

**Passivity and Resilience: Troubling the Master/Slave Binary in
Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed***

by

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ABSTRACT

In *The Bonds of Love*, Jessica Benjamin examines the bonds between mother/child and master/slave to understand the function of domination and submission in a patriarchal society. She demonstrates, through discussing the desire of recognition and lack of mutual connection, how the relationship between the power of domination and the oppression resulting in submission coexists. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the creature, who has the power of knowledge and free will, demands for his creator to provide him with recognition, but Victor Frankenstein absolves his responsibility towards the creature and attempts to isolate his creature into submission. In Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed*, the protagonist Anyanwu falls prey to Doro's intentions to create a master race, but womanhood/maternity/motherhood become the source of her strength and agency. While Doro uses her maternal love as leverage to control her, Anyanwu builds a domestic sphere to support her own function and purpose. Utilizing Jessica Benjamin as a lens into the bonds of love and submission, this thesis focuses on the function of the master/slave binary to analyze the relationships of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*/creature and Octavia E. Butler's Doro/Anyanwu. As Doro and Victor Frankenstein believe the domestic sphere to belong to the weaker creatures of the female sex, they dismiss the power found in womanhood and motherhood. While Anyanwu and the creature live in patriarchal societies, this thesis argues that they both discover the power of female agency that lies within the patriarchal institutions of womanhood and motherhood. Through the analysis of the master/slave power dynamic, this thesis will argue that while women live in a patriarchal society, by rewriting and reconfiguring the female function in literature and, correspondingly, in life, women can gain agency through self-resilience and resistance to dominant discourse.

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Chapter I: Introduction: Not an “Object”: Challenging Restrictive Boundaries on Womanhood and the Domestic Sphere

Having been enrolled in Christian-centered schools for twelve years, I believed in the impurity of my body – the everlasting Madonna/whore conflict between being pure versus tainted. We had a strict dress code, but it was administered and discussed to us differently based on gender. For boys, the dress code encouraged them to dress as professionals, but for the girls, we were told to dress immodestly was to tempt our “brothers in Christ” with impure, sexual thoughts. In mandatory theology courses, girls were taught to memorize Proverbs 31, a chapter dedicated to the summary of the ideal woman – a wife who pleases her husband through serving him, the household, and God. I recall our female teachers adamantly insisting how fulfilling their wedding nights were by emphasizing the purity of their bodies which they bestowed to their husbands. I believed my damnation to be associated with sexual impurity. And, of course, the word *feminist* was a dirty word. I would not receive sexual education until I went to college. How is it that in the twenty-first century, particularly in the progressive San Francisco Bay Area, women were still being taught that they were either Mary Magdalenes or Virgin Marys? Why was it that women were still choosing “voluntary submission” towards their husbands and these supposed higher laws?¹ What was the appeal for women to be submissive to their husbands and the domestic household?

In college, I would continue my education at my first public institution, which broadened my knowledge on politics, sciences, and literature. I was introduced to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a novel that feminist scholars regard as challenging the domestic

¹ Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon, 1988. Print. 5.

roles of motherhood and womanhood due to the authorial biography, the death of every female character, the central topics of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, and the characters' own maternal quests.² I have been riveted by Mary Shelley's own history with her mother and her nightmares surrounding motherhood. While *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, nearly two hundred years later, Shelley's concerns of womanhood and motherhood still bear relevance today.

In Spring 2017, the San Francisco Ballet hosted The Royal Ballet production of *Frankenstein*, and the choreographer Liam Scarlett described Shelley's novel as still "entirely relevant to the human race." Before the performance, Scarlett shared his experience having first read Shelley's novel as a young teen and reflected on how "the older you get, the more it loses its supernatural factor." Scarlett spoke briefly on Mary Shelley's biography and how he chose to weave her tale of "seeking a parent" into the ballet production. He went on to describe the novel as essentially a love story – love that is "unspoken, unfulfilled, unrequited."³ Introducing *Frankenstein* as a love story, he claimed *Frankenstein* to be a story of the "human condition." While Scarlett included the loss, the deaths, and the pain in his production, Mary Shelley mainly focuses on the "human condition" of the creature, as the creature demands *Frankenstein* recognize him, begging the question of what it is to have human connection and what it is to care for someone responsibly. With fluid arabesques and pas de deux between Victor and Elizabeth, the production focuses on their love story as the forsaken creature lurks in the

² Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve." *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Second ed. United States of America: Yale UP, 2000. 213-247. Print.

³ *Frankenstein*. Chor. Liam Scarlett. War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. 24 Feb. 2017. Ballet Performance.

shadows watching Frankenstein in domestic bliss, until the creature learns to receive attention by “taking away what [Victor] loves.” Mocking a previous dance between Victor and Elizabeth, the creature forces Elizabeth to interact in a dance with him demanding curtsies and partnering lifts. Having witnessed Victor give all his attention and love to Elizabeth, the creature’s movements and the musical set evoked bitterness and agony. He is struck and traumatized by his creator’s denial that he is deserving of recognition. The play ends with Frankenstein manor swallowed by flames, engulfing both creator and creature. As in Shelley’s novel, Victor Frankenstein has denied recognition and responsibility for his creature. Symbolically emphasizing the oppressive condition of women, every female character dies to the horror of Frankenstein, who is tied to the domestic sphere.

In the nineteenth century, women were subjected to the roles of “Piety, Purity, Submissiveness, and Domesticity in all their relations,” known as the cult of domesticity.⁴ Thus, women were relegated to the domestic sphere to bear children, serve their husbands, and care for the home. As in Genesis, Eve has attempted to redeem herself through becoming “the mother of all the living,” Shelley strives to forge a bond to her mother through her own attempts of motherhood and literary creations: “In order to prove herself worthy of her parentage, Mary, paradoxically enough, must thus usurp the parental role and succeed in giving birth to *herself* on paper.”⁵ After analyzing Wollstonecraft’s publications and suffering through her miscarriages, Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* as her expressive mother quest, a novel with an “emphasis [which] is not

⁴ MacKethan, Emerita Lucinda, Ph.D. "The Cult of Domesticity." *America in Class*. National Humanities Center, 2011. Web.

⁵ Johnson, Barbara. “My Monster/My Self.” Modern Criticism Response. *Frankenstein*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996. 241-251. Print. 249.

upon what precedes birth [. . .] but upon what follows birth: the trauma of the afterbirth.”⁶ The deaths of all the women in *Frankenstein* annul any possibility of reproduction, maternity, and motherhood, because as a vessel for reproduction, Shelley has failed in the patriarchal construction of womanhood due to her own miscarriages. One scholar suggested that Mary Shelley viewed herself as a monster that destroyed her mother as she was the “unwitting murderous intruder on her own parents’ wedding night [. . .] due to the fact that Mary Wollstonecraft was already carrying the child that was to kill her.”⁷ In her novel, Frankenstein’s mother passes away after nurturing cousin Elizabeth back to health from scarlet fever, catching the illness herself. With the threat of “hell fire in [her] last moments,” Justine submissively takes ownership for killing Frankenstein’s younger brother William, a crime she did not commit, in fear of religious persecution, and she is executed.⁸ Promised in marriage to Victor Frankenstein, Elizabeth frets about the house, waiting for Frankenstein to return from school, and she is killed by his creature on her marriage bed, implicitly destroying any possibilities of tainting her virgin body. In *Frankenstein*, all of the female characters serve the domestic sphere by giving their lives to be nurturing, to be pious, to be wives, and yet, none survive.

So when Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein instills life into his creation in his “filthy workshop,” the creature both horrifies and appeals to his creator, because the creature is constructed from the horrors of the sciences and without the feminine, mother figure.⁹ In Jessica Benjamin’s *Bonds of Love*, she elaborates on Freud’s basis for domination as “the

⁶ Moers, Ellen. "Female Gothic: The Monster’s Mother." *Modern Criticism Response. Frankenstein*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996. 214-24. Print. 218.

⁷ Johnson, Barbara. 249.

⁸ Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996. 56.

⁹ Shelley, Mary. 32.

interaction between the psyche and social life.”¹⁰ For Frankenstein, he desires to gain recognition as a “new species would bless [him] as its creator and source,”¹¹ but he fears the monstrous being that now needs a responsible parent in the social realm. Motherless, grieving Frankenstein would now have to adopt a maternal role to nurture and foster the creature, but in his attempt to restore his masculinity and deny dependency on his child-like creation, he denies mutual connection to his creature. As Frankenstein regulates “self” from “other,” he “retains a close hold over the [creature], [because] it can serve to authenticate [his] experience – an existence which needs validation because of [his] problematic relation to the symbolic realm.”¹² So while Frankenstein denies dependency on the “monstrous” creature, he desires the creature to look to him for recognition and validation.

As contemporary feminist scholars theorize the creature to be a female and representation of the biblical Eve,¹³ the creature becomes “the superman who breaks through normal human limitations to defy the rules of society and infringe upon the realm of God.”¹⁴ The creature looks to his creator Victor Frankenstein for recognition, and the knowledgeable creature demands Frankenstein to regard its requests as “reasonable and moderate” to design a creature with the feminine “sympathies necessary” to provide him with mutual connection.¹⁵ As Frankenstein tells Walton, “How dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native

¹⁰ Benjamin, Jessica. 5.

¹¹ Shelley, Mary. 32.

¹² Creed, Barbara. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection." *Oxford Academic* 27.1 (1986): 44-70. Web. 49.

¹³ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve."

¹⁴ Moers, Ellen. 219.

¹⁵ Shelley, Mary. 98.

town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.”¹⁶ Due to acquiring knowledge, the creature understands that his creator and society have abandoned him, hardening his morals and goodness, and further, they have denied him mutual connection, a pleasure of human interaction. Without the human mutual connection, society and his creator have distanced him as “other,” they have cast him outside of the public sphere. His creator and society have looked upon his physical deformities, and he has been cast as the “horrific nature of the monstrous-feminine [. . .] the horrifying image of archaic mother, phallic woman and castrated body represented as a single figure.”¹⁷ As the creature is not a representation for the cult of domesticity, he becomes a figure for the new woman, an entity demanding to have mutual connection and not cast to the domestic sphere as a servile being.

Written in 1980, Octavia E. Butler’s *Wild Seed*, similarly explores the patriarchal structures limiting womanhood and motherhood. As immortal Doro attempts to create a master race to enslave his patriarchal hierarchy, he views womanhood, motherhood, and reproduction to serve patriarchy in a servile manner. He attempts to enslave protagonist Anyanwu to capitalize on her immortal body’s ability to produce strong, healthy children, and he expects her to serve obediently. Through his cruelty and dominance, he forces Anyanwu to bear children, believing she will submit passively to him; furthermore, he believes the domestic sphere as an oppressive space to keep woman, believing that “once [Anyanwu] was isolated in America with an infant to care for, she would learn submissiveness.”¹⁸ As he exerts himself as master, Doro denies dependency on Anyanwu,

¹⁶ Shelley, Mary. 31.

¹⁷ Creed, Barbara. 63.

¹⁸ Butler, Octavia E. *Wild Seed*. Warners Book Edition. New York: Aspect, 1980. Print. 27.

the only other being with immortality, but he demands her to find recognition in his dominance, privileging male authority. While Doro attempts to use her womanhood, maternity, and motherhood as leverage to control her, Anyanwu builds a domestic sphere, because she finds agency and power through her motherhood, emphasizing that domesticity and womanhood are pivotal and indispensable to society, dismantling the stigma that to be a mother is to lack agency.

As Doro and Victor Frankenstein believe the domestic sphere to belong to the weaker creatures of the female sex, they dismiss the power found in womanhood and motherhood. Through recognizing the self and desire for recognition, these male characters exert domination in order to maintain power and deny dependency on females and femininity, as the patriarchal society constructs such to belong to weak creatures. While Anyanwu and the creature live in patriarchal societies, they attempt to reconfigure their own identities and agency to find purpose through their resistance to the dominant discourse. The creature recognizes that without a female being to share mutual connection, he is subjected to the patriarchal society as “other,” cast off in the “wantonness of power and cruelty.”¹⁹ For Anyanwu, in her desire to “live so badly,” knowing that Doro meant to kill her due to her disobedience to his dominance, she flees to build her own community of family, serving as the matriarch. Through these novels, authors Mary Shelley and Octavia E. Butler challenge the cult of domesticity for women, by structuring an approach to womanhood that recuperates motherhood and rejects the notion of women occupying a supposed weaker role. In their resistance to dominant

¹⁹ Shelley, Mary. 99.

discourse, Shelley and Butler reject male dominance as superior and they challenge the submission of womanhood to find a new role of power in motherhood.

