COMPOUNDING THE CRIME: INGRATITUDE AND THE MURDER CONVICTION OF JUSTINE MORITZ IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

Once set loose in the world of *Frankenstein,* murder seems to spread like a plague. William's murder infects society, and the execution of the innocent Justine is murder begetting murder. Yet we would recognize the jury trial in the enlightened republic of Geneva as approaching our own standards of burden of proof and presumptions of innocence, while exposing at the same time extra-legal emotions which can sway judges and jurors. Ironically, the scales of justice are tipped against the defendant by Elizabeth's impassioned speech in her behalf, which only serves to excite "public indignation" at an offense committed against and in the bosom of the family which had befriended and raised her. Although not stated in the legal documents of the indictment, the crime for which Justine stands condemned in jurors' hearts is her "blackest ingrati tude."[1]

"Gratitude" is cited or invoked by Mary Shelley's characters as reward and motivation for achievement, or to support claims on others for benefits, while "ingratitude" justifies retributive violence against the offender. But more is at stake than settling scores among individuals. The trial of Justine demonstrates that society may exercise collective vengeance, bending and travestying the forms of legal process, to punish presumed individual ingratitude itself as an offense which threatens its vital interests. This legal miscarriage is a form of the monster which stalks the novel, and the trial foreshadows horrors yet to come as charges and countercharges of ingratitude are hurled back and forth in the deadly struggle of Victor and his creation.

A court of law, legitimized by the exemplary model of Swiss republican institutions, should be the secular shrine of enlightenment and reason, dedicated above all to the discovery of truth. The truth of Justine's innocence is known to Victor Frankenstein, but ironically his own allegiance to reason appears to render him mute, and "my purposed avowal died away on my lips" when he hears "the harsh, unfeeling reasoning of these men" (128). Had he attempted to speak the truth,

his "declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman," one who has taken leave of his senses and been abandoned by reason (135). The judges' reasoning may be contrary to fact, but it is still *reason*, against which Victor seems unable to speak. Gratitude and reason have formed a diabolical alliance, and whichever way justice in the figure of Justine turns, she finds only the sentence of death pronounced by custodians of these twin pillars of authority.

That gratitude finds support in legal codes testifies to the authority vested in this ancient standard. The paradigm for Justine's situation is subordination dictated by filial gratitude, which the authoritative Blackstone brings within the scope of English common law, based on "a principle of natural justice and retribution":

> For to those who gave us existence we naturally owe subjection and obedience during our minority, and honour and reverence ever after.

Blackstone adds that "[t]he power and reciprocal duty of a guardian and ward are the same, *pro tempore*, as that of a father and child,"[2] an addendum, of course, specifically applicable to Justine's situation. Edmund Burke extends Blackstone's invocation of "natural justice" to explain one's sense of deferential respect toward authority figures in society "because when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is *natural* to be affected."[3] Tolling the alarm bell of the French Revolution, Burke insists in "Letter to a Noble Lord" that "ingratitude to benefactors is the first of revolutionary virtues," and "revolutionaries are miscreant parricides."[4] The chain of duty, and of gratitude, is unbroken from children and parents through subjects and the state.

William Godwin's response to Burke in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* includes rejection of the gratitude ethic which Burke endorses:

> Gratitude therefore, if by gratitude we understand a sentiment of preference which I entertain towards another, upon the ground of my having been the subject of his benefits, is no part either of justice or virtue.[5]

Godwin also explores the adjudication of servant gratitude in *Caleb Williams*, and the finding of ingratitude to his master

seals Caleb's fate. For both Caleb Williams and Justine, the charge of ingratitude subverts the laws completely, and sweeps aside the constraints of reason in legal process to convict both of crimes for which they were framed. Manipulated by Falkland's self-serving appeals for clemency to his erstwhile servant, Caleb, the presiding magistrate rejects them, as Falkland intended he should:

'Mr. Falkland,' answered Mr. Forester, 'these sentiments do honour to your humanity; but I must not give way to them. They only serve to set in a stronger light the venom of this serpent, this monster of ingratitude. . . .[6]

