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Izvorni znanstveni članak

## **BETWEEN MATRICIDE AND PATRICIDE: FRANKENSTEIN THROUGH A KRISTEVAN LENS**

### **Abstract**

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a multilayered work and, as such, enables multiple interpretations. One such interpretation is the application of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic, feminist theories to Mary Shelley's biography. By following Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's theories, Julia Kristeva thematized the influence of the mother in a patriarchal world. The character of the mother is at the center of her theory. She claims that one needs to separate from the mother and her body if one wishes to be independent. To be more precise, one needs to commit matricide as a first step towards independence. However, a mother's body can never be completely rejected and as such, it always exists on the „borders of one's identity.”<sup>1</sup> Kristeva's theory is especially applicable to Mary Shelley's biography – the death of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft; Mary Shelley's alienation from her father; several miscarriages and tragic deaths in the family. To Shelley, as well as Kristeva, the character of the mother, is the focus of interest. Even though the character of the mother is present in *Frankenstein's* text and subtext, the novel is not only about mother(s) but also about father(s). Through the motif of asexual creation, Mary Shelley criticizes her father, William Godwin, for neglect; male encroachment into the female sphere of childbearing and childrearing and finally, she criticizes patriarchal society for marginalizing women. Thus, *Frankenstein* can be understood as a critique of inadequate parenting that thematically wavers between matricide and patricide.

*Keywords:* Julia Kristeva; matricide; patricide; patriarchy; Mary Shelley; *Frankenstein*

<sup>1</sup> Diane HOEVELER, „Fantasy, Trauma, and Gothic Daughters: *Frankenstein* as Therapy,” *Prism(s): Essays in Romanticism*, god. VIII., 2000., br. 7. – 28., str. 51.

## IZMEĐU MATRICIDA I PATRICIDA: FRANKENSTEIN KROZ VIĐENJE JULIJE KRISTEVE

### Sažetak

Višeslojno djelo *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley omogućava mnogobrojne interpretacije. Jedna od takvih interpretacija jest i ona koja povezuje psihoanalitičku, feminističku teoriju Julije Kristeve s biografijom Mary Shelley. Upravo je takva interpretacija cilj ovoga rada. Julia Kristeva je, naslanjajući se na Freudove i Lacanove teorije, tematizirala problematiku i utjecaj majke u patrijarhalnome svijetu. U samoj srži njezine teorije je majčin lik. Ona, naime, tvrdi da se svaki pojedinac, želi li biti samostalan, nužno mora odvojiti od majke i njezina tijela. Preciznije, mora počinuti matricid kao prvi korak ka samostalnosti. No, majčino se tijelo nikada u potpunosti ne može odbaciti i kao takvo uvijek postoji na „marginama identiteta.“<sup>2</sup> Kristevina teorija može nam biti izrazito zanimljiva povežemo li ju s biografijom Mary Shelley: sa smrću njezine majke Mary Wollstonecraft pri porodu, s otuđenošću od oca te nekoliko pobačaja i tragičnih smrti u obitelji. Za Shelley, kao i za Kristevu, majčin je lik u središtu pozornosti. Iako je u romanu *Frankenstein* lik majke prisutan i u tekstu i u podtekstu, roman se ne tiče samo majki, nego i očeva. Kroz aseksualno stvaranje samoga bića Mary Shelley kritizira vlastitoga oca zbog zanemarivanja, zbog zadiranja muškaraca u žensku sferu rađanja i brige za dijete, te, u konačnici, kritizira patrijarhalno društvo zbog marginaliziranoga položaja žena. Stoga se roman *Frankenstein*, koji tematski leluja između matricida i patricida, može razumjeti kao kritika neadekvatnog roditeljstva.

*Ključne riječi:* Julia Kristeva; matricid; patricid; patrijarhat; Mary Shelley; *Frankenstein*

### Introduction

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley elaborates on multiple images of motherhood such as the absent and desired one, the traumatic and autobiographical as well as the threatening and devouring. Although the mother is present in the text and subtext, the novel is not only about mother(s); it is also about father(s) as „a very infantile desire motivates this text – anger and rage at the betrayal of both parents to sustain the illusory omnipotence that the child feels is his magical birthright.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, *Frankenstein* can be seen as a critique of inadequate parenting, wavering thematically between matricide and patricide. By using biographical facts, this paper wishes to connect Mary Shelley’s mourning for

<sup>2</sup> Isto, str. 8.

the lost, absent mother to Kristeva's theory of matricide. It wishes to show that for Mary Shelley, as a woman, it was more difficult to commit matricide so she creates a narrative circle of mothers dying and being animated which is manifested in repeated matricides. These are shown in Caroline Beaufort's death and the death of the novel's surrogate mothers, Elizabeth and Justine, as well as the destruction of the female creature.

