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Patchwork Paratexts and Monstrous Metapoetics: “M reads Ovid”

Genevieve Liveley

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is, like its own monster, notoriously made up of disparate literary genres and parts, stitched together into a novel shape at once familiar and strange.¹ Amidst its patchwork of mismatched genres we find fragments of epic, epistles, snatches of poetry, travelogue, tragedy, scientific, political, and philosophical treatise. Alongside bits and pieces taken from her father’s novels, from various European ghost stories, from Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Rousseau, and Locke, we find fresher meat cut from Wordsworth, Coleridge, from Percy Shelley, and from the latest scientific dissertations (especially on Erasmean Darwinism and electrical galvanism).²

Yet, just as Victor Frankenstein garners the knowledge to animate his monstrous creation from both ancient and modern sources, it is the ancient corpus of the classical tradition which—indirectly and directly—provides Mary Shelley with several of the core body-parts for her ghost story: recognizable bits and pieces are plundered from Aeschylus, Lucretius, Seneca, Lucan, Plutarch, and Ovid—particularly Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.³ What is more, by re-examining the paratexts to *Frankenstein* where she meditates upon her own metapoetics, we notice that Mary Shelley’s reading of Ovid is mediated through a secondary patchwork of texts—a monstrous corpus made up of different translations, commentaries, notes, and illustrations.⁴

In this chapter, then, I want to take a closer look at Mary Shelley’s engagement with Ovid. In particular, I want to propose a fresh evaluation of George Sandys’s 1632 *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished* in terms of the significant influence this key translation and

commentary is likely to have had upon the reception of Ovid in *Frankenstein*. Sandys's work, as we will see, represents not only a crucial intertext in mediating Mary Shelley's access to Ovid, but also presents an ideally matched paratext both for the *Metamorphoses* and for *Frankenstein*. It is, in Gerard Genette's terms, "composed of an assorted set of practices and discourses of all sorts and of all ages, ... [a] convergence of effects."⁵ Its own patchwork of translation, commentary, quotation, cross-referencing, and illustration, has much to contribute to our finer appreciation and understanding of what happens when Mary Shelley reads the *Metamorphoses* or—as the Godwin-Shelley journal for spring 1815 puts it—what happens when "M reads Ovid."⁶

<1>Monstrous Metapoets: Ovidian Frankensteins

My mind compels me to tell of shapes changed into new
bodies; Gods (for you have inspired these changes too)
inspire my work and from the first origins of the world
up to my own times, spin out my continuous song.

In *nova* fert animus mutatas dicere formas
corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illas)
adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi
ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (*Met.*) 1.1–4⁷

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is notoriously made up of incongruous literary genres and story parts, epic transformed into a novel shape ("*nova*") at once familiar and strange. This is a work—like *Frankenstein*—which repeatedly calls attention to its own veracity and believability, not least of

all through its intricate structure of tales within tales, its biased narrators and credulous narratees, its monstrous humans and humanized monsters who demand our sympathy even while they invite our horror. Amidst this poetic patchwork of mismatched genres—again, like *Frankenstein*—we also find epic and epigram, elegy and epistle, travelogue, tragedy, science, politics, and philosophy fused together in a complex narrative form.⁸

Beyond these “formal” parallels, there are a great many points of correspondence between the *Metamorphoses* and *Frankenstein*. The affinity between M and Ovid is perhaps most obviously signalled in the parallels between the central plot of *Frankenstein* and the choice bits of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in which some human creature is brought to life. There are a remarkable number of such stories in Ovid’s poem: Prometheus’ creation of man from the elemental parts of chaos (1.76–88); Deucalion and Pyrrha’s transformation of hard stones into men and women (1.313–415); Medea’s rejuvenation of Aeson (7. 159–349); Pygmalion’s creation of a woman from pieces of ivory (10. 243–514); and Aesclepius’ re-animation of the dismembered body-parts of Hippolytus (15. 479–546). The Ovidian versions of these stories are each further remarkable for the dark tones and sombre hues in which they are depicted. Ovid does not focus *any* of these miraculous (re)creation narratives upon a successful denouement. Instead, Ovid denies a happy ending to each of these characters. He chooses to follow the narrative of each story beyond the point of the miracle moment of vivification, moving forward in time to show the dreadful repercussions in the aftermath of each of these transformations.

Thus, when Ovid’s Prometheus mixes together earth, water, and air to make the body of man, he unwittingly reintroduces conflict and chaos to the fragile equilibrium of the newly formed cosmos.⁹ In Ovid’s account, an unnamed deity had only recently imposed order and stability upon the primordial chaos by *separating* its hitherto warring elements—earth, water,

and air (1.32–31). Prometheus' mistake in bringing them back together in the body of man is confirmed by the references in Ovid's narrative to the new earth (1.80: *recens tellus*) only recently separated from the air (1.80: *seductaque nuper ab alto / aethere*) which Prometheus now mixes with water (1.82: *mixtam pluvialibus undis*). Prometheus' creature represents the re-embodiment of chaos and, as such, reintroduces conflict and disorder to the new world order.