This scenario plays out dramatically Godwin's argument in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* that gratitude perverts justice by insisting that past benefits create a claim superior to a rational determination of relative merit. Reason clearly has deserted magistrate Forester, who seems to froth at the mouth in denouncing the presumed ingrate, Caleb, but does not the invidious Falkland display a malevolent rationality in manipulating the ideology of gratitude to crush Caleb? Mary Shelley seems to have focused on this flaw in Godwin's faith in reason by showing that reason is powerless to protect the oppressed against the charge of ingratitude, and may even strengthen the accusation with the appearance of legal legitimacy. As Joseph Amato observes, "the poor and the weak also know that the charge of ingratitude is among the most frequently favored, yet the deadliest charge leveled against them by the rich."[7] Johanna Smith, one of the few commentators to pay more than passing attention to the issue of gratitude in *Frankenstein,* echoes Amato in observing that "[g]ratitude, no matter how heartfelt, implies obligation, which in turn implies the power of the person to whom one is grateful or obligated."[8] Menacing though this power is when invested in an individual oppressor, such as Falkland, Caleb at least can focus his defense against a known antagonist. How much more defenseless is Justine against the charge of ingratitude exercised by the depersonalized state, symbolized by faceless jurors and judges?

Indeed, gratitude seems to qualify as a potent force in the system of "discipline" examined by Michel Foucault in the "new 'political anatomy'" of the eighteenth-century, "whose

object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline," which subverts the empowerment an emergent "rights" culture might otherwise offer the underclass.

> In appearance, the disciplines constitute nothing more than an infra-law. They seem to extend the general forms defined by law to the infinitesimal level of individual lives; . . . The disciplines should be regarded as a sort of counter-law.[9]

The situations of Justine and Caleb both testify to the authority of gratitude as "discipline" which turns legal protection into legal oppression, but its paradoxical reinforcement of society's claim to "reason" in convicting and punishing Justine is particularly vicious.

The parade of crimes committed in the name of ingratitude might suggest that Mary Shelly would agree with her father in consigning the gratitude ethic to unenlightened oblivion. Yet she opens the door on a few scenes, so marginal and digressive as to seem almost irrelevant, which present gratitude as power *relinquished* in the name of love, not gratitude *claimed* as the reward of power. Despite Alphonse's authority as husband and financial benefactor of the destitute Caroline Beaufort, Victor recalls that "[t]here was a show of gratitude and worship in his attachment to my mother . . . for it was inspired by reverence for her virtues" (81). The word "show" is problematic, but we must remember that Victor is recalling events before his birth, and the man of reason can only look on the narratives of others as evidence or "show." His direct recollections of earliest childhood, however, are that his parents "seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon me" (82).

Love and gratitude walk hand in hand in those halcyon days before Victor's seduction by reason, which renders him incapable of acknowledging the power of love invoked by the Monster to support his demand for a mate. The monster proposes to *surrender* his physical power of destruction since "the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes" and will "let me feel gratitude towards you" (191-2). The monster already has witnessed the felicity of domestic love in his observa-

tions of the DeLacey family, but learns the hard way that he cannot buy love for services rendered as the invisible deliverer of firewood to the family. Gratitude based on love is not a *quid pro quo* in a system of exchange, which Johanna Smith fails to see in her conclusion that expressions of gratitude in *Frankenstein* reflect a "bookeeping mentality which permeates all the relations in this novel."[10]

Finally, Justine's steadfast affirmation of gratitude in the face of the grossest injustice, betrayed by society and her faith, testifies to its origin in the love she bore her adopted family. One might excuse her if she reflected adversely on how her reputation as "the most grateful little creature in the world" (113) has been turned against her by judges and jury. Yet she goes to her death still avowing her "sincerest gratitude towards those who think of me with kindness," and responds to Elizabeth's assurance that Victor, not surprisingly to the reader, believes her innocent, with a heartfelt "I truly thank him" (134). Certainly this seems to us like another twist of the knife of irony, but Justine's steadfastness reveals a dimension of gratitude beyond its exchange value for benefits received, or the expression of power relationships.