The character of the mother is also at the centre of Julia Kristeva's theory. Kristeva emphasizes the mother's important role in the individuation process. However, she maintains that matricide, i.e. an individual's separation from the mother, is „a vital necessity.”<sup>3</sup> If matricide does not occur, Kristeva claims that an individual risks sinking into asymbolia (the loss of speech and meaning), mourning and melancholy. This process, she believes, is more difficult for women due to their identification with the mother's body.

## **1. The Mother According to Kristeva**

Julia Kristeva bases her theory upon those of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. However, in contrast to both of these psychoanalysts whose theories are based on the father-child relationship, Kristeva emphasizes the important role of the mother. „Unlike either Freud or Lacan, Kristeva is concerned with analysing the complexities of the maternal function, which she maintains have been left out of traditional psychoanalytic theory. Her texts take us deeper and deeper within the maternal function, and thereby take us deeper and deeper into the maternal body.”<sup>4</sup> Kristeva maintains that an individual needs to separate him or herself from the mother (a process she terms as *matricide*) in order to accomplish individuation. Otherwise, an individual sinks into asymbolia, mourning or melancholy. In *Black Sun* she concludes that matricide is a vital necessity: „for man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation.”<sup>5</sup> However, Kristeva claims it is more difficult for women

<sup>3</sup> Julia KRISTEVA, *Black Sun: Melancholia and Depression*, New York, 1987., str. 27

<sup>4</sup> Kelly OLIVER, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double Bind*, 1993., str. 3

<sup>5</sup> J. KRISTEVA, *n. dj.*, str. 27.

to commit matricide due to their inevitable identification with the mother's body.

## 2. Frankenstein as a Critique of Inadequate Parenting

In order to fully understand the impact of Mary Shelley's own life on her novel, a short overview of the important dates in her life needs to be offered. Mary Shelley was born on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1797. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was a renowned writer, philosopher and a feminist, who is best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) in which she advocated gender equality. Wollstonecraft died of puerperal fever ten days after having given birth to her daughter: „Ten days after her unsized and weak baby was born, Wollstonecraft succumbed to puerperal fever.”<sup>6</sup> Although documentary evidence exists that the bizarre death occurred „because the doctor who attended to her afterbirth did not wash his hands”<sup>7</sup> her daughter, Mary Godwin, always felt guilty for her mother's death. She was left to be raised by her father, the philosopher, novelist and journalist William Godwin who gave her a rich education. However, he lacked understanding for his daughter and shortly married a neighbour, Mary Jane Clairmont, who had two children of her own. Mary disliked her stepmother very much, and the animosity which developed between Mary and her stepmother „made life increasingly unbearable for William Godwin, so much so that he sent Mary away, to live in Scotland with people he or she barely knew.”<sup>8</sup>

At the age of sixteen, Mary Godwin eloped with her father's supporter, a poet and a married man then, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Her father considered the elopement to be a crime. Moreover, he disowned her and “followed that up with bullying letters demanding money.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the 1818 edition of

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca BAUMANN, *Frankenstein 200: The Birth, Life, and Resurrection of Mary Shelley's Monster*, Bloomington, 2018., str. 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Isto*, str. 48.

<sup>8</sup> Sherry GINN, „Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Science, Science Fiction, or Autobiography?”, <<https://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipa/2003/ginn.html>>, (1. X. 2018.)

<sup>9</sup> Patricia DUNCKER, „Mary Shelley's Afterlives: Biography and Invention,” Harold BLOOM (ur.), *Bloom's Modern Critical Views – Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley – New Edition*, New York, 2009., str. 107.