Deucalion and Pyrrha, the children of Prometheus and Epimetheus respectively, blindly repeat Prometheus's mistake when the time comes for *them* to recreate the human race—the first Promethean iteration having been wiped out in a cataclysmic flood sent by the gods as punishment for its violent and disorder. In this case the couple lack Prometheus' technical skills, and the crude creation process they adopt brings to life men and women whose hearts and lives turn out to be as hard as the stones from which they are formed (1.414–415). Indeed, in Ovid's version of this story, Deucalion and Pyrrha are overtly censured for turning to artificial means of reproduction, and for their failure to procreate naturally: Deucalion seeks to emulate his parent in this story but, Ovid suggests, might have done better to have simply become a parent himself.

Ovid's account of Medea's preparations for Aeson's rejuvenation emphasizes her dangerously "Promethean" or Titanic character as her airborne search for magical herbs leads her to eye-up (*perspicit*: 7.226) "Mount Ossa, Mount Pelion, Othrys, Pindus, and higher Olympus" (7.224–225) —the very mountains that the Titans had once used in their fight to take Olympus from the gods. Medea's magical powers represent an analogous threat to the immortal gods no less than to humans in Ovid's tale: her rejuvenation of Aeson leads to the murder of Pelias (7.294–349) but Medea's real crime, Ovid intimates, is rooted in her appropriation of powers properly reserved for the gods.

Ovid's Pygmalion story *appears* to offer a happy ending. But, as the story itself warns, appearances can be misleading (10. 252). Ovid's narrative ends abruptly at the point of vivification, with the artist's creation opening frightened eyes and seeing for the first time her creator and the sky (10.293–294). A brief epilogue explains that Pygmalion's creature (she is never named) subsequently bears a child, Paphos. But Ovid is uncharacteristically silent on either Pygmalion's or his creature's reaction to her transformation, and refrains from offering authorial comment on this. However, Pygmalion's quasi-incestuous desire for his own beautiful creation will lead in the next generation to an incestuous horror that deforms and destroys the lives of his descendants—casting a retrospective shadow and question-mark over the Pygmalion story too.¹⁰

Ovid's tale of Hippolytus, a strange “mash-up” of two mythological characters and their stories, offers a similar blend of light and dark. Killed in a tragic chariot crash, Hippolytus has all of the pieces of his mangled body put back together again by the pioneering doctor Aesclepius. Successfully brought back to life by the doctor's arts and powerful herbs, Hippolytus is hidden away and given a new face (it is not clear whether this is to hide his disfigurement or to conceal from others the fact that he has been brought back from the grave) and a new name. He spends the rest of his life as Virbius—the twice-born man—living out of the way and out of sight in the woods (15.479–546), just as Frankenstein's creature will do. He also blames his father for his cruel fate, just as Frankenstein's creature will do. As Ovid's *Metamorphoses* makes clear, the creation—or reanimation—of man (or woman) is a dark art, with consistently unpredictable and dangerous results.

Appropriately perhaps, given the dreadful repercussions that Ovid's own poetry would bring him in the form of his exile in 8 C.E, each of these Ovidian creator/re-animator characters

can and have been read as metapoetic figures for the author of the *Metamorphoses* himself.¹¹ Their stories of re-animation and transformation serve as potent analogies for Ovid's own project to breathe new life into old, inert, material. Or, as Ovid puts it in his programmatic proem (1.1): "to tell of forms changed into new bodies." Similarly, M's creator/animator character can and has been read as a metapoetic figure for the author of *Frankenstein* too. In the 1818 edition, both Frankenstein and his creature are represented within the novel as storytellers, self-referentially referring to the veracity of their "narration." In her introduction to the revised 1831 edition of the 1818 text M retrospectively identifies herself with Victor Frankenstein in referring to the novel as her own "hideous progeny" (1831, xii). What's more, in that same introduction, she refers to her inspiration for the story of *Frankenstein* as "so very hideous an idea" (1831, v); to Frankenstein's creature as a "hideous phantasm of a man," a "hideous corpse" (1831, x); and to all three as "my hideous phantom" (1831, xi). She thus invites us to conflate the nightmare inspiration for her literary creation both with the text of *Frankenstein* and with Frankenstein's creature, both of which "terrify the artist" responsible (1831, x). She writes (1831, v–xii, emphases added):

How [did] I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, *so very hideous an idea?* [...]—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw *the hideous phantasm of a man* stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. *His success would terrify the artist*; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated

would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of *the hideous corpse* which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. [...] I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. [...] And now, once again, I bid *my hideous progeny* go forth and prosper.