Chapter II: The Objects of Desire: A Study of Gender and Power Dynamics in Western Society

In literature, women have notably been recorded as passive to male agency, lacking their own power and desire, perhaps because women have struggled to capture their own voice and authority both on and off the page. Women have been subjected to “mere properties” of cultural identities: the pure virgin, the manipulative shrew, the femme fatale, the devoted mother – all submissive to the dominance of the Western patriarchal society.²⁰ Within this circumscribed paradigm, the existence of being female is to fulfill, to submit, to validate male desire, as women are raised to want to aspire to these roles. In *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, Jessica Benjamin acknowledges “the painful fact that even today, femininity continues to be identified with passivity, with being the object of someone else’s desire, with having no active desire of one’s own.”²¹ The stigma remains that for a woman to have [sexual] agency, she must function as a subject, the “I,” the possessor of desire; she must not remain “it,” an object; to be female and to identify with the “feminine,” women risk sacrificing their agency because patriarchy structures, limits, and degrades women to a domestic sphere, excluding women from “masculine” activities and associating women as weak creatures.²² In this chapter, I analyze the ramifications of patriarchal conditioning shaping womanhood and motherhood in Western patriarchal societies, which have been influenced by Judeo-Christian myths. As the obedience of girls is reinforced in

²⁰ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "The Queen's Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity." *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Second ed. United States of America: Yale UP, 2000. 3-44. Print. 12.

²¹ Benjamin, Jessica. 87.

²² Westkott, Marcia. "Mothers and Daughters in the World of the Father." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1978, pp. 16–21.

adolescent years as a facet of love, women learn to yearn for affirmation by pleasing a dominant figure, transpiring in women passively participating in gender domination.

As women have been limited to the domestic sphere, the mother-daughter bond becomes central as “one of the most persistent ways that feminism has articulated women’s alternative networks of communication” to challenge the patriarchal social concepts of womanhood and motherhood.²³ While looking back to our mothers can provide recognition and identity, I argue for the importance to also acknowledge and challenge the framework of motherhood as suggested by patriarchal concepts. For the woman, who has been reduced to the patriarchal paradigm, her identity is solely founded as a mother. As Adrienne Rich suggests, the patriarchal concepts of society subjects women to the notion that “to have a child [is] to assume adult womanhood to the full, to prove [herself], to be ‘like other women.’”²⁴ To be a woman is to possess her own desires and agency, but the patriarchal construction of motherhood attempts to control the framework of motherhood and womanhood. To be a mother can be too painful a love. There is a constant responsibility and pressure to supply unconditional emotional support for her children, and furthermore, as Rich argues, “the primary identification of women *as the mother* [. . .] that identification, must be fought at every level, including the level of refusing to question it at all.”²⁵ The responsibility to supply domestic and emotional support to her children becomes a burden, and to doubt the role of motherhood is seen as a failure of loving her children and her identity as a mother and a woman. The doubt and

²³ Williams, Linda R. "Happy Families? Feminist Reproduction and Matrilineal Thought." *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Mary Eagleton. Third ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2011. 41-45. Print. 41.

²⁴ Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1986. Print. 25.

²⁵ Rich, Adrienne. 53.

guilt that Rich discusses is a facet of patriarchal conditioning shaping womanhood and motherhood. The category of mother has been reduced to the patriarchal paradigm; her identity is solely as a mother and she feels the strain of the pressure to adhere to the unconditional love model towards her child. A woman's choice to become a mother should not be undermined by patriarchal constructions, and if a woman chooses not to bear children, she should not be cast as weak by a supposed notion that she does not bear "feminine" feelings. It is crucial to dismantle the patriarchal stigma that to be a woman and a mother is to be weak and submissive. For women to have agency and no longer serve the desire of men, they must start with acknowledging and dismantling the preconceived notions of women's roles as weak. With female identities shaped by the patriarchal construction, patriarchy attempts to silence female voices through the first steps of obedience, emphasized to female children in the early stages of adolescence.

These dilemmas of the patriarchal institution of womanhood troubled many feminist writers, including science-fiction authors Mary Shelley and Octavia E. Butler, who both constructed worlds challenging the servility of motherhood in their novels *Frankenstein* and *Wild Seed*, respectively. In *The Bonds of Love*, Jessica Benjamin writes, "Obedience to the laws of civilization is first inspired, not by fear or prudence, Freud tells us, but by love for those early powerful figures who first demand obedience."²⁶ Benjamin first examines the adolescent bonds between mother/child to understand and critique the function and the appeal of domination and submission, sourcing obedience as the foundations in both relationships. The slave's desire to have purpose, influence, and meaning becomes a "source of pleasurable connection" through voluntary submission

²⁶ Benjamin, Jessica. 5.

and their acts of obedience.²⁷ However, the master/slave duality does not give mutual recognition. Rather, the dominant figure receives gratification, while the slave figure consistently serves in order to have validation. Shelley and Butler utilized their characters to discuss female agency, desire, and submission in patriarchal societies through troubling the master/slave relationship. The creature and Anyanwu reflect back to their metaphorical mother figure in hopes to receive mutual connection. For women who have been subjected to the domestic sphere as weak creatures, they search for identity and recognition by looking back first to those that share their patriarchal dilemma – mothers.

In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the miserable creature, who has been denied by society, reflects back to his maternal figure – his creator, Victor Frankenstein – in an attempt to receive recognition as a living being with emotions and knowledge: "I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification."²⁸ The creature passionately requests that his creator look upon his miseries and build a female mate for him to share emotions and connection; while Frankenstein first consents, he ultimately destroys the female mate before completion in fear of it possessing free will. Instead, Frankenstein expects his creature's obedience and he attempts to assert domination over his creation. In Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu falls prey to Doro's intentions to create and dominate a master race. However, womanhood, maternity, and motherhood become Anyanwu's strength and agency, as she looks back to her mother figure for recognition: "It was in [Anyanwu's] mother in whom she found strangeness, closeness."²⁹ While Doro attempts

²⁷ Benjamin, Jessica. 31.

²⁸ Shelley, Mary. 76.

²⁹ Butler, Octavia. 10.

to use her maternal love as leverage to control her, Anyanwu fosters a domestic sphere to support her own function. She finds empowerment through her motherhood, emphasizing that domesticity and womanhood are pivotal and indispensable to society, dismantling the stigma that to be a mother is to lack agency. Through the analysis of this power dynamic, I theorize that while women live in a patriarchal society, by rewriting and reconfiguring the female identity in literature and, correspondingly, in life, women can gain agency through resistance to the dominant discourse.

As Western society embraced the myths of Judeo-Christian religion, the patriarchal power dynamics between man/woman structured women to submit to the dominant discourse. Women became oppressed to a patriarchal concept of motherhood which demanded they dutifully sacrifice their bodies to reproduce and to obediently surrender agency to their husband's desires. With the first origin of motherhood as read in Judeo-Christian myth, Eve became a mother through God's demand for her obedience and for her sins: "if he is so far above me that nothing I do can alter his attitude toward me, I can only submit. My desire and agency can find no outlet, except in the form of obedience."³⁰ In Genesis, God created Adam and Eve with one command: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."³¹ Eve challenged God's authority, exposing the ineffective power he held over the perfection of Eden. When the serpent tempted Eve to eat the fruit to obtain knowledge, she shared their own power of free will with Adam. As punishment, God reasserted his authority by dooming man to live a life of suffering, condemning Eve (and all women) to suffer by "greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy

³⁰ Benjamin, Jessica. 53.

³¹ *Holy Bible: King James Version*. Bible Gateway. Web. Genesis 2:17.

conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” and having man “rule over thee.”³² In her attempts to initiate her own knowledge, she became a pawn in a patriarchal scheme and was directed to be submissive to man. By the Judeo-Christian myths that Western society upholds, women are to strictly serve their husbands and sacrifice their bodies. The female body is “impure, corrupt,” but when the body serves the patriarchal institution of motherhood, the female body becomes “beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing.”³³ In Western society, the female identity is heavily molded for women to serve in the domestic sphere strictly as mothers and caregivers to serve a patriarchal social structure.

With the presence of maternal guilt, suffering, and death in Mary Shelley’s life, Shelley began to write the novel *Frankenstein* in 1816. After her own mother’s passing eleven days after giving birth to Mary Shelley, Shelley was burdened with heartache and grief, troubling the writer into her adulthood. She was further tormented by her own miscarriages. In a private journal entry on March 19, 1815, she wrote, “[I dreamt] that my little baby came to life again, that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived. Awake and [I] find no baby.”³⁴ She would continue to have miscarriages and children who died at young ages. Her only surviving child would be a son named Percy, who was born after the publication of *Frankenstein*.³⁵ Paralleling Shelley’s private journals, Frankenstein’s grief over losing his loved ones is painfully similar: “how did I cling to their dear forms, as sometimes they haunted even my waking hours, and persuade myself that they still lived!”³⁶ Unable to keep her children alive, Mary Shelley was

³² Genesis 3:16.

³³ Rich, Adrienne. 34.

³⁴ Moers, Ellen. 222.

³⁵ “Mary Shelley: A Chronology.” *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996. 333-34. Print.

³⁶ Shelley, Mary. 142.

sorrowful over her perception of failure in reproduction and motherhood. Implicitly, she felt the condemnation of a patriarchal expectation of a woman to produce heirs. With the death of her mother and of her children later in life, it is no wonder why there is no female figure that survives in *Frankenstein* and why her characters are involved in explorations of the maternal figure. In her novel, Frankenstein's mother passes away after nurturing cousin Elizabeth back to health from scarlet fever and catching the illness herself. With the threat of "hell fire in [her] last moments," Justine submissively takes ownership for killing Frankenstein's younger brother William, a crime she did not commit, in fear of religious persecution, and she is executed.³⁷ Promised in marriage to Victor Frankenstein, Elizabeth frets about the house, waiting for Frankenstein to return from school, and she is killed by his creature on her marriage bed, implicitly destroying any possibilities of tainting her virgin body. In *Frankenstein*, all of the female characters serve the domestic sphere by submitting to be nurturing, to be pious, to be wives, and yet, none survive. All the women in Frankenstein are killed, abolishing any possibilities of maternity and motherhood, destroying any possibilities for reproduction.

With the loss of his mother – his creator, his source of life – Victor desperately tries to fill the void by donning the role of creator, subsequently abolishing women's role in natural reproduction: "A new species would bless as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me," adopting a god-like complex towards reproduction and motherhood.³⁸ Frankenstein adopts his god-complex from the patriarchal values of his father, but he neglects to recognize that to create life is also to be responsible for that life. His father tells him not to show weak feelings, such as his grief,

³⁷ Shelley, Mary. 56.

³⁸ Shelley, Mary. 32.

over the deaths of Justine and William, but as a man, Victor Frankenstein needs to uphold a “masculine” strength void of weak emotions. Frankenstein is taught to have male agency as void of dependency on “feminine” feelings so that when he regenerates his creature, Frankenstein fails to separate himself from patriarchal ideology and subsequently fails to embrace the value of women in reproduction, motherhood, and love.

In *Bonds of Love*, Benjamin notes this rejection of femininity and motherhood as central in domination: “The psychic repudiation of femininity, which includes the negation of dependency and mutual recognition, is homologous with the social banishment of nurturance and intersubjective relatedness to the private domestic world of women and children.”³⁹ When Frankenstein refuses to look back to his mother figure, he refuses to acknowledge a social responsibility and importance of the mother figure and maternal nurturance. Due to Frankenstein’s rejection of affection, he cannot sympathize with his creation to nurture and educate his creature, “[failing] in his responsibility to the creature” to provide recognition and connection.⁴⁰ As he denies the creature mutual recognition, Frankenstein creates tension resulting in the master-slave relationship between himself and the creature, as the “absoluteness, the sense of being one (“My identity is entirely independent and consistent”) and alone (“There is nothing outside of me that I do not control”), is the basis for domination.”⁴¹ Frankenstein asserts his authority and power to distance the creation, whom he should love, and he refuses to accept the creature into the realm of humanity, casting the creature as unworthy.

