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Ann Frank Wake

To cite this article: Ann Frank Wake (2001) Justine's trial revisited: A space for women's subculture in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein , European Romantic Review, 12:4, 493-516, DOI: [10.1080/10509580108570153](https://doi.org/10.1080/10509580108570153)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10509580108570153>



Published online: 03 Jun 2008.



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Justine's Trial Revisited: A Space for Women's Subculture in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Ann Frank Wake

"I am not sure that male eyes will not trace these lines, so I will endeavor to be as demure as an old maid — I wonder if you will understand the fitting supplement to that unfinished sentence."

Mary Shelley, Letter to Janey Barry, 28 July, 1827¹

That Mary Shelley acknowledged the power of the male gaze to shape female behavior can be seen in letters to close women friends, among them Janey Barry. Percy Shelley used the curious phrase "subterraneous community of women" to describe his recognition of female bonding that he could identify, but not interpret.² To assume that Mary Shelley might actually use such "knowledge" in constructing her fiction yields a somewhat different reading of woman-centered events in *Frankenstein*.³ The "male eyes" which might censure Shelley's own writing appear reflected in the letter to Barry as forces which not only shape women's behavior ("I will endeavor to be as demure as an old maid") but serve to build female confidences and alliances ("I wonder if you will understand the fitting supplement to that unfinished sentence"). This essay argues that Elizabeth's and Justine's interactions in *Frankenstein* make use of a similar strategy. Their "performances" during the trial scene become Shelley's vehicle for illuminating the dynamics, the necessity and the significance of female communities that supported women's emotional survival within the patriarchal construct.

Following Percy Shelley's death, Mary Shelley heavily relied on female friends. She developed deep feelings for Jane Williams, whose husband had drowned with Percy Shelley in 1822 and was, according to Betty Bennett "her most important link to that past" (*MWS Letters*, II, xiii). Williams betrayed their friendship in the summer of 1827 and the incident profoundly effected Shelley's life.⁴ More than ten years later Shelley wrote of the episode with a poignant depth of emotion that belied the passing of years. Her journal entry

of October 21, 1838 states: "My early friends chose the position of enemies . . . When I first discovered that a trusted friend had acted thus by me, I was nearly destroyed — my health was shaken. I remember thinking of Guatamotzin's bed of torture & with a burst of agonizing tears exclaiming I would prefer that to the unutterable anguish a friend's falsehood engendered! — I cannot forget that — it is wrong . . . there is no resentment — but the world can never be to me what it was before — trust, confidence & the heart's sincere devotion, are gone" (II, 556-57). Many journal entries chronicle the tremendous devotion Shelley showed to women friends, echoed in a line from *Frankenstein* after William's death and Justine's arrest when Elizabeth comments, "Our misfortune is doubly hard to us; we have not only lost that lovely darling boy, but this poor girl, whom I sincerely love . . . If she is condemned, I never shall know joy more" (76). In *Lodore* (1835), by contrast, the middle-aged character Cornelia "had rather avoided female friendships" because of "the treachery of one, and the misconduct of another, of her more intimate acquaintances" (84). The later work reveals the depths and risks of close female friendships that Shelley adopted from her own needs, longing and loss. In *Frankenstein* the strong bond between Justine and Elizabeth represents an ideal female friendship of the kind for which Shelley strove in her youth, but which later caused her tremendous grief and disappointment of the kind that her character Cornelia voids.

William Veeder's *Mary Shelley & Frankenstein — The Fate of Androgyny* (1986) provides the only extensive close reading of Justine's trial scenes to date,⁵ but Veeder, like Frankenstein himself, does not acknowledge the female friendship central to the women's behaviors. Through a psychoanalytic exploration of Elizabeth's behavior and motivations and Justine's reasons for confessing to a crime she did not commit, Veeder emphasizes the "subversive undercurrent" which demonstrates that "no one is innocent" (178). On the witness stand, Veeder finds that Elizabeth "is dispatching a wife-mother rival" (177) when her testimony fails to convince the jury of Justine's innocence. Several factors complicate this view, particularly the more recent feminist critiques of Freudian assumptions and theories about women.⁶ Veeder acknowledges that we "must avoid melodramatic simplifications" (182) of the women characters and that "what destroys them is not effeminacy but a world impossibly strong" (184). This interpretation implies, but does not clarify, the gender and class biases that determine and contextualize Elizabeth and Justine's responses. As the privileged interpreter, Frankenstein demonstrates at best a limited recognition and understanding of the subculture that nurtures and sustains the women in his story.

Apart from Veeder's reading, Justine's trial has been treated foremost as literary digression.⁷ Such presumed ramblings or strays from the "main"

point or plot line, the story goes, embody the kind of artistic “mistake” that should give well-trained minds reason to pause over wasted space. In his discussion of how Romantic poets use literal scenes in their poetry, Joel Haefner has called the spaces in which women in one Bluestocking group confronted themes considered “taboo” for them (in that particular context, “the domestic, the rural, the sexual” 266) a “kind of negative aesthetics, a negative space” (267). Indeed if we view space as “controlled by cultural factors and by the behavioral patterns of society” in which the “significance of space in art lies in its connection to feeling” (Sack qtd. in Haefner 257), then a traditional understanding of digression as excursive, straying or rambling must be rethought.⁸ Such space becomes a supremely valued and value laden commentary. “Narrative splits, subversive subsurface layers, and breaks,” writes Margaret Higgonet, “can all be seen as forms of resistance to totalizing images of narrative wholeness and closure” (196). To read the “social distribution of space and status” (Higgonet 205) in *Frankenstein* is to challenge the very notion of negative space and marginality typically applied to Justine’s trial scenes. Shelley’s painstaking treatment of detail in these scenes — even to the point of telling us where Frankenstein stands as he listens in a room — begs us to consider what happens in the gaps and marginalized spaces of women’s experience. Shelley makes this request within a risky context for women of the time, the political arenas of courtroom and prison within the quasi-liberal environment of late eighteenth-century Geneva. By setting *Frankenstein* outside of England, Shelley presumably created a “safe” space by which to critique another place at another time, while presenting a thinly veiled commentary on gender and class relations in England.