So inextricably connected are the monstrous metapoetics of this commentary, that M conflates the opening of Victor's narrative of the making of *his* monstrous creation with the original opening of *hers*. M tells us that the morning after her horrible dream, she began her story (1831, xi): "with the words, *It was on a dreary night of November*, making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream." Victor's narrative begins identically ([1818] 1993, 51): "It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils." We are invited by such metapoetic allusions in this paratext, therefore, to identify the 1818 novel as a "reanimation" of M's dream, and to see the 1831 reworking of the novel too as a kind of "reanimation" of M's "hideous progeny"—her "creature" *Frankenstein*. At the same time as the new body of the 1818 *Frankenstein* novel is revised and re-published by M in 1831, so the monster inside it is brought to life anew.¹²

<1>Monstrous Metamorphoses: Matter unform'd and Ovid

Every thing must have a beginning, ... and that beginning must be linked to something that went before.

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, "Introduction" (1831, ix)

In the paratextual introduction to the 1831 reanimation of her "hideous progeny" from 1818, M offers us a detailed metapoetic commentary upon the "beginnings" of her novel, upon both the inspiration and composition of her creature, *Frankenstein*. She writes that (1831, ix): "Invention,

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

According to M’s metapoetics, poetic creativity is a process of transformation—all poetry a kind of metapoetry. Literary creation entails giving form to “dark, shapeless substances,” giving form to the material of chaos. In this analysis, literary “invention” is explicitly figured as a kind of metamorphosis. And M’s “creature,” her *Frankenstein*, is explicitly represented as the product of such metamorphosis—literally fashioned out of a chaos of pre-existing materials, reformed from the corpses and corpuses of the dead “that went before.”

Appropriately, M does not herself “invent” these ideas about invention and inspiration. Behind her allusions to literary beginnings and chaos lie Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in which Chaos consists (im)precisely of such “Matter uniform’d and void” (7.233) and represents the raw “classical” material out of which Milton shapes his poem. Milton even begins his epic with the metapoetic conflation of his (own) and His (God’s) creation: “In the Beginning ... the Heav’ns and Earth / Rose out of Chaos: ...” (9–10). And behind the beginning of Milton’s epic lies the beginning of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Ovid’s own metapoetic cosmogony (1. 5–9) where he tells us that:

Before there was sea and earth and sky to cover all
there was one face of nature in the whole world,
which is called chaos: a rough and disordered mass,
nothing but lifeless substance and crowded together
the turbulent seeds of incompatible elements.

ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum
unus erat toto naturae uultus in orbe,
quem dixere chaos: rudis indigestaque moles
nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem
non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum.

Ovid’s primordial chaos—a state of continuous change and flux in which “nothing retains its own shape” (1.17: *nulli sua forma manebat*) — reminds us that this new poem does not itself emerge from a void, but from a pre-existing mass of classical stuff. Just like Ovid’s chaos and cosmos, his poem also represents a transformation of the mass of literary material “that went before.”¹³

M’s paratextual comments remind us to value the transformation and the translation no less than the model. They invite us, too, to go in search of the raw materials behind M’s inspiration and invention in *Frankenstein* —the classical “Matter uniform’d and void” from which she shapes her novel. They invite us in particular to look to the wealth of shape-shifting substance afforded her by Ovid, his *Metamorphoses*, and its own paratexts—the translations, commentaries, notes, and illustrations that would have been to hand when M read Ovid.

In fact, the co-authored journals from the Shelley-Godwin household tell us that M was reading Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* throughout the spring of 1815, as these extracts from the journal show:¹⁴

April 8th ... read 15 lines of Ovids metamo[r]phosis with Hogg

April 9th Read some lines of Ovid before breakfast ... Read Ovid with Hogg (finish second fable). Shelley reads ... the story of Myrrha in Ovid.

April 10th Mary reads third fable of Ovid

April 11th Read fourth and fifth fables of Ovid

April 15th Read Ovid till 3 ... Read Ovid (ninety-five lines)

April 16th draw and read a few lines of Ovid ... Read Ovid (54 lines only)

April 17th Read Ovid ... After tea Read Ovid 83 lines

April 18th [by Percy] Rise late – s. reads Aristo – the Maie [Mary] Ovid – S. & C. go out.

C makes S. a present of Seneca. buy Good's Lucretius – Jefferson [Hogg] & the Maie go

for bonnets after dinner with Clara. S. reads Ovid – Medea and the description of the

Plague – After tea M reads ovid 90 lines ...

April 21st After tea read forty lines of Ovid

April 22nd Read a little of Ovid ... After dinner Fanny goes. Read sixty lines of Ovid.