³⁹ Benjamin, Jessica. 185.

⁴⁰ Levine, George. "Frankenstein and the Tradition of Realism." *Modern Criticism Response. Frankenstein*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996. 208-14. Print. A Norton Critical Edition. 209.

⁴¹ Benjamin, Jessica. 33.

Through this masculine emphasis of authority and power over the creature, Frankenstein views the creature at his mercy, exclaiming to his creation, “Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall.”⁴² He denies his creation acknowledgement. As a result, his creature lashes out for attention so his master would turn responsibility, power, and attention towards him. The creature’s actions are a “consequence of maltreatment or injustice,” but regarding Victor, “there is no such comfortable explanation for the evil of Frankenstein himself.”⁴³ Due to his self-rejection, Frankenstein cannot sympathize with his creation when the creature begs Victor to take pity on him, because he looks outward and only sees the manifestation of his grief through the deformity of the creature. Through the patriarchal conditioning and dismissal of maternal responsibility, Victor attempts to deny his creature’s dependency. By demanding obedience from his creation but failing in his responsibility to nurture the creature, Victor adheres to the master/slave binary, instead of reciprocating a mutual connection. It is through this oppression that the creature becomes a representation of woman functioning in a patriarchal society, attempting to dismantle and disrupt the patriarchal paradigms in the master/slave binary hindering women from being recognized.

Similarly, in Octavia E. Butler’s *Wild Seed*, Butler explores female agency and identity through analyzing women’s roles in motherhood, reproduction, and maternity functioning in the patriarchal society. The immortal Doro roams the earth collecting people with special abilities in hopes to build a master race, attempting to control the

⁴² Shelley, Mary. 66.

⁴³ Levine, George. 209.

reproduction to amass powerful children. He cannot die, but to live he jumps from body to body, consuming their soul and leaving behind an empty shell of a body. He is physically drawn to Anyanwu, who is the only other immortal he has met, but she lives through her ability to morph and heal her own body. For his immortality, he destroys without choice and without end, but her immortality stems from her choice to live and to heal her body. Furthermore, her power stems from her connection to nature, from utilizing plants for healing purposes to her ability to morph her body into that of an animal. When Doro first appears to Anyanwu, he does not utilize fear to convince her to leave with him, but he seduces her by telling her that she “belongs with him,” promising her a life of affirmation and validation through motherhood.⁴⁴ He tells her that he can provide her with children that she will never have to bury, and she will never have to suffer a mother’s pain again. He addresses her deepest desires: “people often submit not merely out of fear, but in complicity with their own deepest desires.”⁴⁵ Doro manipulates her deepest desires of motherhood for his own agency to create a master race, and he attempts to capitalize on what he views as weakness: motherhood and womanhood.

It is through obedience that Doro creates a façade of love towards and within his community, and he positions himself as master by simultaneously emphasizing his authority and recognizing their individual pain. As Doro declares to Anyanwu, “Here, there is only one abomination: disobedience.”⁴⁶ He enslaves Anyanwu to serve as a surrogate for his eugenics experiments, and while Anyanwu grows to resent Doro, she also grows to love and serve this master figure. She serves Doro not from hate, but she

⁴⁴ Butler, Octavia E. 22.

⁴⁵ Benjamin, Jessica. 55.

⁴⁶ Butler, Octavia E. 120.

serves from her love. She finds pleasure, peace, and love through her identity of motherhood, but furthermore, motherhood is never her sole identity, which is why Doro cannot fully bend her into submission. Unlike Doro's children, she has not been raised to be submissive to Doro, but she has been raised to serve herself. She has lived comfortably independent, choosing to only have a husband and a family when it suited her. Unlike Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and creature, Anyanwu embraces the feminine role proudly, and she does not dismiss motherhood as a weak role. She does not submit to patriarchy, but she lives in a patriarchal community continuing to serve her desires of motherhood. As seen throughout *Wild Seed*, to be a mother is to have a responsibility to care and nurture lives. While Anyanwu has lived in patriarchal households, she has never served patriarchy in passivity or viewed her identity as weak for identifying as a woman or mother. As Anyanwu balances motherhood with her own desires, she does not lose her identity and agency to patriarchy.

Jessica Benjamin discusses domination as the "two-way process, a system involving the participation of those who submit to power as well as those who exercise it."⁴⁷ Benjamin argues that for women not to lose themselves to be passive objects to male desire, women have to prioritize not submitting themselves to men but to recognize and affirm their own identities. There is no escaping the patriarchal social culture, but women can create self-resilience by proclaiming their own worth and agency to resist dominant discourse. For Mary Shelley's and Octavia E. Butler's characters to dismantle patriarchy and dissolve the tension within the master/slave binary, the creature and Anyanwu have to receive mutual recognition. By rewriting and configuring female

⁴⁷ Benjamin, Jessica. 5.

agency in literature, and thus in life, women gain power and agency through their resistance to the dominant discourse creating an opening for them to embrace motherhood, womanhood, and maternity without risking their identity to the patriarchal social constructs.

Chapter III: The Making of a Master: Analyzing Dependency and the Dominance in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the characters are burdened by grief and suffering as they attempt to find solace and peace in a world without their loved ones. For Victor Frankenstein, his agony leads to his demise through his pursuit of knowledge to understand the possibilities of recreating life through death. He obsesses over a quest to procure this knowledge after the loss of his mother, and so Frankenstein constructs a living being in his hopes to regenerate life. Earnestly, he devotes himself mind, body, and soul to his task, risking his health and stability to the sciences. He succeeds. As the creature opens his eyes and looks upon Frankenstein, Frankenstein is struck with horror and flees with haste, leaving his creature alone and subjected to find survival in society. He refuses to take a "maternal" responsibility to nurture and educate the creature, but to create life "comes new responsibility and a need for new methods, – a need not merely to consider whether or not we will enter upon the duties of maternity, but how best we can fulfil them."⁴⁸ As Freudian's Oedipus complex theorizes, he denounces the maternal responsibility in an attempt to foster his masculinity as a "boy's disidentification with his mother is considered a necessary step in the formation of masculine identity."⁴⁹ As the creature looks upon him for recognition, Victor dismisses his humanity, seeing him only as a monster, yet he does not destroy the creature. As the manifestation of his grief, the creature represents the hopes of life after the death of Frankenstein's mother Caroline; and further, for Frankenstein to address the creature, he would have to confront his own

⁴⁸ Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Women and Men*. New York: Prometheus, 1994. Print. Great Mind Series. 178.

⁴⁹ Benjamin, Jessica. 160.

emotions regarding his grief. As the creature looks upon Frankenstein for recognition and purpose, Frankenstein distances himself from the creature in an “attempt to deny dependency.”⁵⁰ Due to his rejection of his own self reflected in the creature, Frankenstein cannot sympathize with his creation when the creature begs Victor to take pity on him. He looks outward and only sees the manifestation of his grief through the deformity of the creature. In an endeavor to control the creature, he dismisses the creature as destructive and evil: “You have left me no power to consider whether I am just to you, or not. Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form.”⁵¹ He provides no “just” responsibility to the creature, dismissing the creature to remove himself from his sight.

In *Frankenstein*, there is no clear protagonist or antagonist; the novel’s characters have not been assigned into distinct black-and-white categories mirroring the moral ambivalence present in Mary Shelley’s own life. As I discussed in Chapter I, Shelley’s role in the deaths of her mother and her own children created within her an uncertainty of whether she is a victim or murderer,⁵² just as her character Victor Frankenstein reflects that he too “not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer.”⁵³ Her conflict is mirrored in both Frankenstein and his creature, both innocent except for their circumstances, but both also accountable for their crimes: “The connection between literary creation and the death of a parent is in fact suggested [. . .] after the monster’s animation, Victor Frankenstein dreams that he holds the corpse of his dead mother in his arms.”⁵⁴ The suffering in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is generated from Victor’s abandonment

⁵⁰ Benjamin, Jessica. 52.

⁵¹ Shelley, Mary. 67.

⁵² Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve." 225.

⁵³ Shelley, Mary 61.

⁵⁴ Johnson, Barbara. 249.

towards the creature, resulting in a failure in his responsibility as a creator.⁵⁵ The sensitive relationship between the parent-child associations relevant in Mary Shelley's life is mirrored throughout the novel, displaying the burden of Shelley's sufferings "since the story Mary writes is a tale of motherless birth."⁵⁶ However, the dysfunctional relationship between Victor Frankenstein and the creature is further complicated by the absence of mutual connection and recognition resulting in a master/slave power dynamic. As Victor denies the creature human rights, love, and recognition, he attempts to garner the role as omnipotent master to dominate the creature, who like Eve, resists domination and obedience. This results in Victor's demise due to his own lack of mutual connection and denial of self-recognition towards the creature. In attempting to "deny dependency" for an autonomous identity, the master declares: *I do not need to find recognition in you, but you are to find recognition in me.* Victor Frankenstein expects his creature to obey him, but when the creature appears to have acquired knowledge, Victor has to confront a creature who is not willing to bend to Victor's will.

Before the death of Frankenstein's mother, Frankenstein describes a harmonious household living in peace and unity. With the father overseeing the education and the mother overseeing the nurturing and amusements, both parents contributed towards a well-loved, educated household between the public and private sphere: "mutual affection engaged us all to comply with and obey the slightest desire of each other."⁵⁷ However, with the death of Caroline, the loss of the mother creates an imbalance of the maternal, "feminine" characteristics of tenderness, love, and nurturing, which Frankenstein remarks

⁵⁵ Levine, George. 214.

⁵⁶ Johnson, Barbara. 249.

⁵⁷ Shelley, Mary. 64.

as the “most irreparable evil.”⁵⁸ Due to the pain of losing this figure, the grief of Frankenstein (and Shelley) is never reconciled resulting in his denial on dependency on the mother figure. As I argued in Chapter I, the destruction of every female character leads to the absence of possible mother figures, who nurture and foster the domestic household. Feminist writer in the late nineteenth century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, author of *Women and Economics*, discusses the role of the mothers as “the common glory of womanhood,” a maternal role with lofty expectations that she herself had difficulty fulfilling:

the main agent in reproduction, the mother is most to be venerated on basic physiological grounds. As the main agent in developing love, the great human condition, she is the foundation of all our growth . . . As the first and final educator, she outwardly moulds what she has inwardly made; and, as she is the viable, tangible, lovable, living type of all this, the being in whose person is expressed the very sum of good to the individual, it is no wonder that our strongest, deepest, tenderest feelings cluster about the great work ‘mother.’⁵⁹

Frankenstein’s failure does not simply stem from regenerating life in an unnatural fashion, but rather from his alternative which abolishes the woman’s role in reproduction and motherhood altogether. In his pain, he attempts to deny a need for the “feminine” in order to survive his grief throughout the novel. Grieving and motherless, Victor flees to Ingolstadt and submerges himself in the sciences, soon engaging “heart and soul” in his search to restore life to the deceased.⁶⁰ As he dedicates his time to the sciences, he separates himself from all domestic affection by withdrawing from his family back in Geneva; Victor’s downfall stems from the separation from domestic affection, because he

⁵⁸ Shelley, Mary. 32.

⁵⁹ Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 177.

⁶⁰ Shelley, Mary. 29.

does not have the capacity to both work and love simultaneously.⁶¹ With his disregard of domesticity and nurturing his body and self, he devotes himself and “seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this pursuit.”⁶² Ultimately, Victor disposes of women’s roles in reproduction with his creation delivered through the recycling of body parts of the deceased. Through this false production of life, the female is removed creating a possibility for an all-male society, as Victor attempts to deny dependency on the maternal figure.