Contexts of power in Justine’s trial: gender and class politics

A dramatic irony in *Frankenstein* is that we, too, have been seduced by our interpreter (Frankenstein), and thus may have overlooked the actual cultural and social forces that contextualize the behaviors of women characters. Indeed, only Frankenstein can afford the luxury to “half invent the social forces aligned against [him]” (Sterrenberg 159) — for other characters such forces are all too palpable.⁹ Frankenstein simply *misses the point* of how women close to him interact, interpret, and ultimately show resistance. Dean Franco’s use of Lacan’s phrase “a glance that sees nothing” (82) suggests the significance of Frankenstein’s unseeing and unknowing gaze as he negotiates his path to ruin. The novel’s very structure begs the question as the privileged authorial gaze becomes decentralized by the layers of interpreting and reinterpreting of events by male characters.¹⁰

As he who “reads” all scenes which are then filtered through Walton, Frankenstein’s limited vision reveals not merely what Frankenstein experi-

ences, but what he does not or cannot perceive. Frankenstein proves to be a very bad reader of the one woman centered event in this novel; he altogether misses the significant dynamic of Elizabeth and Justine's solidarity. To read *without* our central character surely would be nonsensical, but to read *beyond* him — to give space to others, to read what he does not read or may not be capable of reading — yields some interesting possibilities for revisiting Justine's trial.

By exposing the political realities for women, Justine's trial recalls both the creature's experience and Mary Wollstonecraft's identification and critique of class and gender bias within the status quo in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.¹¹ According to Alan Richardson, "Both the monster and woman within patriarchy crucially differ from man in point of strength, the monster's difference being produced wholly, the woman's largely, by male intervention" (155). The trial scene thus provides a space and forum for critique of the class structure, which predetermined Justine's guilt based on her social position and gender (specifically as the failed surrogate mother to William). Shelley prepares us for the irony in these events through a letter written by Elizabeth to Frankenstein several months before William's death. In explaining how Justine, a servant girl, could become part of the family, Elizabeth writes: "A servant in Geneva does not mean the same thing as a servant in France and England. Justine, thus received in our family, learned the duties of a servant; a condition which, in our fortunate country, does not include the idea of ignorance, and a sacrifice of the dignity of a human being" (60). The trial proves Elizabeth wrong, but also opens her eyes. In her next statement to Frankenstein, Elizabeth reminds him that he will "remember the heroine of my little tale" (60), which both creates narrative space and sets the stage for Justine's exit as heroine/martyr.

Frankenstein correctly predicts the jury's mindset, for they would indeed never convict a highly trained, prominent scientist with such an easy (female, servant) scapegoat so near at hand. Short of presenting the elusive creature to the court, Frankenstein knows that he will escape censure. But the waters become muddied when Elizabeth intervenes, demanding to testify on behalf of Justine's "excellent dispositions and irreproachable conduct" (79). Justine, Elizabeth tells the court, had tirelessly nursed Mme Frankenstein in her last illness, had attended Elizabeth's own mother in her final days, and had been toward William "like a most affectionate mother" (80). Yet Justine's friendship with Elizabeth ultimately hurts rather than helps her. The jury misinterprets Elizabeth's testimony on Justine's behalf, betraying a class-conscious motive to punish the social outsider — the servant-mother — for neglect of duty. By unwittingly linking Justine in the minds of the jury with motherhood and death, Justine's fate is sealed by virtue of this unforgivable "crime" for which society must punish her.¹²

Veeder has read this scene as one that portrays woman pitted against woman in a reductive power struggle that Elizabeth (as Frankenstein's fiancée) would obviously win in the courtroom. By exposing the complexities of Elizabeth's role as character witness for Justine — which includes her subconscious need to “stress[ing] the servant's [Justine's] status as outsider” (175), — Veeder claims that Justine also becomes Elizabeth's victim. Elizabeth's speech on the stand presumably reveals her deep-seated rivalry against both Caroline Frankenstein and Justine, which overshadows her first intention to serve as “advocate” (172, 173) and explains to Veeder's satisfaction why the jury misconstrues Elizabeth's testimony. But although Frankenstein praises Elizabeth for so convincingly articulating Justine's “esteem and value,” the public and the court hear only that Justine acted ungraciously within her position:

A murmur of approbation was heard; but it was excited by her [Elizabeth's] generous interference, and not in favor of poor Justine, on whom the public indignation was turned with renewed violence, charging her *with blackest ingratitude*. (80)

Justine is punished for having “blackest ingratitude,” or the bad manners to defend herself. Veeder's psychological explanation of Elizabeth's rivalry toward Justine fails to account for the distinctly political context in which Elizabeth chooses to speak on Justine's behalf, and does not adequately account for why her intentions are misunderstood by the jury. Before the courtroom audience, only Elizabeth's own tentative association with the Frankenstein family (as “adopted” daughter and then as fiancée) creates a space to give her a voice. Regardless of this proclaimed Geneva convention to treat servants with dignity and humanity, Elizabeth's moment on the stand has been socially predetermined. In opting to speak, Elizabeth's courage makes Frankenstein's silence even more momentous — an astounding gap in both his own conscience and the narrative.

Elizabeth speaks of Justine *as her servant* in a manner of social protocol, although their deep friendship has been established prior to the event. Elizabeth couches her message in the language of class, as would be expected of a lady toward her servant in a “liberal” environment. This falsely crafted distance creates the only space for Elizabeth's words to have impact on the jury. “It may therefore be judged indecent in me to come forward on this occasion,” she proclaims on the stand (the words suggest that such space is not routinely culturally produced), “but when I see a *fellow creature* about to perish through the cowardice of her pretended friends, I wish to be allowed to speak, that I may say what I know of her character” (79). Attempting to resist class lines, to speak of Justine as a “fellow creature” and to call the

silent cowardly; means that Elizabeth, too, forgot her manners. Her testimony of Justine's dedication, loyalty and nurturing cannot be heard and the jury's response mimics Frankenstein's own preoccupation/inability to read the interactions and relationships between women in the broader sense. (For example, Frankenstein "did not feel the inconvenience of the weather; my imagination was busy in scenes of evil and despair" (72). Frankenstein indeed, always seems to be too busy to perceive the women around him on any other than the most superficial of levels.)