[several leaves of journal lost]

Between 23 April 1815 and 4 May 1815 Construe ovid (117) & read some cantos of

Spenser - Shelley reads Seneca

May 5th Read Spenser; construe Ovid ... Shelley reads Seneca

May 10th Construe Ovid. After dinner construe Ovid (100 lines)

May 12th Construe Ovid (90 lines) ... Read over the Ovid to Jefferson [Hogg], and
construe about ten lines more.

May 13th Read Ovid (60 lines)

M encounters Ovid's poem in bits and pieces—on some days reading whole books or episodes (“fables”), and on some days construing the text line by line, parsing and analysing the grammatical parts and syntactical connections of Ovid's Latin. The distinction she draws between reading “fables” and reading “lines” suggests that she is sometimes reading the text in translation, making swift progress, and sometimes construing in Latin, making much slower

progress. Together, her progress is such that she includes in her reading list for 1815, “Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in Latin” (Shelley, Feldman, and Scott-Kilvert 1987, 47). This is a unique entry in her extant reading lists. M reads the rest of her classics in translation and by the page or book chapter rather than by the line. What’s more, references to her efforts to “construe” and to reading by “line” only appear in the Shelley-Godwin journals in reference to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Elsewhere in her journals, any numbering she gives explicitly refers to whole book chapters or volumes, pages, and cantos. Thus, in her journal of August 1816 she occasionally records “translate and read” in relation to Italian (Cerseau) and French writers (Izouard and Madame de Genlis), but *not* to any of the classics (Virgil and Quintus Curtius Rufus), which she evidently reads in translation. And in her entry for August 4th that year (Percy’s 24th birthday) she records: “go out with Shelley in the boat & read aloud to him the fourth book of Virgil—after dinner we go up to Diodati but return soon—I read Curt. with Shelley and finish the 1st vol.”¹⁵

Something special is happening when “M reads Ovid” then. And if we can establish a better understanding of what is involved in this reading we might also gain a better understanding of how M’s construal of Ovid is mixed in with her construal of *Frankenstein*.

<1>Patchwork Paratexts: Prometheus mixt

That Maker, the best World's originall,
 Either Him fram'd of seed Caelestiall;
 Or Earth, which late he did from Heauen diuide,
 Some sacred seeds retain'd, to Heauen ally'd:
 Which with the liuing streame *Prometheus* mixt;
 Sandys, *Ouid's Metamorphosis Englished* (1632) 1. 78–82

From the paratextual evidence of her journal entries we can confidently assume that M sometimes reads Ovid in translation and sometimes in the original Latin. Sometimes she has Hogg/Jefferson to help her, sometimes (presumably) she has Percy, and sometimes she will have had a dictionary, a commentary, and a reference translation or “crib” to help her. There are a number of different possible texts and paratexts that M could have had at her disposal to aid her reading of the *Metamorphoses* in Latin. The most recent English-Latin edition in circulation was that of Orger (1811), which aims—and largely fails—to capture the poetry of the original in a literal rendering in English rhyming verse. The translation itself takes centre stage in this edition, with the corresponding Latin text squeezed onto the bottom of each page in a pica font, making this a largely useless text for anyone seriously interested in translating Ovid’s Latin for themselves.

Much more helpful to M would have been one of the standard English-Latin editions of the *Metamorphoses* popularly used in schools at this time. One such text from 1748 (reprinted in various formats up to 1812) “for the use of schools as well as private gentlemen,” edited and translated by Bailey, advertises on its cover: “The Latin text and order of construction on the same page; and critical, historical, geographical, and classical notes, in English, from the best commentators both ancient and modern; with a great number of notes entirely new.” On each page it presents ten lines of Latin set alongside a breakdown of the Latin syntax, set on top of a literal translation, and an abbreviated commentary. The commentary notes include relatively little that is actually “new,” but very clearly represent (as its cover paratext promises) the summary and synthesis of pre-existing commentators—most notably Sandys. For, although it is a decidedly “literary” translation and not a “school” edition per se, Sandys’s detailed notes and commentary accompanying his heavily revised 1628 translation in the 1632 *Ovid's*

Metamorphosis Englished continued to be reprinted (in handy duodecimo as well as folio) and to serve as an authority on Ovid's text well into the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Accordingly, Bailey's annotated "school" edition of the *Metamorphoses* explains that Prometheus was a scientist, a "knowing Prince" skilled in "Agriculture, Physic, and other Sciences," as well as a sculptor. Bailey also notes (again, *pace* Sandys) that Ovid's pagan account of the creation of man mirrors that of God's creation of Adam in *Genesis* (Bailey 1748, 9–10). The other Latin-English texts of the *Metamorphoses* circulating in this period broadly follow the same line of commentary, and the same format, again typically summarizing and synthesizing key bits of Sandys.¹⁷

There are plenty of other "literary" English translations that might have additionally or alternatively mediated and aided M's reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Yet once again, Sandys's facilitating influence as a commentator appears to the fore. Golding's creative translation in thumping fourteeners would have been as little help to a student translating Ovid's Latin in 1815 as it is today, so is an unlikely option. But M's journal references to reading Ovid's "fables" might suggest familiarity with Dryden's 1700 *Fables Ancient and Modern*. Admittedly, Dryden's selection of stories in the arrangement—comprising only six of Ovid's "fables"—does not supply anything like that which might be understood as configuring the second and third, or "fourth and fifth fables" which M records reading sequentially in her early engagement with the *Metamorphoses*. This makes it highly unlikely that M is using Dryden's *Fables* as her "crib" for translating the whole of Ovid's epic—although it is highly probable that she would have had known this popular collection.