Victor Frankenstein learns to suppress his emotions from the patriarchal views of his father, who instills “masculine” qualities. Victor struggles with the limits imposed on him by his father and the patriarchal system itself. As he looks to his father, he is often received with stern observations to maintain a proper education and outward countenance. For example, when Frankenstein expresses an interest in the works of Cornelius Agrippa, his father dismisses him by telling him not to waste time on “sad trash,” even though Victor is clearly animated to discuss Agrippa’s studies. Later on, Victor shares with Walton that had his father not made the comment, that “the train of [his] ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to [his ruin].”⁶³ The suggestion is had his father shown more compassion and gentler behavior towards his son, Victor would not have felt the need to recreate life from death. Instead, he became intrigued by the fanciful imagination to restore life to “lifeless clay,”⁶⁴ pouring his grief into a female representation of nurturance, love, imagination into his abjection of the

⁶¹ Mellor, Anne K. “Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*.” *Modern Criticism Response. Frankenstein*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996. 274-286. Print. 275.

⁶² Shelley, Mary. 32.

⁶³ Shelley, Mary. 21.

⁶⁴ Shelley, Mary. 32.

creature. When his father views his agony and grief, his father comments that Frankenstein “should refrain from augmenting their unhappiness by an appearance of immoderate grief” over the loss of his brother William and Justine.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, due to the loss of his mother and the dominance of his father, Frankenstein harbors a severe imbalance in what social education he has received so that when he regenerates his creature, Frankenstein fails to separate himself from patriarchal ideology and subsequently fails to embrace the value of women in reproduction and motherhood. Frankenstein has grotesquely formed his own childlike creature within his own “filthy workshop.” With the birth of the creature, Frankenstein has a dream that begins with the image of Elizabeth and ends with his mother’s dead corpse in his arms, paralleling his fears of the “feminine” symbolized by the creature. In her studies of monstrosity and the female body, Barbara Creed argues that the connection between female and monster is relevant to male fears: “the feminine is not *per se* a monstrous sign; rather, it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse which reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells us nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific.”⁶⁶ As Victor attempts to reaffirm his masculinity, he denies dependency on the female figure, casting his creature aside. By this, Frankenstein mirrors the patriarchal paradigm by denying the “feminine” to the creature, because Victor has denounced the maternal figure as “feminine,” synonymously associating domesticity and nurturing to be weak.

Scientifically, he abolishes the need for a mother figure, and he further attempts to dismiss his own emotional need along with the creature’s need for a maternal figure. He disassociates dependence on the maternal figure in an effort to survive his internalized

⁶⁵ Shelley, Mary. 59.

⁶⁶ Creed, Barbara. 70.

grief. Due to his rejection and repression of affection and “feminine” ideals, he does not sympathize with his creation “[failing] in his responsibility to his creature.”⁶⁷ Victor rejects the need for the “maternal” in his grief, therefore, he fails and refuses to nurture and educate his creature. In his grief, he symbolically demonstrates and stubbornly insists to his creature: *I do not possess a mother; therefore, you shall not possess a mother. I do not need a mother; you do not need a mother.* By subjecting his creature to this ideology, he isolates the monstrous-appearing creature to be subjected to the patriarchal, public society, allowing for no maternal love or upbringing to foster the living being. Jessica Benjamin argues that to reject feminine capabilities is to relinquish equality to the female other:

if this subject establishes his identity by splitting off certain human capabilities, called feminine, and by refusing to recognize the subjectivity of this feminine other, then his claim to stand for equality, liberty, free thought, and recognition of the other is also invalidated. And this means that his way cannot be the best way of doing things.⁶⁸

Since Victor denies the creature due to his own internal emotions and the patriarchal system, he subjects the creature to the public sphere, the space constructed by patriarchy to denounce domestic/female agency, leaving the creature to be denied and never find recognition as established in the master/slave paradigm.

By manifesting his grief into a creature, he succeeds in the sciences of regenerating life, but he is now left responsible for the life of this creature. He has emotionally transferred his agonizing grief into a physical being, relocating his pain into a living reality that demands Victor Frankenstein to take responsibility for his existence. However, for Victor Frankenstein to give recognition to his creature, he would have to

⁶⁷ Levine, George. 214.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, Jessica. 189.

address his bereavement, because “the monster represents both the subject’s fears of being alone, of being separate from the mother, and the threat of annihilation.”⁶⁹ In denouncing his creature, he has denounced his own identity away from his mother figure. In his attempt to “deny dependency” on the mother figure, he denies femininity and motherhood, and then in turn, Frankenstein refuses the creature femininity and motherhood, therefore rendering the creature monstrous.⁷⁰ Due to Victor being “unable to make ‘live’ contact with outside reality,” the birth of omnipotence as a dimension of domination is fostered:

When aggression is projected outward and harnessed by civilization, it winds up doing *outside* what it would otherwise do *inside*: reducing the world, objectifying it, subjugating it. If we translate this process back into Hegel’s terms, this means that the self refuses the claim of the outside world (the other) to limit his absoluteness. He asserts omnipotence. Omnipotence, we might then say, in the manifestation of Freud’s death instinct. When the destructive instinct is projected outward, the problem of omnipotence is not solved, but merely relocated.⁷¹

By externalizing his pain to his creation, he transfers his agony into a physical being. Focused on the regeneration of the creature as a metaphorical, emotional replacement for the loss of his mother, he is frightened at the concept of being responsible for the creature, a being that has free will. He is shocked that the creature has attained knowledge, and without evidence, he is positive that the creature is responsible for his brother’s death. He cannot control the creature, because the creature with free will is what Frankenstein finds horrific – a female representation with power and knowledge surviving outside the private, domestic sphere. Frankenstein asserts his authority and power to distance the creation, as he attempts to have dominance over the resisting

⁶⁹ Creed, Barbara. 65.

⁷⁰ Creed, Barbara.

⁷¹ Benjamin, Jessica. 67.

creature. Instead, he refuses to accept the creature into the realm of humanity, attempting to cast the creature into submission. By abandoning the creation at birth, he damns them both, twisting their angry fates together. His grief is no longer simply internalized, but he is physically face-to-face with his pain, which heightens his desperation to declare himself as master and the creature as a slave to his creator.

As Victor Frankenstein attempts to reassert himself as master, he dehumanizes the creature to justify his own behavior as an irresponsible creator. By doing so, Frankenstein categorizes the creature as Other, instead of a reflection of his self and his grief, refusing to offer mutual connection to his creation. Confronted for the first time since the abandonment, the creature begs Frankenstein:

“Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defense before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscious, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands.”⁷²

The creature asks Frankenstein to allow him “human laws” and to be reasonable, that is, to respond to reason. As the creature relates his tale of what has molded his behavior and temperament into bitterness, Frankenstein begins to sympathize with his creation, but Frankenstein refuses to acknowledge his creature as having reason, morals, and ethics, casting the creature as other. He demonizes the creature in order to justify abandoning the creature, because Frankenstein “urged by curiosity and compassion” listens to the creature’s tale of misery. As Frankenstein feels abandoned by his mother, Frankenstein, in turn, has abandoned the creature in a similar paradigm. Unable to cope with the loss of

⁷² Shelley, Mary. 67.

his mother and subjecting this agony unto his creation, he distances his creature in an “attempt to deny dependency.”⁷³ By this denial of mutual connection with the creature, he asserts his domination to denounce the “duties of a creator.”⁷⁴

Feeling helpless and alone, the creature asks Frankenstein to build him a female mate to “interchange of those sympathies necessary for [his] being,” because the creature recognizes that a female mate would provide love, understanding, and the recognition that he so desires.⁷⁵ At first, Frankenstein consents after hearing the creature’s tales of suffering in society as “miserable beyond all living things,”⁷⁶ but he retracts and destroys the female mate, declaring that it would also have free will and could choose not to be with the male creature. By constructing a second creature, Frankenstein would then abolish the creature’s need for Frankenstein, and Frankenstein would be left without the recognition of a “new species [blessing Victor] as its creator and source.”⁷⁷ As the creature looks to Frankenstein as his creator and as his master, Frankenstein gains recognition, authority, and purpose. He finds fulfillment in his role as master, because he channels his grief and agony into despising the creature. In his own fear of abandonment, Frankenstein denies the creature a mate to subject him in “an effort to recreate tension through distance, idealization, and objectification” to maintain dominance by keeping the creature isolated and marginalized.⁷⁸ When the creature attains knowledge and exerts free will, Frankenstein is horrified. As the creature is a female representation, Frankenstein

⁷³ Benjamin, Jessica. 52.

⁷⁴ Shelley, Mary. 67.

⁷⁵ Shelley, Mary. 98.

⁷⁶ Shelley, Mary. 65.

⁷⁷ Shelley, Mary. 32.

⁷⁸ Benjamin, Jessica. 68.

attempts to maintain dominance over the creature to isolate it into submission and circumvent its free will.

As Jessica Benjamin notes, “the battle for omnipotence is that to win is to win nothing: the result is negation, emptiness, isolation.”⁷⁹ As Frankenstein attempts to reinstate his omnipotence over the creature through the master/slave binary, he further creates dissonance between the two, causing the creature to violently lash out for attention and recognition. When Frankenstein declares himself as master but denies the needs of the creature, the creature can only then conclude to act out to gain Frankenstein’s attention and recognition. Therefore, the creature destroys those who give recognition to Frankenstein in an attempt to destroy Frankenstein, forcing Frankenstein to look upon the creature to provide a mutual connection towards him. Similarly, as Frankenstein refuses to provide a mate to the creature so he is forced to look to Frankenstein for recognition, the creature one-by-one eliminates the loved ones of Frankenstein – William, his brother; Justine, the adopted sisterly cousin; Elizabeth, his wife; Henry Clerval, his best friend. Victor suffers from mental breakdowns over the repeated deaths of his family, which ultimately leaves him isolated and alone. Subsequently, he is enticed to seek revenge against the creature. However, since one cannot exist without the other, their tension becomes paramount as both demand recognition, but the master figure refuses to acknowledge and accept the slave’s need for love and recognition as a living being with emotions and reason. His refusal represents a denial of the “feminine” ideals of love, understanding, and companionship which the creature asks of his creator – his mother, his creator, his master. Victor Frankenstein

⁷⁹ Benjamin, Jessica. 35.

denies the creature the capabilities of reasoning, morals, and ethics, and he refuses to connect to his creation. He thus deems his creature unworthy of human rights and love.

In his demand for obedience from the creature, he is left in agony, since as Benjamin theorizes, “mutual recognition cannot be achieved through obedience, through identification with the other’s power, or through repression. It requires, finally, contact with other.”⁸⁰ Victor Frankenstein can only find solace for his agonizing grief over the loss of his mother by his interaction with the creature, the very being who embodies all his internalized pain. In his insistence to dominate the creature through isolation and subordination, he denies both the creature and himself mutual connection. Frankenstein’s refusal to share human connection and deeper understanding leads to his ruin. In *Frankenstein*, there is no resolution between creator and the creature as Frankenstein dies in his pursuit of revenge due to his mental and physical exhaustion. Since one cannot survive without the other, the creature is devastated by the death of his creator, because now he is truly alone. There is no one to recognize or give compassion to the creature: “If I destroy the other, there is no one to recognize me, for if I allow him no independent consciousness, I become enmeshed with a dead, not-conscious being. If the other denies me recognition, my acts have no meaning.”⁸¹ Through the destruction of the other, the self is left alone and without mutual connection. The interaction and play between self and other is what provides human connection. Since Frankenstein refuses to provide to the creature’s need for a maternal figure to provide compassion and love, Frankenstein denies his own desire and dependency on a maternal figure. Through his disassociation of the “feminine” capabilities, he denies his creature and himself recognition through mutual

⁸⁰ Benjamin, Jessica. 40.

⁸¹ Benjamin, Jessica. 53.

connection and interaction. By abandoning his creature, Victor Frankenstein establishes his creature as Other, creating the monstrous representation of the female body. Due to his egotistical denial of the feminine, he demands obedience from his creature, forming the catastrophe of the master/slave relationship.