*Frankenstein* is dedicated to Godwin. This is ironic being that Shelley criticizes inadequate parenting in the novel, particularly fatherhood. Her short life with Percy Shelley was full of tragic deaths: she was pregnant five times and only one son, Percy Florence, survived to adulthood. Taking these biographical facts into consideration it is obvious that Mary Godwin:

„was denied the stable and profoundly intellectual family that seemed her birthright, but she was powerfully shaped by the mother she lost, shaped by something that was simultaneously a gaping absence and a painful, ever-present wound, creating a sense of alienation that she channelled in the writing of *Frankenstein*. Without a mother, a woman – or a monster – must gaze back at her past life and ask “What was I?” The daughter’s life also paralleled her mother’s in many ways.”<sup>10</sup>

Julie A. Carlson refers to Mary as a „perpetual mourner”<sup>11</sup> due to the succession of family deaths and her devout reading of her parents’ books. As the daughter of a respected feminist, Shelley endeavoured to „emulate her mother’s writings.”<sup>12</sup>

*Frankenstein* is a critique of inadequate parenting. Mary Shelley considered her father’s neglect to be deliberate and her mother’s death to be inevitable. In fact, all the families depicted in *Frankenstein* are motherless and have issues with the father figure. The Frankensteins, the DeLaceys, Elizabeth, Justine and the creature are all motherless so „we are in a world where parental irresponsibility and failure are the rule.”<sup>13</sup> Due to a miscarriage and her infants’ deaths, Shelley herself felt like an inadequate parent. All in all, in the novel:

„parentage is a zero-sum game: either the child destroys the parent on its way out of the womb (as she felt she had done to her mother) or the parent destroys the child through neglect (as Victor does with his misbegotten offspring, as Percy did with the children of his first marriage that he abandoned, and as Byron did with the children he left in the wake of his innumerable liaisons). There is no healthy, successful, sustained parent/child relationship in *Frankenstein*. There is no domestic bliss but only obsessive pursuits of dangerous passions.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> R. BAUMANN, *n. dj.*, str. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Julie A. CARLSON, *England’s First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley*, Baltimore, 2007., str. 162.

<sup>12</sup> Sharon L. JOFFE, „‘The Instinct of Nature Spoke Audibly’: Representation of the Mother-Child Bond in Mary Shelley’s Fiction“, Susan C. STAUB (ur.), *The Literary Mother: Essays on Representations of Maternity and Child Care*, 2007., str. 118.

<sup>13</sup> Laura P. CLARIDGE, „Parent-Child Tensions in *Frankenstein*: The Search for Comunión“, *Studies in the Novel*, god.XVII., 1985., br. 1., str. 17.

<sup>14</sup> R. BAUMANN, *n. dj.*, str. 30.

It is no longer questionable whether and to what extent *Frankenstein* entails autobiographical elements. It undoubtedly does. „The essential elements of Frankenstein’s story, taken from Mary’s own life, have been identified as (1) a white gravestone; (2) a motherless child; (3) a beloved father turning his back on his child; (4) a university student conducting wild experiments; and (5) dreams of rekindling the life of a dead child.”<sup>15</sup> Ginn adds that „certainly each element found its way into the novel, but reducing the novel to autobiography is too simple.”<sup>16</sup> The novel has frequently and conservatively been read as a cautionary tale which „is an oddly conservative reading for a novel written by a young woman who was the daughter, lover, and friend of anarchists, atheists, feminists, and sexual rebels – and who shared many of their views and practices.”<sup>17</sup> It has Romantic and Gothic elements and is often termed as the first science fiction novel, even the first feminist science fiction novel. In any case, it is eclectically patched (just like the creature) and „is a mad experiment of piecing together autobiography, travelogue, ghost stories, folklore, and orts of science, philosophy, and poetry that she had read, discussed with her circle of eccentric friends, digested, and repurposed into her own entirely unique intellectual child.”<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Shelley’s Negotiation of Maternity

Mary Shelley’s „preoccupation with the cult of motherhood”<sup>19</sup> stems from her own motherlessness and her personal traumatic experiences of motherhood. As Aström asserts, „the answers to the question why mothers are absent falls into four categories: ‘the author’s own mother, psychoanalysis, society and culture, and narratological constraints.’”<sup>20</sup> Due to Shelley’s own experiences of being motherless and her premature and insecure mothering, she elaborates on the well-known literary trope of an absent mother not just in *Frankenstein* but in *Lodore* and *Falkner* as well. „By crafting novels in

<sup>15</sup> S. GINN, *n. dj.*

<sup>16</sup> *Isto*

<sup>17</sup> R. BAUMANN, *n. dj.*, str. xvi.

<sup>18</sup> *Isto*, str. xvii.

<sup>19</sup> S. JOFFE, *n. dj.*, str. 117.