It is also possible (probable, in fact) that M would have consulted the famous multi-authored translation of the whole *Metamorphoses* from 1717, produced under the direction of Samuel Garth and including bits and pieces from Dryden (who translates book one), Pope,

Addison, Congreve and “other eminent hands.” Yet, as a “crib” to aid a student’s linguistic understanding and parsing of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the original, Garth’s Augustan translation is far from ideal. Beyond Garth’s preface, there is no commentary or annotation, and the translations—albeit exquisitely formed—are, as Garth himself acknowledges in a preface, not “too exact” (Garth 1751, xlix). Notice the elaboration and deviation from the original in Dryden’s translation of Ovid’s proem (*Metamorphoses* 1.1–4):

Of Bodies chang'd to various Forms, I sing:
Ye Gods, from whom these Miracles did spring,
Inspire my Numbers with Celestial Heat;
'Till I my long laborious Work compleat:
And add perpetual Tenour to my Rhymes,
Deduc'd from Nature's Birth, to *Caesar's* Times.

My mind compels me to tell of shapes changed into new
bodies; Gods (for you have inspired these changes too)
inspire my work and from the first origins of the world
up to my own times, spin out my continuous song.

Garth makes no apologies for this free style of translation, criticizing by comparison Sandys’s earlier rendering as too “verbal.” Garth does, though, recommend that readers of his multi-authored translation consult Sandys’s work on the *Metamorphoses*, for (1751, xli–xlii): “Mr. Sands has, by a laborious Search amongst the Mythologists, been very full. He has annex’d his Explanations to the End of each Book, which deserve to be recommended to those, that are

Curious in this figurative Learning.” Even if reading Garth, Dryden, *et al*, then, M will have been directed towards Sandys to illuminate her reading of Ovid.

Indeed, whatever Ovidian texts and paratexts M consulted during the spring and summer of 1815, it is highly likely that Sandys’s “classic” translation and commentary was among them. Despite Garth’s criticisms, Sandys’s version was read widely among members of the Romantic circle. This is the translation of the *Metamorphoses* that we know Wordsworth (and in all probability, Percy Shelley) read at school, and this is the version that Keats also preferred.¹⁸ Byron knew Sandys’s translation of the *Metamorphoses* too—reportedly reading it on his wedding day.¹⁹ And among the library sale catalogue lists for M’s father, William Godwin, we find not one but three editions of Sandys’s translation of the *Metamorphoses* (from 1626, 1638, and 1640). Godwin also owned Golding’s translation in Seres’ 1567 imprint, but the Garth edition is noticeably absent.²⁰ The balance of probability suggests, therefore, that Sandys—in some form—figured prominently among the paratexts supporting M’s reading of Ovid in 1815. At a bare minimum, this would have been through the reproduction of something based on his commentary and notes in an edition of the Latin text—“Every thing ... must be linked to something that went before.” But evidence in both *Frankenstein* and in the Shelley-Godwin journals suggests that when M reads Ovid she is also reading Sandys directly.

In the notes to his commentary on each book of the *Metamorphoses*, Sandys draws his readers’ attention to a host of classical sources treating similar myths and themes, or sharing common allusions and phrasing. In his commentary and notes to Book 1 we therefore find references to Homer’s *Iliad*, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Horace’s *Odes*, Virgil’s *Aeneid* and *Georgics*, alongside cross-references to other parts of the *Metamorphoses* and to other Ovidian works. There are quotations too from Manilius (*Astronomica*) and Pontanus (*Meteorologica* 464–473)

—the humanist and natural scientist renowned for his theories on the different forms and powers of lightning. We also find frequent references to Lucretius, Seneca (especially the tragedies), and Lucan. Sandys quotes from these authors repeatedly and extensively, giving both the original Latin and his own verse translation in each instance. In his notes to the commentary on Book 1 for example, Sandys quotes at length from Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 2.600–603, Lucan *Bellum Civile* 3.247–248 and 4.74–82, and Seneca *Hippolytus* [or *Phaedra*] 972–989. Sandys does not mind that Ovid would not have read Seneca or Lucan. For him, the *Metamorphoses* is a patchwork poem, its origins and inspirations—along with its generic affiliations and its poetics—an ordered chaos.