Chapter IV: The Appeal of the Creature's Submission: Examining Obedience and Desire in Master/Slave Power Dynamics

In the last chapter, I argued that the patriarchal social constructs structures Victor Frankenstein as the dominant master figure through the absence of the “feminine.” In this chapter, I was curious to analyze the appeal of submission for the creature as equivalent to the slave in the master/slave dialect, and I discuss how the character serves to function as a female representation in patriarchal society and gender oppression. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the creature abandoned by his creator is left to navigate nature and society to understand his purpose and identity. A rough image of man through the assembly of deceased men’s parts, all who look upon him are filled with terror. He witnesses that to be human is to have association and recognition with one another, but at every step, he is denied this gratifying connection. In a quest to reconcile his pain and satisfy his deep desires, he seeks out his master, his creator of life, who is horrified to discover that not only does his creation live, it also has two powerful allies: knowledge and free will. His creator attempts to isolate and deny his creation in order to subjugate his creation and force its submission, reinforcing a master/slave binary between Victor and the creature. Victor fears how his creature may further choose to utilize his free will, and he demands for the creature to be obedient. Jessica Benjamin notes the demand of obedience is first encouraged by the concepts of love. Having been abandoned, the creature demands for his master to recognize him by murdering his creator’s loved ones, all those who provide recognition towards Frankenstein. In Victor Frankenstein’s pursuit to recreate life, he “supports a patriarchal denial of the value of women and of female

sexuality” by only procuring a male creature.⁸² As the object of the creator’s desire, he has to destroy the ideal of the master figure for providing his recognition and compassion, because as argued in the last chapter, the creator has been conditioned to mirror a master/slave power dynamic that denies his responsibility and denounces “feminine” compassions. Searching for power and agency, the creature demands to be recognized, and, in his righteous anger, he violently lashes out to passionately declare that he “shall not be the submission of abject slavery.”⁸³ By this replica of gender and power dynamics through domination, the creature represents a morally ambiguous, mutilated Eve-like portrayal for women,⁸⁴ as “other” and slave to dominant man, to male desire, to patriarchal constructs, and to “unsurmountable barriers.”⁸⁵

Created in misery, *Frankenstein*’s creature embarks on a self-discovery quest to reconcile the loss of his master and creator, searching for recognition, struggling for acceptance, and yearning for knowledge. By the abandonment of his creator, he roams nature as a “newborn” and “nameless” child who has not been taught morals and ethics, and he finds himself amongst society, which forms his thoughts.⁸⁶ Designed in the likeness of a grown man, yet treated less than a man and more like a monster, the creature aligns himself as a Miltonic Eve when he looks upon his reflection in the water,⁸⁷ as both are forsaken by their creators and doomed to define their existence as a crude, diminutive manifestation of man: “God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image;

⁸² Mellor, Anne. K. 274.

⁸³ Shelley, Mary. 98.

⁸⁴ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror’s Twin: Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve." 241.

⁸⁵ Shelley, Mary. 98.

⁸⁶ Moers, Ellen. 218.

⁸⁷ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror’s Twin: Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve." 240.

but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid from its very resemblance.”⁸⁸ Created from the rib of Adam, Eve is read by feminist critics Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar as portrayed far from the perfection of Adam’s likeness to be of God’s image as “Eve’s moral deformity is symbolized by the monster’s physical malformation, the monster’s physical ugliness represents his social illegitimacy, his bastardy, his namelessness.”⁸⁹ As the first woman and designed to be a mere helpmate, Eve sought the knowledge of the tree to “...be as gods, knowing good and evil.”⁹⁰ Choosing to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and challenging God’s authority, Eve exercised her free will to attain the forbidden knowledge that the serpent promised her. After Adam and Eve have eaten from the tree, God looks upon his creation, says to the Trinity that they are “like us,” and punishes man for exercising their free will. Man has exposed that they have free agency against the hierarchy of God’s authority. While man was created with free will, God severely punishes every single human, whom he claims to love. God condemns Eve (and all women, thereafter) to suffer declaring that her will, “greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” and having man “rule over thee.”⁹¹ Banished from Eden, Eve is destined to be the primogenitor of mankind to fulfill a patriarchal order, and she does so. Looking to God and her husband, she submissively bears the children of the world, assumedly passive to the authority employed upon her looking to her master for recognition, love, and forgiveness. She has little choice when “the hope for redemption is the signature of the power that inspires

⁸⁸ Shelley, Mary. 88.

⁸⁹ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve." 241.

⁹⁰ Genesis 3:5.

⁹¹ Genesis 3:16.

voluntary submission.”⁹² By the same paradigm, the creature acquires knowledge – to the horror of his creator, Victor Frankenstein, who attempts to dominate over the creature, now that the creature is like him knowing good and evil.

Obtaining knowledge and understanding his subjugation, the creature recognizes the injustice against him by the one who should have protected him above all else – his creator, Frankenstein – and he is devastated at the realization that his creator has chosen to abandon him: “Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy *justice*, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due.”⁹³ The creature is denied the opportunity to develop and strengthen the faculties to foster independence and autonomy: “No Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts; I was alone.”⁹⁴ Frankenstein denies and casts his creation to be hardened by a patriarchal society, a society which as eighteenth-century writer and Mary Shelley’s own mother Mary Wollstonecraft argued, treated women as inferior due to lack of equality in education, subjugating women to “blind obedience.”⁹⁵ An advocator of women’s rights, Wollstonecraft wrote in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: “the most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent.”⁹⁶ In a case of nature versus nurture, the creature argues that his rationality of morals and ethics have been shaped in

⁹² Benjamin, Jessica. 5.

⁹³ Shelley, Mary. 66. Italicized mine.

⁹⁴ Shelley, Mary. 88.

⁹⁵ Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Ed. Deidre Shauna Lynch. Third Norton Critical Edition ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2009. Print. 27.

⁹⁶ Wollstonecraft, Mary. 24.

his exile by the temperament of society: “I shall relate events that impressed me with feelings which, from what I was, have made me what I am.”⁹⁷

Abandoned by his creator, the creature begins his life in the wilderness of nature, experiencing basic human survival by learning what to eat and how to harness the power of fire. He learns to fend for himself to be “independent, well-educated, self-supporting.”⁹⁸ The creature expresses that his nature was inherently good, but “misery made [him] a fiend” as people reject and abuse him.⁹⁹ Man has cast him as a monster being; man has made him what he is by their maltreatment. As a female representation, the creature learns to survive without the assistance of men, but he yearns for the human interaction, which provides acceptance and validation to his existence. As Mary Wollstonecraft suggests, “Mankind, including every description, wishes to be loved and respected by something.”¹⁰⁰ However, Victor Frankenstein refuses to acknowledge the creature as an independent entity, “as existing for *himself* and not just for [Frankenstein].”¹⁰¹ When the creature stumbles upon the De Lacey family, he observes his deepest desires of love, connection, family, and belonging:

He raised her, and smiled with such kindness and affection, that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth of food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions.¹⁰²

He witnesses the mutual connection that the family members share amongst each other, and he yearns to share emotionally with the cottagers, who are objectively morally good

⁹⁷ Shelley, Mary. 77.

⁹⁸ Mellor, Anne K. 277.

⁹⁹ Shelley, Mary. 66.

¹⁰⁰ Wollstonecraft, Mary. 62.

¹⁰¹ Benjamin, Jessica. 36.

¹⁰² Shelley, Mary. 72.

people, yet they too ultimately demonize the creature. He observes the family, and he learns the “godlike science” of communication to which “knowledge might enable [him] to make them overlook the deformity of [his] figure.”¹⁰³ By attaining knowledge and perceiving a loving humanity, the creature recognizes that “sorrow only increased with knowledge.”¹⁰⁴ He has continually been denied an acceptance into humanity and cast as a monster purely based on the monstrous design of his appearance. As Jessica Benjamin argues: “the territory of self and other, that space in which we know, discover, and create the world through our connection to it” creates our relationship to the outside world from our independent self.¹⁰⁵ When the creature is denied from the public sphere, he is denied the experience of affirmation from the greater society, and so, he looks to this creator in a hope to receive validation to “allow the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way.”¹⁰⁶ Jessica Benjamin theorizes that through a balanced recognition of self and other is how individuals function through human interaction. Therefore, when the creature is denied interconnection and provided isolation, I argue that he is forced to retaliate through rebellion in order to maintain identity and agency; otherwise, he would be consumed by the dominant power into nothingness.

After being battered by humans, the creature looks upon his own image in a pool of water,¹⁰⁷ and his own difference disturbs him: “I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am.”¹⁰⁸ By the perception of others, he is denied human mutual connection into believing that he is unworthy, and by this, he looks to Victor, his creator,

¹⁰³ Shelley, Mary. 75-76.

¹⁰⁴ Shelley, Mary. 81.

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin, Jessica. 193.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin, Jessica. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve." 241.

¹⁰⁸ Shelley, Mary. 76.

for recognition and understanding as both have been without a maternal figure. If the creature passively accepts himself as unworthy of recognition and validation, he loses his agency, because to have mutual connection with one another is to maintain identity through the play and affirmation between self and other. Further, the creature reflects on being motherless: “No Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts; I was alone.”¹⁰⁹ Both he and Victor have been without a maternal figure for love and compassion, but even though Victor can identify with the creature, he refuses to provide “the sense of shared feeling about the undertaking [as] not only a reassurance, but [as], itself, a source of pleasurable connection.”¹¹⁰ As mentioned in Chapter I, the bonds between mother/child are crucial in adolescent development as obedience becomes a foundation in understanding recognition for self and other. The creature has a need for recognition by anyone, particularly by the hands that formed him into being as he reflects back to his “mother” figure. Regardless of having been denied, the creature still recognizes that his creator solely can provide what the creature needs and desires through mutual understanding:

Unfeeling, heartless creator! You had endowed me with *perceptions and passions*, and then cast me abroad an *object* for thy scorn and horror of mankind. But on you only had I any claim for pity and redress, and from you I determined to seek that justice which I vainly attempted to gain from any other being that work the human form.¹¹¹

Reflecting back to Victor as the master figure becomes harmful for the creature, because Victor denounces the “feminine” capabilities to nurture and educate his creation. Victor did not hypothesize that the creation would have free will, and he does not know what to

¹⁰⁹ Shelley, Mary. 88.

¹¹⁰ Benjamin, Jessica. 31.

¹¹¹ Shelley, Mary. 94. Italicized mine.

do with this. He refuses to provide a connection or understanding to his creation, because he does not want to be responsible for the creature who exercises his free will and has “perceptions and passions.” In her *Vindication*, feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft discussed women, the power of knowledge, and the subjugation by male oppressors as “blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavor to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing.”¹¹² Victor created the creature as a manifestation of his grief, and the creature was to be an *object*, not a *subject* with independent wills and desires. As Victor oppresses and isolates the creature as a slave to Victor’s agency, the creature risks losing himself to be a passive object to Victor’s desire. Forming the creature to embody his grief, Victor determines the creature to be an object, a passive tool to help provide healing after the death of his mother. Victor knows he should be responsible for the creature: “I, not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer,”¹¹³ and in giving recognition to the creation, he would have to address that he has been the source of pain for the creature through abandonment, a repeat of a paradigm that Victor is subjected to suffer. When Victor abandons the creature, he already dismisses a role of responsibility for his creation, and so when the creature looks for Victor in hopes to gain recognition, Victor has refused him a chance at mutual connection by denying him the recognition “which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self.”¹¹⁴ He denies the creature autonomous power between understanding self and other, creating dependency on the master figure for his recognition of self.

¹¹² Wollstonecraft, Mary. 27.

¹¹³ Shelley, Mary. 61.

¹¹⁴ Benjamin, Jessica. 12.

Throughout *Frankenstein*, the creature has shown his capacity for love, morality, ethics, and knowledge, and yet, Victor Frankenstein repeatedly responds to the creature as not equated with him, and not having a right to mutual connection and interaction with man. Frankenstein regards the creature as not belonging in the realm of humanity to receive basic human rights, nor does he deserve to be treated as one with intellect, feeling, and reason. The creature sought to acquire knowledge and become equal with man, not reign over man; he wants to be treated with mutual connection and goodness. Victor and the society at large reject the creature without acknowledging the creature as a being with rational thought and feeling. The creature voluntarily submits to Frankenstein, because as the rest of society denies him, he expects his mother figure, his master, his creator to look upon him and give him recognition: “All men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!”¹¹⁵ Constructed as the manifestation of Frankenstein’s grief, the creature’s identity has been formed to fulfill his own deepest desires through the recognition of his master; therefore, one cannot exist without the other since their pain and their resolution was to be found in mutual recognition. Frankenstein refuses to accept this “other” to have compassion, casting the creature to feel rejected: “I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on.”¹¹⁶ Victor’s denial of responsibility, of compassion, of love, of motherhood, and his embrace of the same patriarchal system that has oppressed him his entire life leads Frankenstein and his creation to their demise.

