts is also not confined to works by a single author and can be broadened to include works by multiple authors. Sara Coleridge enters into a complex palimpsestic relationship with the texts of her father in order to help construct her own autonomous identity and independent voice, much like the Brontë sisters enter into a tripartite palimpsest created out of their shared imagination and search for creative originality. The palimpsest can also span centuries, as is the case with authors such as Jane Austen and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose original publications and their later adaptations hold generative palimpsestic potential. For Austen and Doyle, their fictional works consistently engage in a call-and-response relationship with one another and also have become texts that underlie our understanding of culture today since their novels and characters continually refuse to be forgotten and remain caught in a perpetual cycle of adaptive overwriting and reappearance. Overall, the potential that the figure of the palimpsest holds for

nineteenth century literary studies is simple: to recover the complex, latent energies of the past in order to anticipate the future rather than to let lesser-known authors and texts be “borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance” (*FR* 161).

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