Now, it may be simply coincidence that the Shelley-Godwin journals and reading lists for 1815 show Percy reading Lucretius and Seneca at the same time as he and M are both reading Ovid. And it may be coincidence that, as Jesse Weiner has demonstrated, *Frankenstein* echoes these classical authors in its learned allusions to Senecan philosophy, Lucretian atomism and Lucanian chaos.²¹ But the Sandys connection is certainly suggestive. Suggestive, not least of all, because it helps to explain an apparent anomaly in the chain of reading and reception which has M demonstrating her close familiarity with Lucan in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* but seeming only to read his *Pharsalia* or *Civil War* in the summer of 1819. The Sandys connection also reminds us that it is not only Seneca's philosophies that Percy is likely to be reading, but also Seneca's tragedies—his *Oedipus*, *Thyestes*, and *Hippolytus* (as the *Phaedra* was then known) —those horrifying, gruesome, palimpsests infamous for the monstrous poetics of disintegration and amalgamation that they perform.

If we take a closer look at Sandys's translation, notes, and commentary on the Promethean creation story from Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses*, we can map yet more significant

parallels between Sandys's Ovid and M. In Sandys's translation of *Metamorphoses* 1.76–83 we find the Latin translated thus:

The nobler Creature, with a mind possest,
Was wanting yet, that should command the rest.
That Maker, the best World's originall,
Either Him fram'd of seed Caelestiall;
Or Earth, which late he did from Heauen diuide,
Some sacred seeds retain'd, to Heauen ally'd:
Which with the liuing streame *Prometheus* mixt;
And in that artificiall structure fixt
The forme of all th' all-ruling Deities.

sanctius his animal mentisque capacius altae
deerat adhuc et quod dominari in cetera posset:
natus homo est, sive hunc divino semine fecit
ille opifex rerum, mundi melioris origo,
sive recens tellus seductaque nuper ab alto
aethere cognati retinebat semina caeli.
quam satus Iapeto, mixtam pluvialibus undis,
finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum.

There is not much of significance to note in Sandys's translation here, beyond observing his close rendering of the Latin, his translation of Ovid's *sanctius animal* as "nobler Creature," and his avoidance of Ovid's epic circumlocution in translating *satus Iapeto* (literally, "son of

Iapetus”) as “Prometheus”. In his commentary, however, a more interesting—and proto-Frankensteinian—picture of Prometheus and his “Creature” emerge. Maintaining the same ambiguity found in Ovid in respect of who “really” created man, Sandys aligns Prometheus with Ovid’s *opifex rerum* (literally, “maker of things”), the same all-powerful deity responsible for the original creation of cosmos out of chaos, the “Maker, the best World's original,” he who (1632, 19): “raised the heauy, illuminated the obscure, quickned the dead, gaue forme to the deformed, and perfection to the imperfect.”

Sandys takes pains here as throughout his commentary to insist upon the proto-Christian sensibilities of his pagan poet. In his commentary to the birth of Prometheus’ “Creature” (1632, 24–25), he stresses the remarkable similarities between Ovid’s account of Prometheus’ creation of man and that found in the Bible’s *Genesis*. In an allegorical reading of the text, Sandys further seeks to explain why Ovid paradoxically attributes the first creation of man to a man, figuring Prometheus as an ancient sculptor, philosopher, astronomer, and even as a pioneering natural scientist. Sandys also connects here the myths of *Prometheus plasticator* and *Prometheus pyrphoros*—that is, Prometheus as creator of man, *and* as thief of fire—an aspect of the Prometheus myth that is absent from this story in the *Metamorphoses*.²² We can readily see how *this* Prometheus—scientist and philosopher, *plasticator* and *pyrphoros*, with the godlike power to quicken the dead—might inspire M, and serve as one of the prototypes of Victor Frankenstein.

There are several further striking analogues that potentially link Sandys’s Ovidian commentary to M’s novel. In Sandys’s rationalization of Ovid’s account of the earth-born giants we find a hint as to why Frankenstein’s earth-born creature might also (if somewhat unexpectedly and unnecessarily, given that he is made out of human and possibly animal body parts appropriated from “the dissecting room and the slaughterhouse”—Shelley [1818] 1993, 48)

be represented as a giant, both in terms of his stature *and* his rebellious, destructive, character (Sandys 1632, 27):

It is said that the Earth, intraged with *Iupiter* for the slaughter of the *Titans*, in reuenge produced Gyants of a vast proportion: yet rather so called of their monstrous Mindes. For the statures of Men are now as heretofore: as appeares by the embalmed bodies of the *Aegyptians*, and by the ancient Sepulchers in *Iudea*.