Looking to Frankenstein for recognition, while inevitable, the acknowledgment of the self becomes an unequal and failed exchange of connection, because Frankenstein

¹¹⁵ Shelley, Mary. 65.

¹¹⁶ Shelley, Mary. 155.

regards the creature as an “object,” not a “subject” of desire and needs. Therefore, reflecting back to the master figure hinders the creature’s agency, as Victor refuses to see the creature with equality. If the creature does not build resilience, resistance, and rebellion, he risks being consumed by his master figure, only to serve the dominant’s desire. The slave becomes too dependent on the master figure for identity and risks losing his own identity. However, the creature becomes enraged that he has been denied goodness due to his outward deformity, and he lashes out in desperate attempts to gain recognition. Like Benjamin’s slave, he has no condition of rebellion, he is then consumed by the dominant, because with the absence of tension, the slave risks abdicating its existence for the pleasure of the master. Through passivity and total submission of the self, the master/slave binary dissolves when the master loses interest in the slave who participates as a passive being, as without tension the relationships only “returns to the emptiness from which it was an effort to escape.”¹¹⁷ For the creature, the appeal to be submissive is the hope of gaining recognition for the self to become autonomous, and for Victor Frankenstein, the appeal of the dominant is to receive recognition and maintain a false sense of independence, void of his agonizing grief. For them to share mutual recognition to dissolve the domination of the master/slave binary, they must share in mutual recognition to gain identity and autonomy. Benjamin notes that recognition remains as the “response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way.”¹¹⁸ As Benjamin discusses, one must have an autonomous self and human connection in order to make “meaningful” of the self. While both are searching for a

¹¹⁷ Shelley, Mary. 66.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin, Jessica. 12.

source of love and knowledge, their lack of empathy for each other limits their interactions between them. Only with mutual recognition can their fatal dynamic lose tension for them both to live harmoniously. As each declares that their pain was more burdensome than the other's suffering, they create tension and obstinacy between them further exacerbating a master/slave power dynamic.

The creature finds appeals in his role as submissive as he desires to receive acceptance, acknowledgement, and identification through interconnection. Through this fulfillment of desire, he would acquire validation to his existential crisis: *What does it mean to be human? Am I human? Am I only a distorted image of man? Do I have purpose?* The creature witnesses that to have interconnection between people is to have humanity, to share in the pleasure and pain of emotions. He observes that for the De Lacey family, these emotions provide "sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature."¹¹⁹ While denied these sensations through the non-nurturing of society, these sensations provide understanding of human relationships, the essence of being human is to "actively engage and ourselves known in relationship to the other."¹²⁰ As Benjamin suggests, "You belong to me, yet you are not (any longer) part of me. The joy I take in your existence must include *both* my connection to you *and* your independent existence."¹²¹ As Frankenstein denies the creature as having rational feelings, thoughts, and morals, he wrongly subjugates the creature denying it any humanity. As a result, Frankenstein continues to be dominant through demonizing the creature as Other, and thus denying the creature mutual recognition.

¹¹⁹ Shelley, Mary. 72.

¹²⁰ Benjamin, Jessica. 18.

¹²¹ Benjamin, Jessica. 15.

Since the master figure can only remain dominant through the interaction and desire of the voluntary submission of the slave, one cannot exist without the other; the master cannot exist without the slave. Jessica Benjamin explains this perpetual existence of the master/slave:

If I destroy the other, there is no one to recognize me, for if I allow him no independent consciousness; I become enmeshed with a dead, not-conscious being. If the other denies me recognition, my acts have no meaning; if he is so far above me that nothing I do can alter his attitude toward me, I can only submit. My desire and agency can find no outlet, except in the form of obedience.¹²²

The creature understands that he has been wrongly abandoned, and he finds recognition by destroying all those who give recognition to Victor. By killing Frankenstein's loved ones, the creature attempts to control the master by forcing him to give attention and recognition to the creature: "You are my creator, but I am your master; -- obey!"¹²³ The creature is hideously angry at the injustice shown to him, and in rebellion, he receives pleasure through manipulating Frankenstein into providing recognition to him. By removing the others who provide Frankenstein with recognition and connection, the creature hopes in a play of revenge to make his creator as miserable and alone as he had done unto the creature.¹²⁴ To isolate Frankenstein is to force Frankenstein only to have interaction with the creature, similar to Frankenstein denying the creature a mate to maintain dominance and recognition as a master figure. Through the creature's resistance, he destroys the ideal of the master figure, as the creature expresses to Frankenstein, "Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art

¹²² Benjamin, Jessica. 53.

¹²³ Shelley, Mary. 116.

¹²⁴ Shelley, Mary. 116.

bound by ties only *dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us.*¹²⁵ When Frankenstein becomes fatally ill due to mental and emotional exhaustion, the creature is overcome with grief, because without his Creator and master, he knows that his end is near since he will find no interconnection in hopes to exist alongside humanity. Without his Creator to give him purpose or to fulfill his deepest desires not to be alone, the creature understands that there is nothing left for him to do except cease to exist. In their struggle for recognition, while the creature and Frankenstein struggle to remain in power, they refuse to recognize each other and neither wins: “The painful result of success in the battle for omnipotence is that to win is to win nothing: the result is negation, emptiness, isolation.”¹²⁶ One could not exist without the other since their pain was found in each other’s recognition of self. If the creature fully submits without resistance to Frankenstein, the creature becomes “no person at all” as he accepts defeat,¹²⁷ no longer providing the dominant with recognition as master of authority. When the creature reflects back to Victor Frankenstein for affirmation, he expects to receive the pleasure of “control, order, and boundary that the master provides.”¹²⁸ The master has the authority to provide recognition to the slave figure, but without tension and resistance, Victor Frankenstein has no reason to acknowledge the creature. Thus, the creature must lash out in order to receive attention. He must kill those who provide affirmation to Victor Frankenstein in his hopes that Victor Frankenstein will understand the isolation that has befallen the creature.

¹²⁵ Shelley, Mary. 65. Italicized mine.

¹²⁶ Benjamin, Jessica. 35.

¹²⁷ Benjamin, Jessica. 65.

¹²⁸ Benjamin, Jessica. 64.

Through Mary Shelley's experience as a "female author (or monster) [learning] about a male-dominated society,"¹²⁹ her masterpiece *Frankenstein* can be read as the female experience struggling in a patriarchal society as the creature deals with loss and desire for recognition from the abandonment of his creator. For Mary Shelley, the "characteristic ambivalence with regard to female self-assertion was largely a response to her very particular position"¹³⁰ as daughter to feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, wife to author Percy Shelley, and mother to her deceased children. As Mary Wollstonecraft posited, "If women be educated for dependence; that is, to act according to the will of another fallible being, and submit, right or wrong, to power, where are we to stop?"¹³¹ For women to be recognized in the unavoidable patriarchal society, they must dismantle and disrupt the paradigms which deliver them from slavery to the patriarchal male dominance. They must become subjects, no longer passive, obedient objects to the male desire. Shelley's creature is rendered free from bonds of slavery through its resilience, rebellion, and aggression in its insistence for recognition to be treated fairly to mankind due to its knowledge and free will. The creature attempts to call attention to the patriarchal paradigm by demanding of his master to acknowledge the creature instead of casting him aside as a monster/other.¹³² Jessica Benjamin elaborates on Freud's concepts of domination: "either we accept the necessity of some rational authority to control our dangerous nature, or we maintain naïvely that our better nature is dangerously repressed by the social order."¹³³ Understanding that he must destroy the ideal of the master figure

¹²⁹ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve." 237.

¹³⁰ Poovey, Mary. "'My Hideous Progeny:': The Lady and the Monster." *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. N.p.: U of Chicago, 1984. 114-42. Print. 115.

¹³¹ Wollstonecraft, Mary. 52.

¹³² Shelley, Mary. 68.

¹³³ Benjamin, Jessica. 4.

to have an autonomous identity, the creature declares “Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only *dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us.*”¹³⁴ The creature refuses to be subjected to Victor’s dominance, which represents the Master’s (Victor’s) dismissal of the crucial existence of the “feminine” potential, capacity, and competence. By allowing the creature mutual recognition and an autonomous self, the tension between dominant and submissive dissipates, resulting in the master having to acknowledge an identity reliant on the slave’s recognition of him. As Victor denies dependency on “feminine” faculties to reinstate his own “masculine” authority as discussed in Chapter II, the creature as a female representation must write his own agency. He cannot be passive to Victor’s authority; he must escape the domination to find his own agency in order to have purpose. As women are subjected to the dominant discourse of patriarchy, they must find their own authority through womanhood, embracing the power of the “feminine” to not adhere to the patriarchal societal concepts of womanhood and motherhood.

¹³⁴ Shelley, Mary. 65. Italicized mine.

Chapter V: Reconciling Female Agency in Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed*

As Western society embraced the Judeo-Christian religion and myths of Eve, women became oppressed to a patriarchal concept of motherhood, which demanded of them to dutifully sacrifice their bodies to reproduce and to obediently surrender agency for their husband's desires. For women to be seen as subjects, authors of their own destinies and masters of their own desires, it is crucial to dismantle the stigma that to be a woman is to be weak and submissive. The patriarchal notion must be demolished that the female experience is only fulfilled through motherhood. However, if a woman chooses to become a mother, motherhood is not to be invalidated as a debilitated capacity for a woman. When a woman becomes a mother, she is pressured to fit the demands of a patriarchal institution of motherhood by giving the entirety of herself to "bring forth children" and to have her husband "rule over thee."¹³⁵ Otherwise if she chooses not to become a mother, she is demonized and accused of not owning maternal or loving faculties. As Adrienne Rich notes in *Of Woman Born*,

Not only have women been told to stick to motherhood, but we have been told that our intellectual or aesthetic creations were inappropriate, inconsequential, or scandalous, an attempt to become "like men," or to escape from the "real" tasks of adult womanhood: marriage and childbearing.¹³⁶

As patriarchy limits women to the domestic sphere, the private sphere becomes tainted through the association of its embodiment of "feminine" activities.

Through this structure of the institution of motherhood, women are subjugated, oppressed and relegated as objects, not as subjects of their own agency. Their

¹³⁵ Genesis 3:16.

¹³⁶ Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1986. Print. 40.

identity serves as a cog in the wheel of patriarchy: “It is precisely the pervasive depersonalization, the banishment of nurturance to the private sphere, that reveal the logic of male dominance, of female denigration and exclusion.”¹³⁷ If she repeatedly searches for validity in the male figure, a female’s existential desire and quest to have self-recognition for identity becomes detrimental to possessing autonomous agency. She must not accept her role as weak, and she must exhibit resistance to the dominant discourse.

In Octavia E. Butler’s novel *Wild Seed*, immortal Doro, the antagonist, exhibits a patriarchal mindset and believes that he can exert his dominance to subjugate Anyanwu to be his surrogate slave for his own desire to create a master race. He controls his colony through instilling fear and demanding obedience, and Anyanwu fears his destructive, barbaric tyranny. Hoping to protect her family from his enslavement, she follows him to America, agreeing to marry Doro’s son Isaac and to create a new family. Cruel and malicious, Doro exerts his dominance over Anyanwu, attempting to control the only other immortal, but she resists. With the passing of Isaac, she flees, knowing her life is at risk. A century later, Doro finds Anyanwu, who has constructed her own successful community, which she fosters by nurturing and loving. Exhausted by Doro’s antics and tired of running, Anyanwu decides to submit her body to death, but surprisingly, Doro begs for her not to leave him. Anyanwu chooses to live, and they both learn to respect and recognize the other.

¹³⁷ Benjamin, Jessica. 87.