Class and gender clearly matter in Geneva, and the two — rather than a psychosexual rivalry — explain why Justine is punished for her *ingratitude* toward her benefactors. Elizabeth's testimony falls on deaf ears. What the jury *perceives* as important, and punishes, is indecorum — a breach of the mistress-servant relationship. Elizabeth's outpouring depicts how powerless she, too, remains within this public realm, in spite of her position as Frankenstein's fiancée (albeit, former servant). The politically disempowered female voice becomes that which is officially sanctioned in the courtroom. Elizabeth's action is cast as a frivolous gesture in political dabbling outside the bounds of female knowledge and space. The space, in effect, collapses around Elizabeth, requiring her to face Justine on new terms that temporarily undermine her confidence in herself and in humanity. "How shall I ever again believe in human benevolence?" Elizabeth laments after Justine confesses to the crime. "Justine, whom I loved and esteemed as my sister, how could she put on those smiles of innocence only to betray?" (81). Elizabeth loses her entire faith in humanity when she can no longer trust her "more than sister". The pain of her friend's confession proves to be as equally devastating to her as does William's death. Elizabeth's feelings of having been deceived and betrayed by Justine (based on Justine's confession) obliterate their shared history of deep friendship and trust — the feelings that gave Elizabeth the courage to testify unflinchingly on Justine's behalf and echo Shelley's feelings of betrayal in the letters and journals.

Martyrdom and women's community

In the trial scenes Shelley links Justine's martyrdom both to Elizabeth's difficulty in facing the future without her friend and to Frankenstein's continued physical and spiritual demise. During the trial Justine's emotions range from confidence in her acquittal based on her own and her witnesses' testimony, to confusion as her confidence in the court and the public wanes, and finally to a bullied confession as the weight of circumstantial evidence mounts against her. Having initially appeared "confident in innocence," but with no explanation for the evidence, her confusion is considered "proof of her guilt" (77). Elizabeth feels crushed by the weight of the painful "knowledge" that

Justine has Caroline's necklace in her possession but cannot explain the reason. Justine publicly acknowledges herself a victim of circumstance but opens the door to her punishment: "I know . . . how heavily and fatally this one circumstance weighs against me, but I have no power of explaining it . . . I commit my cause to the justice of my judges, yet I see no room for hope" (79). Justine recognizes that her low status combined with circumstantial evidence will close the door on justice.

In dying as a martyr, Justine clearly wins a psychological and spiritual battle over Frankenstein, a battle for which he himself has set the terms. Condemned to dirty knowledge, silence, guilt and outbursts of agony over her death, Frankenstein ironically no longer considers Justine a "subject for pity" (69). Justine's progression from confusion to confession and ultimately to transcendence in facing her own death positions her squarely within the tradition of Christian martyrdom. Veeder associates her punishment with Mary Shelley's notion of "true woman" not as the "'feminine' weakness" (184) which we might expect, but as a form of "radical purposiveness which releases her" (184-85). If the martyr accepts self-sacrifice as the means by which to prove that divine justice surpasses its human definitions and knowledge, Justine has retained a mythical moment of power equivalent to Frankenstein's own initial elation at having by-passed the divine source in his creation of life. On this point, Veeder agrees with U. C. Knoepfelmacher that Justine's "passive death becomes . . . a retaliation" (11) rather than with Moers that Justine "accepts guilt with docility" (99) (both qtd. in Veeder 185). Justine dies as triumphant martyr while Frankenstein suffers an evil twist of the classic Romantic agony, misinterpreting his own guilt as punishment for having achieved divine status.

In the 1831 edition, first submitted to a Mrs. Thomas in 1823, Shelley adds a passage late in the novel in which Frankenstein fancies himself a martyr, an act which literally, symbolically and ironically echoes Justine's martyred death. During Frankenstein's imprisonment on the island he, too, is accused of a murder (Henry Clerval's) that the creature committed. His situation completely mirrors Justine's, except that no one else knows the truth and would remain silent as did Frankenstein during Justine's trial. With punishment of death imminent, Frankenstein thinks:

— In truth, it was insanity, not of the understanding, but of the heart, which caused me always to think of one thing, of one sentiment, and thus there would at times escape to my lips, as a half stifled sigh may; though else unseen & unheard, just moves the flame that surrounds the martyr at the stake. But though he sigh, he will not recant, & though I more weak, gave vent to my pent up thoughts in words such

as these, yet I shrunk unalterably from anything that should reveal the existence of my enemy [sic]. (183)

The passage shows that martyrdom was on Shelley's mind when she revised the parallel scene to Justine's trial and death. It also demonstrates that Frankenstein recognizes the power in martyrdom and has had a twisted, egotistical understanding of the concept that mirrors his initial audacity to bypass a divine source and the female in creating a new life source. Frankenstein clings to the martyr's "stubbornness" to "not recant" or give in to external pressures. But he misses the point that a martyr's power comes from the *justice* of a cause and the triumph of a heart. In her testimony, Justine had spoken as a martyr, pleading "God knows . . . how entirely innocent I am. But I do not pretend that my protestations should acquit me" (78). "If their testimony shall not overweigh my supposed guilt," she says in reference to her character witnesses, "I must be condemned, although I pledge my salvation on my innocence" (79). This Christian framework applied honestly gives Justine the martyr's power, and makes Frankenstein the "more weak" (183). Frankenstein turns to the Romantic "god within," thus perverting the martyr's tradition and purpose. Here Shelley seems highly critical of the egotism inherent in Romantic ideology which has led Mellor and others to discover "why women didn't like Romanticism" (274-287). The emphasis on martyrdom at the expense of rebellion (Justine dies; Shelley cuts Elizabeth's anger out of the later edition) suggests Shelley's more realistic, if more hopeless, view of gender politics as she grew older.

Justine's plight ultimately mirrors that of the creature in grotesque-like fashion, for society judges both by appearances. But Frankenstein literally shrinks and withers, while Justine transcends the limitations of social trappings. As the creature's soul turns viler, Justine's becomes more serene. What happens between Justine's condemnation and death may be the most important scene involving women in the novel. Elizabeth's initial reaction to Justine's formal "confession" and the outcomes of their exchange in Justine's cell demonstrate the rebuilding of a shattered female community before the unknowing and uncomprehending male observer who tells the story his way. It proves to be extremely significant that Frankenstein hears, but does not listen, and reports, but does not internalize, Elizabeth and Justine's conversation at this moment.