Frankenstein, then, not only challenges Godwin's wholehearted confidence in reason, but also his rejection of gratitude as moral motivation for humanity, and thus offers further textual support for Lee Sterrenburg's opinion that the work "might well be described as a descendant of the anti-Godwinian novel of the 1790's," which includes most of the later so-called gothic novels. Sterrenburg goes on to endorse the view that the dedication of Shelley's novel to William Godwin was, "as U.C. Knoepflmacher suggests . . . secretly invidious," adding that "Victor is a latter-day Godwinian" (148). *Frankenstein* may be looked upon as a debate with Godwin's *Enquiry*, but which goes beyond a simple affirmation of gratitude against Godwin's denial and presents gratitude as the mark of love's presence, with reason the destroyer of love. In a universe driven by reason, love's emblems wink out one by one, stars in a darkening chaos, as Caroline, William, Justine, Clerval, and Elizabeth perish. Justine, indeed, is "framed" by the locket which frames the picture of Caroline, a dead symbol of love in a loveless and motherless world. After

the monster fails to "buy into" the love shared by the DeLaceys, they vanish and he torches their cottage, his narrative the only remaining record of their brief existence.

Clearly, love and gratitude are a fragile partnership. Does Shelley hold out any hope for survival of the partners, let alone the partnership? Walton's retreat and return to England from his own Frankenstein like quest suggests that Victor's dying narrative opens his eyes and heart to a love for humanity, represented by his reluctant crew, which can prevail over his own lofty goals. Godwin, however, may pronounce the fate of gratitude in arguing that, should a person provide a benefit to another, he is only serving the cause of justice *if* the act corrects inequities: "It is therefore impossible for me to confer upon any man a favour; I can only do him right."[11] Shifting the focus to "rights" puts the quietus to gratitude, and Justine's pre-execution avowal may be its elegy, even if Mary Shelley grieves at its death and honors its memory.

William G. Sayres

University of New Hampshire

NOTES

[1] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1831), ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1985) 131. Subsequent page references appear in parentheses.

[2] Sir William Blackstone, "Of the Rights of Persons," *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-69), ed. George Sharswood, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1875) Bk. I, Ch. 16, 453, Ch. 17, 461-2.

[3] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1988) 182.

[4] Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 5 (London: Bonn, 1902) 138, 148-9.

[5] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 171.

[6] William Godwin, *Things As They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1988) 181.

[7] Joseph Anthony Amato II, *Guilt and Gratitude. A Study of the Origins of Contemporary Conscience*. (Westport: Greenwood, 1982) 29.

[8] Johanna M. Smith, "'Cooped Up': Feminine Domesticity in *Frankenstein*," Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Johanna Smith (Boston: St. Martin's, 1992) 279.

[9] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) 208, 222.

[10] Smith 279.

[11] Godwin, *Enquiry* 176.

ROBERT SOUTHEY'S *THE DOCTOR, &C*: ANONYMITY AND AUTHORSHIP

Every student of English literature (albeit perhaps unknowingly) is familiar with anonymous publication. Some of our most significant novels — *Pamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Roderick Random*, all Jane Austen's early work — have appeared with no attributed author, and so have such poems as Gray's *Elegy*, Byron's *Don Juan*, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. There are listed in Halkett and Laing's *Dictionary* (1882-8) thousands of other examples of anonymous, pseudonymous and "initialled" authorship, ranging widely in style and scope.[1]

Authors hide behind the veil of anonymity for the most part to protect themselves or their reputation. But there are many other motives besides caution, for anonymity can just as surely attract as deflect attention. Perhaps surprisingly, given the amount of such publications, there exist, with the exception of brief studies of particular authors who at some stage in their careers went "under cover" and of disputes over anonymity in Victorian periodicals, almost no general studies of anonymity and authorship, nor of such topics as the creation of authority through anonymous publication.[2] Since Courtney's pioneering survey more than eighty years ago, no one seems to have examined the reasons for anonymous publication or the responses of readers and critics to unattributed work.[3] This brief article is intended to show how, in the case of one important novel, anonymous publication led to intense speculation about likely attribution, a peculiar and heightened critical reception for the work, and a reading of the novel which bore some unusual emphases. In a coda, it is shown that the riddle of authorship was presented at the start of the novel in the form of an anagram; the anagram is then unscrambled for the first time.