Doro roams the earth to collect those with special abilities, such as telepathy and telekinesis, in hopes to build a master race. He coerces those individuals to leave their homes and families to live in his colonies by first addressing their deepest desires for connection for their otherness. Doro's "people often submit not merely out of fear, but in complicity with their own deepest desires."¹³⁸ When he meets the immortal, shape-shifting Anyanwu in the depths of Africa in Butler's 1690, he regards her for her fertile worth in his colonizing scheme, minimalizing her identity, desires, and agency. He insists that she only function in the service of motherhood in order to advance his larger purpose – to "use her for breeding and healing."¹³⁹ When Doro first appears to Anyanwu, he seduces her by providing a taste of mutual recognition as immortal entities. Importantly, he captures her "full attention" by addressing her maternal desires and offering the possibilities of never having to bury her children, so she will never have to suffer a mother's pain of loss again.¹⁴⁰ Finding pleasure and purpose in motherhood, she covets this desire. Doro coerces Anyanwu to follow him to British-ruled New York, believing his promises to provide "children of her [own] kind."¹⁴¹ Intrigued, she follows him to America, and soon, she finds herself under Doro's mercy. She is horrified at what she views as abominations in American customs, such as drinking an animal's milk, and Doro's insistence of incestuous relationships in his colonies. Still, she stays. He demands her to marry and have children with his son Isaac, for he has demised that "once she was

¹³⁸ Benjamin, Jessica. 55.

¹³⁹ Butler, Octavia E. 90.

¹⁴⁰ Butler, Octavia E. 22.

¹⁴¹ Butler, Octavia E. 23.

isolated in America with an infant to care for, she would learn submissiveness.”¹⁴² She does submit to Doro not from fear or ignorance, but she *willingly* submits in a hope to fulfill her own desire for womanhood and motherhood. In Octavia E. Butler’s *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu falls prey to Doro’s intentions to create a master race, but womanhood, maternity, and motherhood become her strength and agency. While Doro uses her maternal love as leverage to control her, Anyanwu builds a domestic sphere to support her own agency as a mother. She finds strength and power through her motherhood, emphasizing that domesticity and womanhood are pivotal and indispensable to society, challenging the stigma that to be a mother is to lack agency.

In her desire for recognition and mutual connection as she had once shared with her mother, Anyanwu “enlists voluntary submission” towards Doro in hopes to share once again with another individual.¹⁴³ As mentioned in Chapter I, the relationship between mother and daughter remains a fundamentally feminist approach to the “alternative networks of communication” in womanhood, maternity, and motherhood.¹⁴⁴ Jessica Benjamin claims, the need for recognition, first found in the mother figure, is pivotal to self-development:

A person comes to feel that “I am the doer who does, I am the author of my acts,” by being with another person who recognizes her acts, her feelings, her intentions, her existent, her independence [...] Recognition is thus, reflexive; it includes not only the other’s confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Butler, Octavia E. 27

¹⁴³ Benjamin, Jessica. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Williams, Linda. R.

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin, Jessica. 21.

Anyanwu has found recognition and herself by looking to her mother figure, who first provided mutual connection due to their shared telepathic sensitivity. Throughout her life, Anyanwu has wed husbands, given birth to children, aged her body to grow old, watched her family die, and started again. She has chosen to take husbands and to bear children knowing they would not live to stand by her eternally, but she finds pleasure, peace and love through her identity of motherhood. Without her shared experience and mutual recognition with her now deceased mother, she has ultimately been alone and living in secrecy due to her otherness and her immortality. Reflecting back, Anyanwu recalls mutual connection and recognition for her identity and “strangeness” that she has not found comparable in another, until Doro:

It was in her mother in whom she found strangeness, closeness, empathy that went beyond what could be expected between mother and daughter [...] Anyanwu had no more than ghosts of that early closeness with her own children and with three of her husbands. And she had sought for years through her clan, her mother’s clan, and others for even a ghost of her greatest difference, the shape changing [...] She had shared no thoughts with [Doro], but something about him reminded her of her mother. Another ghost.¹⁴⁶

As Jessica Benjamin argues in reference to the mother/child bond developing towards the inevitability of the master/slave binary: “Obedience to the laws of civilization is first inspired [. . .] by love, love for those early powerful figures who demand obedience.”¹⁴⁷ As the child finds recognition and affirmation through the reinforcement of the mother, the child gains recognition and pleasure through the “reaction of [an]other subject who applauds.”¹⁴⁸ As she looks upon Doro, she recognizes and longs for a “ghost” of her uniqueness in another, and she beholds the potential to have someone provide

¹⁴⁶ Butler, Octavia E. 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin, Jessica. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin, Jessica. 22.

understanding and recognition towards her. She submits, because she finds appeal in the hopes of someone looking upon her to “applaud,” to share, and to experience the same grief, pain, and wonder that she has experienced in her long lifetime. As she had once shared a semblance of sensitivity with her mother, she hopes to find that connection with the only other who has shared the “ghost.”

When Anyanwu looks upon Doro and sees a semblance of the “ghost,” she finds recognition in the other who also shares immortality, and yet the two function entirely different from one another as Doro demands obedience and submission. As Doro tells Anyanwu that his name means “east – the direction from which the sun comes” and as Anyanwu’s means “the sun,” the two are inexplicably tied as the only immortal beings.¹⁴⁹ However, Doro denies her mutual connection. He asserts himself as dominant for his own desires, and since he “cannot accept his dependency on someone he cannot control, the solution is to subjugate and enslave the other.”¹⁵⁰ Because of his patriarchal mindset on motherhood, he subjugates Anyanwu believing that “once she was isolated in America with an infant to care for, she would learn submissiveness.”¹⁵¹ He identifies Anyanwu as a woman whose agency solely revolves around motherhood, and he mistakenly regards motherhood as submission to the domestic sphere. In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich notes the demands of the patriarchal institution of motherhood by detailing “... the primary identification of women *as* the mother [. . .] that identification, must be fought at every level, including the level of refusing to question it at all.”¹⁵² Doro associates motherhood as a debilitating role, believing that Anyanwu would sacrifice her female

¹⁴⁹ Butler, Octavia E. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Benjamin, Jessica. 54.

¹⁵¹ Butler, Octavia E. 27.

¹⁵² Rich, Adrienne. 53.

agency to motherhood. However, while Anyanwu first found recognition by looking back to her mother figure, she finds pleasure, love, and resilience by being a mother, and “her power had made her independent, accustomed to being her own person.”¹⁵³

However, Doro regards motherhood and womanhood as a submissive role, designating domesticity to serve patriarchy. When Doro first appears to Anyanwu, he does not utilize fear to coax her to leave with him, but he seduces her by telling her that she “belongs with him.”¹⁵⁴ He tells her that he can provide her with children that she will never have to bury, and she will never have to suffer a mother’s pain again. As he addresses her deepest desires, he provides a “sense of shared feeling” about her maternal desire which leads to a “source of pleasurable connection.”¹⁵⁵ He attempts to create dependency from Anyanwu in hopes to gain a body to utilize towards his own desires for creating a master race. While he provides her recognition, he does not look to Anyanwu for connection, creating the tension required between master and slave. As Benjamin states:

The need for recognition entails this fundamental paradox: at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it. At the very moment we come to understand the meaning of “I, myself,” we are forced to see the limitations of that self.¹⁵⁶

When Doro and Anyanwu meet, they both have found recognition in another, as they are the only two immortals, but they respond differently. Doro desires to “win her alive,” but Anyanwu yearns for the possibility of immortal children. He allures Anyanwu with promises of motherhood, but he himself cannot provide immortal children. He cannot die,

¹⁵³ Butler, Octavia E. 27.

¹⁵⁴ Butler, Octavia E. 22.

¹⁵⁵ Benjamin, Jessica. 31.

¹⁵⁶ Benjamin, Jessica. 33.

but to live he jumps from body to body, consuming their soul as the “most efficient cannibal” and leaving behind an empty shell of a body.¹⁵⁷ His immortality applies to his soul, not the temporary host body he inhabits. He does not receive any special abilities from the body he inhabits. However, in contrast to Doro, Anyanwu’s body is powerful. As he looks upon Anyanwu, he recognizes that she is so powerful that he may have to kill her. After arriving in America, he demands that she uses her body to bear children with special abilities and raise them to serve Doro’s community. He commands her to submit and to utilize her body for his desires for a master race, and if he kills her, Doro “would not acquire her malleability, longevity, or healing.”¹⁵⁸ For Anyanwu, her maternal body is her ultimate power. His immortality is demonstrated through his destruction, but hers stems from nurturing her body. She lives through her ability to understand and heal her body as she could “control or alter what she saw there.”¹⁵⁹ Doro attempts to exert himself as master over Anyanwu, because he recognizes that her extraordinary abilities are powerful and a threat to his dominance. She can shape shift her body to appear as a man, a woman, and even as an animal, and she embraces her body and its powers. Regardless, of her physical change, as man, woman, or dolphin, each time Anyanwu chooses to build a family and to be a maternal figure, because she finds pleasure, not servility, in the domestic.

As the only two immortals, one would believe them to be naturally drawn to each other, but their relationship is riddled with elements of intrigue, lust, tension, and most often, hate for the other, as he enforces dominance and she

¹⁵⁷ Butler, Octavia E. 44.

¹⁵⁸ Butler, Octavia E. 88.

¹⁵⁹ Butler, Octavia. E. 53.

submits for recognition and mutual connection. After a relationship of resentment, control, and animosity between the two, Octavia E. Butler surprised her readers by concluding her novel with Doro and Anyanwu, the master and the slave, uniting together romantically. As many would consider *Wild Seed* a feminist novel, the ending remains rather unsettling as Anyanwu in a moment between life and death chooses to live at Doro's request. However, there is no world without Doro; he cannot be killed. Doro is the epitome of the patriarchal society – it (he) will not go away. The dominant presence of “he” cannot disappear, and Doro is thirsty for power. In their first moments of meeting, he looks upon Anyanwu and thinks: “She was too powerful. She might force him to kill her.”¹⁶⁰ His power is not absolute; he recognizes Anyanwu as a threat to his power, which is why he denies her recognition. By denying her recognition, he attempts to deny her independence and individualism. He attempts to create a façade of need for his slave, Anyanwu, to look upon him for recognition. As God looked upon Adam and Eve after they ate from the Tree to gain knowledge, he said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil,” and then, he proceeded to banish them from the Garden of Eden before they obtained fruit from the Tree of Life.¹⁶¹ Similarly as in *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein is horrified that his creature has procured knowledge. As Mary Wollstonecraft argued that to “strengthen the female mind” would demolish “blind obedience.”¹⁶² Therefore, Doro attempts to withhold knowledge from his other half, because if Anyanwu gained knowledge

¹⁶⁰ Butler, Octavia E. 16.

¹⁶¹ Genesis 3:24.

¹⁶² Wollstonecraft, Mary. 27.

of his fear and the full grasp of her own power, he would lose dominion. She would be formidable.

In his attempt to subjugate Anyanwu, he underestimates the power of motherhood, but for Anyanwu, she fully engages in her own female agency as a healer and mother. As Isaac tells Doro, Anyanwu is “wild seed,” because while she has lived in patriarchal households, she has never served patriarchy in passivity.¹⁶³ In Allan G. Johnson’s article, “Patriarchy, the System,” he elaborates that patriarchy is a system in which people participate, perhaps even survive, by taking the “paths of least resistance.”¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, he explains that people do not equal patriarchy; patriarchy is a system that we have adapted to by not objecting to sexist ways and by revering masculinity. Anyanwu does not serve motherhood or patriarchal institutions passively, she learned to “become a kind of master herself” in order to survive independently and resiliently.¹⁶⁵ She relies on herself for her livelihood, not a livelihood depended upon a husband or a sole identity as mother. She has not been raised to be submissive to Doro. She has lived comfortably independent, choosing only to have a husband and a family when it suited her. When Doro attempts to intimidate her through motherhood by threatening the safety of her children, he is disturbed by her independence.

There was no challenge in her voice, but he realized at once she was not telling him she was all his – his property. She was saying only that he had whatever small part of herself she reserved for her men. She was not used to men who could demand more. Though she came from a culture in which wives literally belonged to their husbands, she had power and her power had made her independent, accustomed to being her own person.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Butler, Octavia E. 108.