Accompanied by Frankenstein, Elizabeth visits Justine one last time in the "gloomy prison chamber" (81), expecting to question and condemn Justine for the unspeakable act. Instead, Justine tells Elizabeth the "true" story, beginning with her psychological reaction that in the courtroom she began to believe herself "the monster" she was interpreted to be. Justine's confessor has conditioned her to accept her identity as if she indeed has committed

infanticide. In an echo of Frankenstein's self-admonition following the guilty verdict as "my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave" (72); Justine comments to Elizabeth: "I almost began to think that I was the monster that he [the confessor] said I was" (82). Justine then reveals the sinister verbal, emotional and spiritual abuse that she experienced in the prison: "He [the confessor] threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments, if I continued obdurate" (82). Bullied by a tyrannous representative of her faith into admitting, at the peril of her very salvation, her crime to all who "looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition" (82), Justine admits to the crime. "I am to suffer ignominy and death," she repeats to Elizabeth, the comment a telling reflection of her preoccupation with honor and reputation, the tattered remnants of a woman's social conditioning no matter her social class or circumstances.

The "retribution speech"

Elizabeth immediately believes Justine's explanation as to why she confessed, a testament to the trust they have shared in each other and indeed a catalyst for her own cynicism toward power structures. We have evidence for Elizabeth's anger and cynicism in the 1818 version of text, which William Veeder has called, for convenience, the "retribution speech." In this passage Elizabeth decries against the society that bullies confession from its least powerful individuals. She expresses an uncharacteristic, spontaneous rage which even Frankenstein's presence does not keep in check:

Yet heaven bless thee, my dear Justine, with resignation, and a confidence elevated beyond this world. Oh! how I hate its shews and mockeries! . . . The executioners, their hands yet reeking with the blood of innocence, believe that they have done a great deed. They call this *retribution*. Hateful name! . . . Yet this is not consolation for you . . . unless indeed that you *may glory in escaping* from so miserable a den. Alas! I would I were in peace with my aunt and my lovely William, escaped from a world which is hateful to me, and the visages of men which I abhor. (83 second italics mine)

Far from passive here, Elizabeth boldly articulates her frustration and anger toward the injustice of patriarchal constructs implied by the behaviors of the clergy, the jury and, although she does not realize it, her fiancé. Her usually controlled and self-deprecating speech becomes completely undercut. Ironically, Frankenstein reports that he "had retired to a corner of the prison-room" in order to "conceal the horrid anguish that possessed [him]" (83). In other words, he is not really paying much attention. Frankenstein's self-absorption reflects his disinterest in what the two women are saying. Within

the private sphere of their friendship, Elizabeth “confesses” her recognition of how completely ineffectual justice and life become in the name of “retribution”. Yet she turns Justine’s condemnation into a triumph by elevating her above the men whom would have her murdered. Justine may “glory in escaping” from these abhorred visages.

Veeder interprets Elizabeth’s “retribution speech” as a telling comment on the judiciary in relation to “true womanhood.” “Set off against state and church and venal individuals,” writes Veeder, “true womanhood is presented not as debilitatingly weak but as touchingly vulnerable” (184).¹³ Yet Elizabeth’s is an angry speech, not a “touchingly vulnerable” one. Veeder’s assessment may on one level implicate Frankenstein in his own self-absorbing dilemma: he recalls Elizabeth’s words but finds no reason to feel threatened by her reaction. Are the words merely echoes of Romantic manifestos against injustice familiar to Mary Shelley, or is Frankenstein simply ignoring a feminist outcry? Mary Shelley’s feminism may very well converge with Mary Wollstonecraft’s and Percy Shelley’s in this speech. She addresses, in abstract and subliminal language, unequal distributions of power, and the injustice of patriarchal systems, institutions and customs. But inherent in these words, as in Frankenstein’s very inattention to them, we find not merely the suppression of female anger and talent, but of the mechanisms — lack of serious response, lack of space — responsible for disempowerment. Elizabeth’s words mimic familiar radical politics of the time, perhaps heard so often that they become ineffectual. We might even ask how Elizabeth would have learned these political views, living as sheltered as she was. We are not prepared for this political outburst within the narrative context; a gap occurs between what Frankenstein would have Elizabeth know, and what she knows. This scenario proves consistent with recent interpretations of early nineteenth century education as a means by which “women, colonized peoples, the nascent proletariat,” together with Shelley’s creature, are “within the frankly hegemonic social discourses of Shelley’s time, infantilized” (Richardson 157). Although the women are perceived (by Veeder and, no doubt, Frankenstein) as “infantilized,” the discrepancy between Elizabeth and Justine’s knowledge and Frankenstein’s assumptions regarding that knowledge, prove to be different indeed. Once initiated into the power system, Elizabeth reveals in the “retribution speech” her new knowledge. She recognizes *for herself* that her own and other women’s vulnerability is a controlled, deliberate product and protocol of female and class experience within patriarchal institutions, indeed, a dangerous and sobering knowledge.

Justine, unlike Frankenstein, immediately understands the import of Elizabeth’s words in the “retribution speech,” but is forced to reject them: “I must not learn the lesson that you would teach me,” she tells Elizabeth. The

coded language in which Elizabeth as teacher shares a powerful discovery — a “lesson” — with her condemned friend, reveals a shared communication which Frankenstein misses. By seeing the “infantile” female in a (familiar) powerless position, he hears what he wants to hear and sees what he wants to see. He has no questions, he does not respond in surprise or outrage to Elizabeth’s feminism. Recognizing that acceptance or rejection of Elizabeth’s angry conclusion (to “glory in escaping so miserable a den”) would debilitate her “Christian” response to death, Justine suggests that the magnitude of Elizabeth’s anger might prevent Justine’s very “salvation.” Justine thus chooses to take the words personally, rather than politically, as an acknowledgment of Elizabeth’s faith in her. “I feel as if I could die in peace,” she tells Elizabeth, “now that my innocence is acknowledged by you, dear lady, and your cousin” (83). This statement parallels Elizabeth’s anguished comment upon hearing that Justine had confessed to William’s murder, “If she is condemned, I shall never know joy more. But she will not . . . and then I shall be happy again” (76). The assumption of a sustaining bond between sisters is a life line for them both — a bond so powerful that a “blessing” from one gives meaning to the other’s unjust death. The women’s subculture that triumphs in this scene, provides indeed both space and measure by which to determine Frankenstein’s success or failure in human terms.