Sandys's commentary, as it were, fleshes out the bones of Ovid's narrative, and offers a more detailed picture of those key parts of the *Metamorphoses* which appear to have found their way into M's imagination and thence into *Frankenstein*. Frankenstein's monster is not (only) a giant because Victor finds that in building his creature "the minuteness of the [body] parts formed a great hindrance" (Shelley [1818] 1993, 47), but because his mind is monstrous, prone to rebellion and destruction. Sandys's connection between giants and Egyptian mummies may also be significant here, given Frankenstein's description of his horror at first seeing his (giant) creature brought to life (Shelley [1818] 1993, 51): "A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch."

Indeed, among the patchwork of paratexts that makes up *Ouid's Metamorphosis Englished*, there are several illustrated plates which make their own important contribution to Sandys's translation and transformation of Ovid—and, in turn, to M's reception of Ovid and to her own translation and transformation of the *Metamorphoses* in *Frankenstein*. As a final consideration of the potential impact that such paratexts might have made upon M as she read Ovid in 1815, we should therefore consider the images used to illustrate the *Metamorphoses*—and the Prometheus story in particular.

In the editions of Sandys's translation and commentary published from 1632 onwards (including, then, two of the editions in the library of M's father), the opening text of each Book chapter is illustrated with a copperplate engraving by Clein and Savery [insert Liveley-Fig 1 here]. Each plate depicts a composite tableaux of key scenes from the Book to follow. Thus, in the illustration to Book 1, we see sketched out in the background, Syrinx pursued by Pan; Mercury playing his pipes to Argus as he guards Io; and Daphne transformed into laurel, with the slain Python at Apollo's feet. In the centre of the tableaux we see the hooded figures of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the stones behind them taking on human form; to the left we see Lycaon fleeing Jupiter's wrath; to the right we see the giants piling the mountains of Pelion upon Ossa in their attempt to launch an attack upon the heavens and overthrow the gods. And in the foreground, the focal point of the tableaux and the scene etched out in the greatest detail and depth (contrasting starkly with the brief thumbnail sketch of 13 lines that Ovid gives the story in the Latin text), we see Prometheus at work on his creature [insert Liveley-Fig 2 here]. In contrast to his maker, the creature is naked, like the giants fighting atop the mountains behind him. And he is proportionately their size, further reinforcing this implicit connection between them. He is not yet animate, as suggested by the limp arm which Prometheus holds up, and by (what appears to be) the fennel stalk which Prometheus holds above the creature's heart: Prometheus, it seems, is pictured at the very point of animating his creature—with stolen fire. The myths of *Prometheus plasticator* and *Prometheus pyrphoros* are here conjoined. But it is an unsettling image. The creature's limbs are in anatomical proportion, its features beautiful, its muscles clearly showing beneath the skin, its hair black and flowing, but its pale face with its dark, hollow eyes suggests death much more than life.²³

The chances of M having encountered this image *somewhere*—in her father’s library, in Percy’s library, or on her own desk—are high. Indeed, taken together with the host of other Sandian details that are scattered throughout the novel, it is no exaggeration to say that scraps of Sandys’s patchwork paratext are to be encountered *everywhere* in the text of *Frankenstein*. Anticipating Victor Frankenstein’s character, Sandys’s Ovidian Prometheus is first and foremost a pioneering natural scientist, a “knowing Prince” skilled in “Physic, and other Sciences,” and is even likened to Pontanus—the fifteenth century scientist renowned for his theories on the powers of lightning. Pre-empting M’s own parallels between Frankenstein’s “Creature” and the Bible’s Adam, Sandys similarly sees Prometheus’ creation of his “nobler Creature” directly mirroring that of God’s creation of Adam—in which vein Sandys’s Ovidian Prometheus is likened to the divine “Maker” who “raised the heauy, illuminated the obscure, quickned the dead, gaue forme to the deformed, and perfection to the imperfect.” What’s more, the illustrations to Sandys’s commentary and translation correspond closely with M’s own descriptions of the giant size and ghastly appearance of the Creature. And Sandys’s commentary notes and translated quotations from Lucan and Lucretius even cast new light onto how it is that M can display a detailed knowledge of Lucan in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* but seem only to read his *Civil War* in the summer of 1819.

Of course, we can never determine with absolute certainty the precise translation or translations (if any) that M consulted during her own readings of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Nor can we determine unequivocally the Latin text and any notes and commentary she used. But it would be incredible if her encounter with Ovid did not in some way bring her into contact with Sandys. Indeed, the balance of probability and the weight of evidence suggest that M was familiar with the full patchwork of paratexts that makes up *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished* and

that these materials helped both to inform and to give form to the dark shape of her *Frankenstein*. For nothing is ever created “out of void,” and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is—in part—made out of Sandys’s Ovid.²⁴

Images

Figure 1: Book 1: Illustration from George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 1632 folio edition. <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/sandys/bk1start.htm>

Figure 2: Prometheus: Detail from George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 1632 folio edition. <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/sandys/bk1start.htm>

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¹ The creature tacitly recognizes his own patchwork composition in correctly interpreting Victor's desire to return him to that state (Shelley [1818] 1993, 153): 'You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph.' See also Reichart (1994, 155) and Weiner (2015, 52): "Frankenstein's monster is a patchwork man, a collage of ill-assorted pre-existing parts, grotesque in the artificiality of their combinations."