<sup>20</sup> Berit ASTRÖM, *The Absent Mother in the Cultural Imagination. Missing, Presumed Dead*, 2017., str.

which mothers – whether present, absent, silent, or ineffective – profoundly influence the lives of their children, Shelley negotiates maternity in all its forms.”<sup>21</sup> Critics have recognized and discussed the exclusion of women/mothers from the novel which has been variously interpreted. Some, such as Marc Rubenstein, see it as the author’s own search for the lost mother. He believes that „the spirit of primal scene observation penetrates into the very structure of the novel and becomes part of a more deeply hidden search for the mother.”<sup>22</sup> Some critics see it as either a daughter’s rage towards a father,<sup>23</sup> or as a deliberate killing of the mother.<sup>24</sup> Ellen Moers was the first to define *Frankenstein* as a „birth myth.” „For *Frankenstein* is a birth myth, and one that was lodged in the novelist’s imagination, I am convinced, by the fact that she was herself a mother.”<sup>25</sup> Marc Rubenstein directly connects the novel’s theme of motherhood to Shelley’s own life: „Frankenstein, for all its exclusion of women, is – among other things – a parable of motherhood. If the novel’s status as a myth of procreation does not itself suggest the element of motherhood, one should at least know that Mary Shelley was eighteen and the mother of a six month old child when she began writing the story.”<sup>26</sup> He understands “the specialness of” Mary Shelley’s origins to be „perhaps the key to the novel.”<sup>27</sup> This paper follows the same path.

#### 4. Frankenstein – an Attempted Matricide

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley only seemingly creates a motherless world. It is a maternal text because it is deeply permeated with troubling and traumatic visions of motherhood that stem from Mary Shelley’s own life experience. Being motherless herself and faced with an almost deadly miscarriage and

<sup>21</sup> S. JOFFE, *n. dj.*, str. 117

<sup>22</sup> Marc A. RUBENSTEIN, „My Accursed Origin: the Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein*“, *Studies in Romanticism*, god. XV., 1976., str. 166.

<sup>23</sup> Usp. U. C. KNOEPFLMACHER, „Thoughts on the Agression of Daughters“, George LEVINE - U. C. KNOEPFLMACHER (ur.), *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*, LA - London, 1979., str. 95.

<sup>24</sup> Usp. Mary JACOBUS, „Is There A Woman In This Text?“, Mary JACOBUS (ur.), *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, New York, 1986., str. 102.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen MOERS, (ur.) *The Great Writers*, New York, 1976., str. 93.

<sup>26</sup> M. RUBENSTEIN, *n. dj.*, str. 166.

<sup>27</sup> *Isto*, str. 167.

numerous infant deaths, Shelley repeatedly reanimated and eliminated the mother in her texts. After the death of her first child, a girl, on March 19, 1815, Mary recorded in her journal: „Dreamt that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it by the fire and it lived. Awake and found no baby.”<sup>28</sup> This dream was often understood as the inspiration for *Frankenstein*. Margaret Homans notices “the apparently necessary destruction of the mother”<sup>29</sup> as *Frankenstein* mothers are killed almost immediately after being introduced as characters in the novel. Caroline Frankenstein, an idealized image of Mary Wollstonecraft, dies at the very beginning and places Elizabeth as a surrogate mother to her other children. Justine acts as William’s mother and is executed for his murder. Homans recognizes an “autobiographical pattern” here – Elizabeth and Justine are said to have become „the deaths of their mothers” – precisely the hall-mark that Shelley felt she was marked with.<sup>30</sup>

Kristeva claims that the lack of the mother and the impossibility of separating from her is a fertile ground for melancholy. In this case:

„the melancholy person who can go as far as repudiation (melancholy psychosis) is, during the illness’ mild development, characterized by the prevalence of *denial over negation*. [...] The result is that traumatic memories (the loss of a loved relative during childhood, some other, more recent wound) are not repressed but constantly evoked as the denial of negation prevents the work of repression, at least of its representative parts.”<sup>31</sup>

Depressed persons, according to Kristeva, „disavow the negation: they cancel it out, suspend it, and nostalgically fall back on the real object (the Thing) of their loss, which is just what they do not manage to lose, to which they remain painfully riveted.”<sup>32</sup> In this way the image of the mother is constantly evoked in Shelley’s mind and text. This is seen in the mothers’ repeated animations and matricides. All the novel’s characters are motherless and yet all the females act as death-bearing mothers. They are either real

<sup>28</sup> R. BAUMANN, *n. dj.*, str. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret HOMANS, „Bearing the Word: *Frankenstein’s* Circumvention of the Maternal“, Margaret HOMANS (ur.), *Bearing the Word: Language and the Female Experience in Nineteenth-century Women’s Writing*, Chicago, 1986., str. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Usp. *isto*, str. 102.