Behaving as the consummate martyr before her death, strong and serene in facing the scaffold, Justice is shown to be forgiving of her accusers. In an ironic moment, she steps out of her intimate conversation with Elizabeth and, turning to Frankenstein, resumes her role as the family servant when addressing him. “Dear sir,” she comments to Frankenstein, “you are very kind to visit me; you, I hope, do not believe that I am guilty” (83). Justine here unwittingly twists the knot of deceit more tightly around his neck: “The tortures of the accused did not equal to mine; she was *sustained by innocence*, but the fangs of remorse tore my bosom and would not forego their hold” (80 italics mine). In place of the “languid,” knowing smile she had for Elizabeth, Justine addresses Frankenstein with polite, distanced regard represented by the servant’s customary use of the third person: “I truly thank him. In these last moments I feel the sincerest gratitude towards those who think of me with kindness” (83). This passage also proves ironic, given that Justine was condemned for “blackest ingratitude” and because she absolved the culprits who victimized her. Her spiritual superiority reigns over Frankenstein and renders him impotent. As Elizabeth rises to leave, Justine “assumed an air of cheerfulness” (84). She admirably “tried to comfort others and herself,” and, based on Frankenstein’s observations, “indeed gained the resignation she desired” (84). She blesses Elizabeth in their final exchange: “dearest Elizabeth, my beloved and only friend; may heaven in bounty bless and

preserve you; may this be the last misfortune that you will ever suffer. Live, and be happy, and make others so" (84). The benediction mocks past and future events for which Frankenstein is responsible, not least of which will be Elizabeth's murder.

In Justine's absence, Elizabeth assumes her familiar role with Frankenstein. Yet the undercurrents of her conversation imply that Frankenstein has indeed been ignorant of the depths of exchange which occurred between Justine and her. "*You know not, my dear Victor, how much I am relieved,*" she tells him (84 italics mine). "Now my heart is lightened. The innocent suffers; but she whom I thought amiable and good has not betrayed the trust I reposed in her, and I am consoled" (84). Elizabeth again speaks the eulogy expected of a "lady" toward her former servant, but also clarifies that the sisterhood and subculture that had been threatened have been fully restored. Frankenstein now suffers from the martyred servant's spiritual and ethical superiority. Justine now has psychological control over her condemner. Frankenstein tells Walton, "I was a wretch, and none ever conceived of the misery that I then endured" (84). He lacks the imagination to consider what Justine faces; he has extended a gaze that "sees nothing."

Frankenstein merely tells Walton that he noticed a change in Elizabeth following Justine's death. She had "become grave, and often conversed of the inconstancy of fortune, and the instability of human life" (88). Elizabeth, however, told Frankenstein much more than this. After Justine's death, she tells him that she:

can no longer see the world and its works as they before appeared to me. Before, I looked upon the accounts of vice and injustice, that I read in books or heard from others, as tales of ancient days, or imaginary evils; *at least they were remote, and more familiar to reason than to the imagination; but now misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood.* (88 italics mine)

Elizabeth's personal recognition leads to sorrow; that is, the political has become personal and the personal, political. She too faces the caverns of a spiritual and imaginative hell: "I feel as if I were walking on the edge of a precipice, towards which thousands are crowding, and endeavoring to plunge me into the abyss" (88). She also unwittingly condemns her fiance to further torture when she determines the murderer to "have been the most depraved of human creatures" and "unfit to remain in the society of men" (88). "But even if I were condemned to suffer on the scaffold for the same crimes," Elizabeth continues, "I would not change places with such a wretch" (88). Not knowing that Frankenstein "in effect, was the true murderer" (88), Eliza-

beth perceives his anguish over Justine's death. Ironically, she interprets his pain as equal to her own due to the "expression of despair, and sometimes of revenge, in [his] countenance, that makes [Elizabeth] tremble" and reassuringly tell him "I would sacrifice my life to your peace" (89).

Elizabeth's story

Elizabeth's own life has consisted largely of years waiting for her marriage with Frankenstein to take place, although he rarely communicates and she feels compelled to challenge his sincerity on one occasion. Fearing his regret of their "attachment," she writes: "You have traveled; you have spent several years of your life at Ingolstadt . . . that I could not help supposing that you might regret our connexion" [sic] (185). One might suppose that her feelings lie beyond the structural boundaries of the narrative, for Frankenstein himself rarely considers her life as he pursues his own. Her concerns strangely echo the dynamic between Walton and his sister, Mrs. Saville, who silently receives his letters (Frankenstein, significantly, rarely writes letters home, even to his fiancée).

Shelley's story "The Mortal Immortal: A Tale" (1833) suggests that she had other visions and spaces for women in mind shortly after the third edition of *Frankenstein* was released. Written two years after the publication of Shelley's revised edition of the novel, the story, in effect, rewrites the character of the silent female fiancée (Elizabeth) in *Frankenstein*. Bertha, unlike Elizabeth, is brash and outspoken. Elizabeth's "retribution speech" in the 1818 text would not be surprising or out of character if uttered by Bertha. By casting the story as a "tale" she ensures more narrative space in which her imagination and the outspoken character Bertha might move. This work, like *Frankenstein*, centers on an ambitious, obsessed scientist, who in the story also neglects his relationships in order to satiate desire. The narrator, slavishly mentored to Cornelius Agrippa, falls obsessively in love with a very strong woman named Bertha. When this narrator disappears for days, completely absorbed in work and neglectful of his engagements, Bertha takes immediate action. In a telling passage we are told that the scientist was "forced to remain, day and night, feeding [Agrippa's] furnaces and watching his chemical preparations" (221). Bertha "waited for me in vain at the fountain. Her haughty spirit fired at this neglect . . . she received me with disdain, dismissed me in scorn . . . she would be revenged! — And truly she was" (221). Somewhat less egocentric than Frankenstein, the scientist eventually repents of his neglect and marries Bertha, albeit at great consequence as the plot unravels. Bertha, unlike Elizabeth, refuses to remain silent or to wait, and insists upon her way. The narrative design of *Frankenstein*, by comparison, requires a fissure in the narrative by which female desire and possibility can be acknowledged.