² See Pollin 1965.

³ Frankenstein is influenced by Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus (Shelley [1818] 1993, 30). See also Weiner (2015, 73).

⁴ "Paratext" describes those bits and pieces of a text that are not part of the main body of work or narrative *per se*, but which do contribute to its interpretation and reading: titles, epigraphs, prefaces and introductions, translations, commentaries, notes, reviews, illustrations, etc. Here I treat the 1818 edition as the core text and the 1831 edition as a "paratext" offering potential insights into the composition and poetics of the earlier work. "Metapoetic" describes an author's self-reflexive treatment of writing (poetry or literature) as a subject for or motif within their own writing.

⁵ Genette (1991, 262).

⁶ See Shelley, Feldman, and Scott-Kilvert (1987, 43–47). Hereafter, this chapter refers to Mary Shelley as ‘M’.

⁷ All translations are my own unless otherwise attributed, based on Miller’s Latin text.

⁸ On the generic diversity of the *Metamorphoses* see Solodow (1988, 9–36).

⁹ See Liveley 2002.

¹⁰ See Janan 1988.

¹¹ See Wheeler 1999 and Tissol 1997 on Ovid’s self-conscious narration. See Ovid *Tristia* 2.207–252 on the “*carmen et error*” (“poem and mistake”) that led to his exile in the frozen wilderness of Tomis. Ovid describes Tomis as an ice-bound polar outpost at the edge of the world, where the sea is frozen solid for several months of the year, where ships become trapped in the ice, and men must walk on foot across the snowy landscape (*Tristia* 2.188–196; cf. *Tristia* 3.10.27–40). Both Ovid and Frankenstein end their days as exiles in the ice and snow at the edge of civilization.

¹² Frankenstein’s own character and story are proleptically conflated with those of his monster in Walton’s repeated descriptions of Victor as a “creature” ([1818] 1993, 14) who is “restored ... to life,” helped by Walton’s friendly ministrations through which “a new spirit of life animated the decaying frame of the stranger” on board his ice-bound ship ([1818] 1993, 15). Indeed, Walton is himself a highly metapoetic character: self-educated, having spent his youth running “wild on a common” ([1818] 1993, 7), he works through the volumes in his “uncle Thomas’s library,” he is “passionately fond of reading,” and “a poet” influenced by Milton, Shakespeare, and the classics, who “for one year lived in a Paradise of [his] own creation” ([1818] 1993, 5). He is thus a hybrid of both Percy and Mary Shelley, of Victor Frankenstein, and of his creature. What is more, the

sister to whom he narrates his strange tale via letter (Margaret Walton Saville) shares the same initials as his own creator (Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley).

¹³ This includes: Hesiod *Theogony* 116–125, Apollonius Rhodius 1.496–48; Diodorus Siculus 1.7; Aristophanes *Birds* 693–94; and Lucretius *De Rerum Natura*.

¹⁴ See Shelley, Feldman, and Scott-Kilvert (1987, 43–47). In 1815, M was not yet married to Percy Shelley and retains her father’s name, Godwin.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶ On the various editions of Sandys’s Ovid see Davis 1948.

¹⁷ See Clark’s 1752 edition of Ovid’s text with his own translation (“as literal as possible”), aimed at “Beginners” in Latin, both in and out of school. Clark’s preface on the traditional pedagogical and philological merits of using a literal translation to guide a “reading” of the original Latin offers ample testament to this long-standing scholarly habit and confirms the likelihood that this is how M too would have “read” Ovid.

¹⁸ See Wu (1993, 161) and Colvin (1917, 171).

¹⁹ See Hunt 1841.

²⁰ Although Godwin did own Dryden’s *Fables Ancient and Modern*. See “Texts Godwin Read”:
<http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bibl/> [accessed 23.02.2017]

²¹ Cf. Weiner (2015, 46–74). M’s journal records that she “finishes” Lucan’s *Pharsalia* between 24 Sep 1819 and 29 Sep 1819—that is, *after* writing *Frankenstein*.

²² Sandys also links this “creation” story to that of Deucalion and Pyrrha by stressing their relationship to Prometheus and Epimetheus.

²³ Compare Frankenstein’s description of his creature: “His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the

work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.” ([1818] 1993, 51).

²⁴ Thanks to the editors and to *Modern Prometheus* conference participants for feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter. My very grateful thanks too to Tim Saunders, David Hopkins, and Emma Hammond for helping me pull my collage of thoughts on this topic together.