¹⁶⁴ Johnson, Allan G. 1997. “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, a Them, or an Us.” *Women’s Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*. 68-76.

¹⁶⁵ Butler, Octavia E. 9.

¹⁶⁶ Butler, Octavia E. 27.

Anyanwu first identifies as a woman, not solely identifying herself as someone's wife or mother. She functions as an independent subject with her own desires and agency. She even acknowledges that "she had even found it difficult to be a good wife" due to her experience of servitude and submission to her husbands.¹⁶⁷ For Anyanwu, to be a mother is to be powerful, and she finds purpose and agency serving the domestic.

To be female and to identify as a mother, women risk abdicating their agency to patriarchy, because the social construction of patriarchy views the role of womanhood and motherhood to be servile positions. It is through Anyanwu's resilience that she is freed her from submission to Doro's domination and is therefore able to "transcend the experience of duality, so that both partners are equal, require[ing] a notion of mutuality and sharing."¹⁶⁸ While Anyanwu provides recognition to Doro, he must view Anyanwu as an equal to share mutual connection and be able to "transcend" the master/slave dialect.

Octavia Butler's ending to *Wild Seed* can be reconciled through the understanding that Anyanwu and Doro must both survive, as each contributes to the other's recognition of the self. With "loneliness and grief pressing on her,"¹⁶⁹ Anyanwu decides to leave Doro alone in the world by killing herself, but "almost sick with desperation," he pleads with her to stay.¹⁷⁰ Exhausted by Doro and tired from fleeing him, Anyanwu desires to end her life, not seeing an end to his destruction or dominance. Doro tells her, "There isn't anything I wouldn't give to be able to lie down beside you and die when you die.

¹⁶⁷ Butler, Octavia E. 9.

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin, Jessica. 48.

¹⁶⁹ Butler, Octavia E. 270.

¹⁷⁰ Butler, Octavia E. 272.

You can't know how I've longed. . .”¹⁷¹ Presumably, he has been envious of Anyanwu's power, and in his desire for dominance, he has attempted to subjugate her to maintain power. He has attempted to “deny dependency” on Anyanwu, because he wanted to assert his independence. Finally understanding that Anyanwu is the foil to his destructive self, he accepts mutual connection with Anyanwu, creating dependency for them to interact with each other. As Isaac told her in the beginning, Doro needs Anyanwu:

“Everyone has always been temporary for him – wives, children, friends, even tribes and nations, gods and devils. Everything dies but him. And maybe you, Sun Woman, and maybe you. Make him know you're not like everyone else – make him feel it. Prove it to him, even if for a while, you have to do some things you don't like. Reach out to him; keep reaching. Make him know he's not alone anymore!”¹⁷²

Throughout his immortal life, Doro has only served destruction; his immortality costs another their life. In his destruction, he has attempted to find recognition by creating a master race with him as the patriarchal figure head, but he creates the master race by employing manipulation and instilling fear in his people. He has not found another immortal to share in recognition and mutual understanding until he discovers Anyanwu, who creates her own communities through her natural reproduction and nurturing her families. While patriarchy serves to lessen female agency, as Jessica Benjamin theorized, “the issue is not how we become free of the other, but how we actively engage and make ourselves known in relationship to the other.”¹⁷³ Participants dueling within the master/slave binary, they struggle to receive acknowledgement and affirmation from the other. However, one is bound to be dominant without mutual recognition. As Anyanwu threatens the dominance of Doro due to her innate healing powers and desires for

¹⁷¹ Butler, Octavia E. 277.

¹⁷² Butler, Octavia E. 129.

¹⁷³ Benjamin, Jessica. 18.

motherhood, maternity, and womanhood, her female agency challenges the patriarchal institution. She deconstructs the notion that to be a female, and a mother, is to be an object to male desire within the confines of patriarchy. Rather, her agency is founded in her role as mother, supplying maternal qualities to the household. For Anyanwu and everyone else, their only choices are seemingly to die or obey Doro. Anyanwu's chooses to live instead of killing herself from exhaustion and submission to Doro. If Anyanwu had chosen submit to death, she would ultimately allow Doro, and as such patriarchy, to have omnipotence. By choosing to live and refusing to cease, she reclaims female agency and autonomy, because her choice requires Doro to recognize an identity reliant on Anyanwu's mutual recognition. If there is no escape from the immortal Doro, nor the patriarchal social culture, Octavia Butler suggests that the social constructs of womanhood and motherhood need to be rewritten to serve women, to redesign women to be authors, to be subjects, to be masters of their own desires. For as Benjamin theorizes: "Mutual recognition cannot be achieved through obedience, through identification with the other's power, or through repression. It requires, finally, contact with the other."¹⁷⁴ When Doro finally provides Anyanwu with mutual connection, Anyanwu agrees to choose life, and he "did not command her any longer" dictating her life.¹⁷⁵ By recognizing and honoring her role of domesticity and motherhood, he dissolves the master/slave binary between the two, as he no longer views her as subordinate to himself. He chooses to view her as his equal half, recognizing her female agency as crucial.

¹⁷⁴ Benjamin, Jessica. 40.

¹⁷⁵ Butler, Octavia E. 277.

Chapter VI: Conclusion: Recoding Womanhood to Restore Female Power and Agency

As Donna Haraway discusses in her essay, “Cyborg Manifesto,” one cannot dismantle the patriarchal society, but one can defy and disrupt it through rewriting their agency and function within the structure, both within the domestic and public sphere.¹⁷⁶ By disrupting the dominant discourse, women must rewrite their own function in literature and correspondingly, in life. As Haraway suggests, “Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.”¹⁷⁷ For women to no longer serve the desire of men, they must start with acknowledging and dismantling the preconceived notions of women’s roles as inferior, for in Haraway’s theory, the cyborg exists as a “creature in a post-gender world.”¹⁷⁸ By recoding patriarchal binaries through rewriting language as Haraway suggests, the “cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense.”¹⁷⁹ Recoding the communication in the Western patriarchal world means there is no Eve eternally searching to reconcile her sins, therefore, the female body is no longer prescribed as the breeding ground for sin and evil.

As discussed in Chapter I and IV, Western patriarchal society regulates women to the private, domestic sphere demanding them to serve the domestic sphere through the institution of motherhood. As Adrienne Rich notes, the patriarchal institution of motherhood suggests that “women shall assume the major burden of pain and self-denial

¹⁷⁶ Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science Technology and Socialist-feminism in the Late Twentieth-century." *The Cybercultures Reader*. Ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy. New York: Routledge, 2000. 291-324. Print.

¹⁷⁷ Haraway, Donna. 311.

¹⁷⁸ Haraway, Donna. 292.

¹⁷⁹ Haraway, Donna. 294.

for the furtherance of the species.”¹⁸⁰ However, in *Wild Seed*, Octavia E. Butler reconfigured the domestic sphere to be a source of power and agency for Anyanwu. Anyanwu balances her identity as mother with her own desires; she does not lose her power and agency to patriarchy. She does not passively submit to Doro, and she resists bending to his will, only staying in the hopes to soften his patriarchal mindset to save his “human part” from dying.¹⁸¹ By her powers and desires to heal, Anyanwu attempts to soften his male rationality to have him find recognition in her power as mother and healer. She does not exist in order to serve his desire to use her as a surrogate mother, but she chooses to be a mother and healer. As she reflects back to her own mother, she then reflects to her children for recognition. As Donna Haraway suggests for women, Anyanwu reconfigures her own female agency through constructing her own purpose and pleasure. She finds mutual connection within her mother/child relationships. She finds pleasure and power in her domestic role of motherhood, and she utilizes her experience of motherhood to find mutual recognition between mother and child.

Comparatively, in the chapters regarding Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, I argued that because of Victor Frankenstein’s rejection of female agency and power through motherhood and maternity, he denies his creature a maternal figure, who would provide “feminine” capabilities to nurture and educate his creation. His creature pleads with his creator to bestow a female mate to him, so he will no longer be denied female interconnection. Denied, the creature violently lashes out against Frankenstein. As Mary Shelley suffered through her lack of a mother figure, the creature agonizes over not being

¹⁸⁰ Rich, Adrienne. 34.

¹⁸¹ Butler, Octavia E. 275.

able to “interchange of those sympathies necessary for [his] being.”¹⁸² With no mother figure herself to share with, no female character survives in *Frankenstein*, denying any possibility to share in mutual connection between mother and child. In a journal entry of 1838, Mary Shelley wrote, “My total friendlessness, my horror of pushing, and inability to put myself forward unless led, cherish and supported, -- all this has sunk me in a state of loneliness no other human being ever before, I believe, endured.”¹⁸³ The mother figure and domesticity remains crucial to mutual recognition for authors Octavia E. Butler and Mary Shelley.

As I analyzed in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Octavia E. Butler’s *Wild Seed*, Victor Frankenstein and Doro both demand obedience by denouncing the “feminine” to be inferior. They distance and reject recognition to their female foil. Each treating the female’s existence to serve their male desire, they expect them to obediently serve their male purpose without hesitation. Their male rationality reduces females to the domestic sphere, mistakenly regarding womanhood and motherhood to serve patriarchy. Thus, Frankenstein and Doro create dysfunctional relationships representative of the master/slave dialect, which is complicated by their refusal to interact with their female counterparts. They deny Anyanwu and the creature, respectively, mutual connection and recognition, resulting in a master/slave power dynamic, and Anyanwu and the creature refuse to submit to their dominance. Jessica Benjamin argues that gender domination is understood as a masculine discourse:

His freedom consists of protection from the control or intrusion of others. It is a *negative* ideal of freedom: freedom as release from bondage, individuality stripped bare of its relationship with and need for others. From a feminist point of view, the missing piece in the analysis of Western

¹⁸² Shelley, Mary. 98.

¹⁸³ Poovey, Mary. 114.

rationality and individualism is the structure of gender domination. The psychosocial core of this unfettered individuality is the subjugation of woman by man, through which it appears that she is his possession, and therefore, that he is not dependent upon or attached to an other outside himself.¹⁸⁴

When a male denies dependency on the female figure, he attempts to reinstate his masculinity in a new bondage. He too becomes subjected to patriarchy as he is denied the opportunity to experience validation to his emotions, deemed as “feminine” and weak capabilities. For Frankenstein, as mentioned in Chapter II, his father suggests that he should not display a countenance of grief, and to expel his feelings, he manifests his grief into a physical being, who demands to be recognized. He cannot escape the presence of the “feminine” as his creature embodies a female representation. As Anne Poovey suggests, “the true meaning of [Frankenstein’s] accomplishment: having denied domestic relationships by indulging his selfish passions, he has, in effect, murdered domestic tranquility.”¹⁸⁵ In his egotistical quest, he denies everyone a mother figure in his designs for an all-male society. For Doro, as discussed in Chapter IV, he desires to find recognition as a patriarchal authority over a master race. However, he never nourishes his colonies with domestic, nurturing resources, but instead, he instills fear in his people. In his desire for omnipotence and autonomy, he refuses to depend on Anyanwu, a powerful woman, for recognition and mutual recognition. Victor Frankenstein and Doro view motherhood and womanhood as servile positions to validate their male desire – desires for dominance and supremacy. They refuse to acknowledge Anyanwu and the creature to have the same rights as them, casting them to be inferior.

¹⁸⁴ Benjamin, Jessica. 188.

¹⁸⁵ Poovey, Mary. 124.

However, authors Mary Shelley and Octavia E. Butler revered the domestic sphere, finding powerful agency in womanhood/maternity/motherhood. With female agency at the center of their novels, they resisted dominant discourse to discuss the function and necessity of women in the domestic and private sphere, recoding womanhood to restore female power. While Anyanwu and the creature exist in patriarchal realms, they reconfigure their own female code to find purpose through resistance to the dominant figure. They refuse to be objects, serving a master figure, and they become subjects, masters of their own desires and destinies. As Donna Haraway suggests, women must rewrite their own function to have “power to survive.”¹⁸⁶ By dismantling the stigma of femininity and motherhood as weak, women have the power to dismantle patriarchal constructions of womanhood.

¹⁸⁶ Haraway, Donna. 311.

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