Revision lessons

In identifying the major shifts in Shelley's philosophy suggested by the revisions from the 1818 to the 1831 texts, Mellor notes that in the third edition Elizabeth Lavenza's position in the Frankenstein family is "both more legitimate and more oppressed": "No longer a blood-cousin, she is an orphan adopted by Caroline Frankenstein; no incestuous overtones accrue to her marriage to Victor" (*Her Life* 175). Mellor suggests that the elimination of the "retribution speech" demonstrates the degree to which those in the novel are now bound by the "immutable laws of nature" so that Elizabeth, as a dependent with no free will, has "become a cypher, the woman as the silenced Other" (176). By 1831, writes Mellor, "Mary Shelley had lost faith in the possibility that a generous, loving, and nurturant response to both human and physical nature might create a world without monsters" (176). Even the creature comes to life by accident via a surprise strike of lightning, rather than through an act of Frankenstein's own will (173).¹⁴ Yet the influence of fate necessarily impacts Frankenstein the most, as the only one with any real freedom. It seems less clear that the oppression increases for Elizabeth and Justine, who bear the impact of Frankenstein's choice to remain silent (the true test of his free will) in both editions. The changes in the text make Justine's martyrdom clearer at the same time that Frankenstein's motivation appears diluted and more subject to uncontrollable forces which were operating in the women's lives in both versions. The ultimate difference in the women's responses from first to third edition lies in how they *choose to act* in the midst of these forces of "fate" and oppression, as suggested by the following revisions Shelley introduced.

Elizabeth's words of anger and retribution [the "retribution speech" 82.30-83.17] are preceded in the first version by Justine's plea that Elizabeth "ought to raise me with thoughts of a better life, and elevate me from the petty cares of this world of injustice and strife. Do not you, excellent friend, drive me to despair" (82). Elizabeth poignantly responds, "I will try to comfort you; but this, I fear, is an evil too deep and poignant to admit of consolation, for there is not hope" (82). Elizabeth's "retribution speech" then follows. In the 1831 version Shelley recasts the "retribution speech" to shift the conversation from Elizabeth's more political reaction to resignation toward Justine's inevitable punishment and martyrdom. In both instances Justine dictates the terms of Elizabeth's response. In the first version when Elizabeth first sees Justine she cries through her sobs:

. . . why do you kneel, if you are innocent? I am not one of your enemies; I believed you guiltless, notwithstanding every evidence, until I heard that you had yourself declared your guilt. That report,

you say, is false; and be assured, dear Justine, that *nothing can shake my confidence in you for a moment, but your own confession.* (82 italics mine)

At this point, Justine explains that she was “besieged” by her “confessor,” who “threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was” (82). Shortly after, Elizabeth responds,

Oh, Justine! forgive me for having for one moment distrusted you. Why did you confess? But do not mourn. Do not fear. I will proclaim, I will prove your innocence, and force belief. Yet you must die; you, my playfellow, my companion, my more than sister. I never can survive so horrible a misfortune. (82)

The above passage is substituted by the following in the third edition:

Do not fear. I will proclaim, I will prove your innocence. I will melt the stony hearts of your enemies by my tears and prayers. You shall not die! — You, my play-fellow, my companion, my sister, perish on the scaffold! No! No! (246)

In the first edition Elizabeth insists that she will prove Justine's innocence; she will “force belief.” At the same time she recognizes that she cannot save Justine's life: “Yet you must die.” She claims that she herself cannot survive this unjust death. The later version shows more decisiveness and insistence that Elizabeth herself, by “melt[ing] the stony hearts of [her] enemies by tears and prayers,” might prevent Justine's death. The shift lies not merely in conviction, but in *how* to act. The later passage presents an appeal to religious principles not present in Elizabeth's earlier words. While Elizabeth will “proclaim,” “prove” and “force” in the earlier version, in the later version she will “proclaim,” “prove” and “melt” hearts through “tears and prayers.” In effect, she will try to shame the jury into the right decision. The response proves consistent with the overall more obvious attention to martyrdom as the only source of salvation for Justine, and also reinforces the importance to both women that trust and faith in each other remain the firm and sustaining force.

In the third edition, rather than explode into the “retribution speech,” Elizabeth is coaxed into accepting God's will:

Justine shook her head mournfully. ‘I do not fear to die,’ she said; ‘that pang is past. God raises my weakness, and gives me courage to endure the worst. I leave a sad and bitter world; and if you remember me, and think of me as of one unjustly condemned, I am resigned to

the fate awaiting me. Learn from me, dear Lady, to submit in patience to the will of Heaven!' (246)

The conventional response to "submit in patience to the will of Heaven" provides Justine with hope at the same time that it exposes the tools by which the oppressor assures the continuance of status quo politics. In the third edition Frankenstein specifically uses the language of martyrdom when discussing Justine's case. He tells us that "Elizabeth's heart-rending eloquence failed to move the judges from their settled conviction in the criminality of the *saintly sufferer*" (246 italics mine) and Justine "perished on the scaffold as a murderess!" (246). The emphasis on martyrdom itself as a major motif in the third edition profoundly demonstrates Shelley's clearer understanding of the bitter ways of the world, as gender and class bias doom the least powerful individuals.

The shifts in perspective, from political response in the "retribution speech" of the first edition to looking to an Afterlife in the third, imply that Shelley herself experienced the hopelessness of confronting injustice, power and gender politics. While she felt "no hope" in the early edition, Elizabeth would still fight a just cause. In the later edition we see resistance to Justine's death itself; "You shall not die! . . . perish on the scaffold! No! No!" (246) followed by a consequent rejection of political response. Feminist psychologist Ellyn Kaschak offers a psychoanalytic process much different in kind from Veeder's which more fully accounts for Elizabeth's change in response. As women gain in experience and maturity, Kaschak has found through her research that they must inevitably recognize and grow despondent over the extent to which patriarchal boundaries set limitations on women's lives. For Kaschak, feminist psycho-therapy "includes the work of mourning the various losses for every woman, central among which is the loss of the possible as a function of gender restrictions" (222). "Disappointment," she continues, "is well embedded in female psychology and must be acknowledged before the work of regaining the possible can begin" (Kaschak 222). If woman is to move beyond disappointment in order to "regain[ing] the possible," she must be able and allowed to feel anger. Anger is "directly related to power and the ability to change" (222). The "retribution speech" of the first edition shows Elizabeth's anger and would suggest a hope for change. Elizabeth's acceptance in the third edition of the conventional Christian response leads to a kind of maternal lamentation — "perish on the scaffold! No! No!" — which seeks to protect, but responds within the framework of "tears and prayers" (246), the only realistic social response for the woman as bystander to injustice. What happened to Shelley's anger that made the "retribution speech" such a telling and important contribution to these scenes in the first edition? What can we say about Elizabeth and Justine when the speech is gone?