<sup>31</sup> J. KRISTEVA, *n. dj.*, str. 46.

<sup>32</sup> *Isto*, str. 44.



(but dead) mothers such as Caroline Frankenstein, surrogate mothers such as Elizabeth and Justine or potential mothers such as the female creature. Even though „each actual mother dies very rapidly upon being introduced as a character in the novel,”<sup>33</sup> the novel is never deprived of a maternal presence. Instead, there is a pattern of succession, i.e. reanimating and killing the character of the mother.

As has already been stated, elaborating on the idea of matricide, Kristeva maintains that matricide is vital. She claims that it is biologically and psychologically necessary in order to gain autonomy. However, women fail to commit it as they, more easily than men, identify with the woman's body:

„it is difficult for her to kill the maternal body without also killing herself. For women, matricide does not ward off suicide. For women, matricide is a form of suicide. A woman cannot properly mourn the lost object. She cannot get rid of the maternal body. Kristeva woefully claims that she carries the maternal Thing with her locked like a corpse in the crypt of her psyche.”<sup>34</sup>

In a poetical explanation, Kristeva elaborates on a woman's impossibility to commit matricide:

„for a woman, whose specular identification with the mother as well as the introjection of the maternal body and self are more immediate, such an inversion of matricidal drive into a death-bearing maternal image is more difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, how can She be that bloodthirsty Fury, since I am She (sexually and narcissistically), she is I? Consequently, the hatred I bear her is not oriented toward the outside but is locked up within myself. There is no hatred, only an implosive mood that walls itself in and kills me secretly, very slowly, through permanent bitterness, bouts of sadness, or even lethal sleeping pills that I take, in smaller or greater quantities in the dark hope of meeting.”<sup>35</sup>

*Frankenstein* is, in Kristevan terms, a matricide. To be more precise, it is an attempted but failed matricide. This is best seen in the constantly repeated deaths of female characters: Caroline, Elizabeth, Justine and finally, the female creature. Caroline is a mother, Elizabeth and Justine act as surrogate mothers and the female creature is a potential mother of whom Victor is especially afraid because: „a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition

<sup>33</sup> M. HOMANS, *n. dj.*, str. 102.

<sup>34</sup> K. OLIVER, *n. dj.*, str. 63.

<sup>35</sup> J. KRISTEVA, *n. dj.*, str. 29.

precarious and full of terror.”<sup>36</sup> The fragility of life and the certainty of death was an experience particularly close to Mary Shelley. This is the reason why the image of death and the image of mother merge into the Kristevan image of a death-bearing mother. This image is repeated in Caroline’s, Elizabeth’s, Justine’s death and finally, in the destruction of the female creature. The death-bearing mother is also Mary Shelley herself who had brought death to four out of her five children.

In discussing the notion of matricide, one should start from Margaret Homan’s claim that for Shelley, as for many of her female contemporaries and authors, writing was a form of mothering. She maintains: „Thus Shelley not only practices the daughter’s obligatory and voluntary identification with the literal, as do Dorothy Wordsworth and Elizabeth Gaskell (and again with Charlotte Bronte) their concern with writing as literalization, as a form of mothering”<sup>37</sup> After all, in the introduction to her novel Shelley wrote: „And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words which found no true echo in my heart”<sup>38</sup> which clearly equates the book with a child. Anne K. Mellor sees a reference to pregnancy in the epistolary structure of the novel and Walton’s letters. She states: „exactly nine months enwomb the telling of the history of Frankenstein; moreover, these nine months correspond almost exactly with Mary Shelley’s third pregnancy, for Clara Everina was born on September 2, 1817.”<sup>39</sup> She believes that Walton’s letters can be dated from December 1796 to September 1797, based on the manuscript evidence and references to two important events: Mary Shelley’s birth on August 30, 1797 and the death of her mother, on September 10, 1797. For Mellor, Victor’s, the Creature’s and Wollstonecraft’s deaths are „the consequences of the same creation, the birth of Mary Godwin – the author.”<sup>40</sup> She is certain that „this metaphor of book as baby suggests Shelley’s anxieties about giving birth to her self-as-author.”<sup>41</sup> However, she

<sup>36</sup> Mary SHELLEY, *Frankenstein: or Modern Prometheus*, New York, 1983., str. 158.