Kaschak's model suggests that Elizabeth's rage in the 1818 text might demonstrate a more positive relationship to women's anger and its associated "power and the ability to change" which Shelley herself may have envisioned in her own youth (before her twentieth year when she wrote the first version). As a 34 year-old widow when the third edition was published, Shelley had a son, a father-in-law who would support her child but never acknowledge her, and a need to keep writing to support herself. How feasible would political change seem to a woman dependent on someone else to support her son, and who in turn, snubbed her in the process? Shelley's own biography merges with the female backlash against Romanticism, and changes in her character Elizabeth reflect this shifting reaction to literary and social climate and the realities of daily life.

While the revisions of *Frankenstein* clearly reflect change in Shelley's world view, including a far greater pessimism as discussed by Mellor (*Her Life* 170), the changes also demonstrate how women coped and performed in the midst of "male eyes" which demanded they be "demure" and self-effacing to be acceptable. To her close female friends, Shelley could drop the image. She preceded the comment in the opening quote by presenting the ironic and bemused context in which Janey Barry was to read what followed, writing: "does the bright lilly raise its head lightly & cheerfully? [sic] — God send it may never in the slightest degree droop! . . . I am not sure that male eyes will not trace these lines. . ." (MS). The pretense of cheerfulness belies the resignation embedded in the rhetorical syntax of the questioning. Shelley shows her awareness and concern as to whether or not other women recognized the game as they played out the dynamics of intruding audiences even in their "private" correspondences. Here Shelley "tests" female sympathy toward social prescriptions for women's behavior and acknowledges that "male eyes" force even knowing women to "demure" as "old maid(s)". In similar fashion, Shelley wrote to Jane Williams in the same year (shortly after the latter betrayed their friendship): "I hope the incongruity of all this will please you but for woman's sake, being a woman — let not the sight of such trash draw Jeff's mouth into a sarcastic smile — " (MS).¹⁵ The distinctions between what women *show* and what they *know* exude from both letters, although Shelley's remark to Jane Williams hints of a personal distrust. Jane Williams could show her husband what Shelley had written, and, in effect, betray her again as in the past.¹⁶ But the bond of womanhood holds them together so that Shelley still responds in code. Shelley would trust her women friends, and would sometimes pay the price. The two letters referenced here suggest that Shelley hoped to enlighten women friends if they did not recognize the gendered power structure at work even in unexpected, private places.

Shelley's subsequent treatment of women as icons and passive victims in later fiction also can be viewed as a deliberate strategy by which Shelley

comments on their very marginality. In *Lodore* (1835) Shelley's omniscient narrator claims, "A man is more thrown upon the reality of life, while girls live altogether in a factitious state" (117). The artificial behavior reflects expectation, not reality. Justine's conventional response in both editions to "look to heaven" remains a quick fix, which Elizabeth rejects in Shelley's first edition, and accepts later, as Shelley reaches her own mid-thirties. Justine's words to "Learn from me, dear lady, to submit in patience to the will of Heaven!" (83) suggest the angel-woman preparing to do her duty. We can only wonder at Shelley's anguish over such a response — her recognition that oppressed peoples are conditioned to find in the Afterlife the hope they could not find in their lived lives. The recognition that "male eyes" and "sarcastic smiles" determine woman's behavior seems reinforced in the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, in which we see the pessimism that emerges when Shelley's anger proved futile. Woman as monstrous "other" finds space for expression and redemption, ironically, in notions of marginalization which have literally been understood and labeled as "digression" in the text. Stripped even of anger as Shelley grew to "know better" in the midst of the "male eyes", Elizabeth draws true strength not from resignation, or the clergy, or belief in judicial process, but from her trust in and friendship with Justine. *Frankenstein*, however, does not know this, even though his own gaze shapes their very lives. We might say that the entire novel, as well as Justine's trial scenes, occupies the "negative aesthetics" or "negative space" (Haefner 267) by which Shelley confronts a woman's tabooed subjects, or subjects considered taboo for a woman to reveal to outsiders. We see how women learn, strategize, respond and ultimately triumph using the means and power most available to them — each other. In the end, Justine's trial shows what female community really means, how it gives dignity, and how it survives. Such community demonstrates, by contrast, the magnitude of *Frankenstein's* monstrosity. Indeed, after such knowledge, what forgiveness?

Elmhurst College

Notes

This article appeared in earlier form as chapter two of my dissertation, *Factitious States: Mary Shelley and the Politics of Early Nineteenth-Century Women's Identity and Fiction*, The University of Michigan, c1989.

1. The letter (MS) is part of the "Loose papers of William Godwin and Mary Shelley" in the Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford, England. Quoted by permission of Lord Abinger.
2. I quote from the editors' note in the *Journals*, which identifies the phrase "subterraneous [sic] community of women" as possibly being provoked by reading Ludvig Holberg's book *A Journey to the World Under-Ground* (English trans. 1742), which "describes an underground province of Cocklecu, where the women assume the dominant role in society". Mary had already gone to bed before this particular discussion, but notes reading the book in January 1817 (*Journals* I, 32 n.1). The date makes it possible that Shelley was influenced by the work as she completed drafts of the first edition of *Frankenstein*, which she finished in May 1817 (pub. March 1818). Claire Clairmont (Jane) was Mary Shelley's step-sister with whom she had a tempestuous relationship at best. Clairmont traveled and lived with Percy and Mary off and on before and after their marriage in December 1816.
3. All quotations from *Frankenstein* (both the 1818 and 1831 versions) and the "Introduction to the Third Edition" are from James Reiger's edition and cited by page number parenthetically within the text.
4. Bennett describes that Williams, who was "not like-minded," had spread "malicious tales" about Shelley. When Shelley learned of the betrayal in the summer of 1827, Bennett claims that it "brought on an emotional crisis almost as intense as the one she experienced at [Percy] Shelley's death" (*Letters*, II, xiii). The July 13, 1827 journal entry depicts her first recorded response to the behavior: "My friend has proved false & treacherous! Miserable discovery . . . Not for worlds would I attempt to transfer the deathly blackness of my meditations to these pages — let no trace remain — save the deep — bleeding, hidden wound of my lost heart — of such a tale of horror & despair" (*Journals* II, 502-03). In April of the next year (1828), still distraught, Shelley departed for Paris, "sick at heart yet pining to see my Friend" (II, 507). The friend was not Jane Williams, but Julia Robinson. Having lost one sustaining female bond, Shelley characteristically sought another intense female relationship.
5. See Veeder, Chapter 6, "The Women of *Frankenstein*," especially pages 172-85. Veeder and I differ primarily in how we interpret the psychological "undercurrents" of Elizabeth and Justine's behavior, as the ensuing analysis will show.

6. See Gardiner's useful summary of psychoanalysis and its uses, as well as feminist reformulations of psychoanalytic theory (113-145). For a succinct discussion of the influential Lacanian rereading of Freud which has shaped our understanding of woman as "Other" in the symbolic order, see Smith, 14-15. In sum, Smith clarifies the problematic nature of applying Freudian critiques of literary texts: "Ultimately the theorists, like the historians, have not questioned their underlying assumptions about writing and sexual difference, about genre and gender, about the intersection between ideologies of selfhood and ideologies of gender" (15).
7. Ellen Moers commented early in the renaissance of Mary Shelley scholarship that the novel "brought a new sophistication to literary terror, and it did so without a heroine, without even an important female victim" (79). More recent critical readings have attended to women in the text, only to draw similar conclusions. See especially Poovey, Richardson and Dickerson for discussions of ways in which female passivity and victimization infiltrate the text. I want to demonstrate here that such conclusions result, at least in part, from accepting Frankenstein's particular subject position (as the narrative encourages). Frankenstein ignores the social, political and gendered aspects of Elizabeth and Justine's circumstances. In this respect his ignorance and solipsism demonstrate Shelley's own rejection and revision of "Romanticism." See Curran, Mellor ("On Romanticism and Feminism" and "Why Women Didn't Like Romanticism") and Ross for excellent discussions of ways in which Shelley and other women writers of the period critiqued, revised, and "feminized" Romanticism.
8. Joel Haefner considers the uses of "real" or literal scenes within Romantic texts; i.e. the setting of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* or Coleridge's lime-tree bower, whereas I want to address the more structural and formal uses of space and focus on why Shelley devotes so much space to the seemingly "peripheral" story of Justine and Elizabeth. I have made reference here to two tenets which Haefner identifies as part of the rubric of "behavioral geography".
9. Lee Sterrenburg commented early on that "the novel often deals with the problems of the subjective viewer, who is projecting upon others a private vision of demonic persecution". Mary Shelley, he continues, "pays a good deal of attention to how characters misperceive or half invent the social forces aligned against them" (159). Sterrenburg has identified the issue I address here, but in the end focuses solely on "Victor's subjec-

tive fantasies of the Monster he has created" (159) and consequently never determines how social forces in the text apply to women characters.

10. See Dunn for an excellent discussion of the implications of the novel's narrative structure.
11. Alan Richardson cautions against any reading which would "underestimate the force of its [Frankenstein's] Wollstonecraftian dimension, its exposure of the untenability of woman's position in a male-dominated society ultimately no more hospitable to Elizabeth than to the creature . . ." (156). Shelley's *Journals* show that she read the *Vindication* off and on throughout the period of composing *Frankenstein*.
12. See Homans, Knoepfelmacher, Langbauer and Rubenstein for discussions that focus on the implications of associating motherhood with death. A quote from Langbauer proves particularly relevant here: "The maternal is that which threatens a system of power — patriarchy or representation — and is cast out accordingly, her absence shoring it up" (215). Both Justine and Elizabeth must be "cast out" for the threat they pose to the "system of power," as embodied in the trial scenes.
13. While Veeder means to cast this vulnerability in a positive light, this interpretation fails to account for the tone, content, context and power of Elizabeth's speech.
14. For a discussion of differences between the 1818 and 1831 texts beyond the scope of this text, see Mellor's chapter "Revising Frankenstein" in *Mary Shelley*. Mellor attributes many personal tragedies, including the deaths of her husband, two children, Byron, Jane William's betrayal, and troubling financial circumstances, to why Shelley became convinced "that human events are decided not by personal choice or free will but by material forces beyond our control" (170). Mellor concludes that in the 1831 edition Shelley "reshaped her horror story to reflect her pessimistic conviction that the universe is determined by a destiny blind to human needs or efforts" (171). Even Frankenstein becomes the "pawn of forces beyond his knowledge or control" (171). I would suggest that Frankenstein's oblivion to the import of Elizabeth's and Justine's interactions stand out in both editions to the point that the larger pessimism which governs the novel becomes submerged in the 1831 text.
15. This letter (MS) of September 23, 1827, is part of the "Loose papers of William Godwin and Mary Shelley" in the Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford, England. Quoted by permission of Lord Abinger.

16. In a letter written in 1839 to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who had married Jane Williams, Shelley responded ironically to his criticisms about omitted details in her edition of Percy Shelley's poetry by rekindling the bitter feelings she had for Jane: "I thank you for your kindly expressed insinuations. I began to be fed on poison at Kentish Town — it almost killed me at first — now I am used to it — & should have been heartily surprised not to have been supplied with a large dose on the present occasion . . ." (*Letters II*, 309). The comment, based on the broken friendship of 14 years before, attests to the seriousness by which Shelley continued to experience her female friendships, and the degree to which they influenced her life. Elizabeth and Justine's strength of friendship in *Frankenstein* suggests that Shelley believed in female community as a significant means by which women survived within patriarchal culture. That she felt betrayed in her own life by women friends would no doubt compound the devastating effects of patriarchal structures and expectations on her as a woman writer. Poovey argues, somewhat reductively in my view, that Shelley became so preoccupied with the notion of the Proper Lady that she became one so that she "would seem to be only what a lady should be" (144). In my view, that Shelley on occasion distinguished between what women knew and what they revealed, would suggest that she used the Proper Lady as a strategy by which to demonstrate the effects of patriarchy on women.

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