<sup>37</sup> M. HOMANS, *n. dj.*, str. 101.

<sup>38</sup> M. SHELLEY, *n. dj.*, str. xii

<sup>39</sup> Anne K. MELLOR, „Making a ‘monster’: an introduction to Frankenstein“, Esther SCHOR (ur.), *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, Cambridge, 2003., str. 12.

<sup>40</sup> A. MELLOR, *n. dj.*, str. 12.

<sup>41</sup> *Isto*, str. 11.

does not believe that these anxieties stem from her feminist convictions but „rather, her anxiety was produced by both Godwin and Percy Shelley’s expectation that she would become a writer like her mother.”<sup>42</sup>

By literalizing her own motherly experience, Shelley tries to renounce and separate herself from her own mother or her memory, but she fails. Victor’s attempt to reanimate his mother Caroline is Shelley’s attempt to reanimate Mary Wollstonecraft or, to be more precise, an attempt to renounce the feeling of being guilty for her death. It is well known that Mary Shelley knew her mother only through the „latter’s own writings.”<sup>43</sup> According to Mary Shelley’s letters and journals, it is clear that she tried to identify with her mother, yet considered Wollstonecraft to have been more talented and successful. Patricia Duncker argues, „Mary Wollstonecraft accumulated an enviable array of courageous deeds, unsuitable lovers and interesting suicide attempts before she eventually died of post-natal complications. We are a generation no longer afraid of her sexual candour.”<sup>44</sup> But her daughter Mary Shelley was deeply influenced by her although she idealized both of her parents:

„Her desire for autonomy is linked to the recognition of the genius of her mother figure. Yet, her sorrow and guilt over the death of her unknown mother and her admiration for her mother’s brilliance also serves to limit her appreciation of her own talents. Her overt idealization of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, together with the covert, imagined perception that her mother had achieved more, was more talented and had generally led a more successful existence, is mirrored in the mother-child relationships in Shelley’s novels.”<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, the idealized mother figure is Caroline Frankenstein. She is also the novel’s only real and true mother while all the others act as surrogate or potential mothers. Caroline was an orphaned beauty, saved by her father’s devoted friend, Alphonse Frankenstein, whom she married two years later: „He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care; and after the interment of his friend he conducted her to Geneva and placed her under the protection of a relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.”<sup>46</sup> This scene is often criticized for its patriarchal under-

<sup>42</sup> *Isto*, str. 11.

<sup>43</sup> S. JOFFE, *n. dj.*, str. 118.

<sup>44</sup> P. DUNCKER, *n. dj.*, str. 98.

<sup>45</sup> S. JOFFE, *n. dj.*, str. 118.

<sup>46</sup> M. SHELLEY, *n. dj.*, str. 32.

tone. However, there is a clear analogy between Mary Wollstonecraft and Caroline Frankenstein. Notably, „Mary Wollstonecraft was the eldest daughter of a once-wealthy family who had fallen on hard times – a scenario replicated in *Frankenstein* by Victor’s mother Caroline Beaufort.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Wollstonecraft’s father was violent-tempered so she had to protect her mother and younger siblings from him. This might be the reason why she left home at nineteen and subsequently started her own school, worked as a caretaker and a governess. These experiences undoubtedly shaped her feminist views and convictions. Mary Shelley profoundly idealized her mother: thus, the idealized motherly figure of Caroline Beaufort/Frankenstein is actually her own mother. Her need to reanimate the mother is great but the need to kill her and to show the catastrophic consequences of her death is even greater. Victor’s transformation, the making of the creature and the fall of the Frankenstein family all stem, Mary Shelley suggests, from Caroline’s death. Victor refers to his mother’s death as „the first misfortune of my life occurred – an omen, as it were, of my future misery.”<sup>48</sup> The description of her death is emotionally detailed and tragically realistic:

„She died calmly, and her countenance expressed affection even in death. I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil, the void that presents itself to the soul, and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance. It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she whom we saw every day and whose very existence appeared a part of our own can have departed forever – that the brightness of a beloved eye can have been extinguished and the sound of a voice so familiar and dear to the ear can be hushed, never more to be heard. These are the reflections of the first days; but when the lapse of time proves the reality of the evil, then the actual bitterness of grief commences. Yet from whom has not that rude hand rent away some dear connection? And why should I describe a sorrow which all have felt, and must feel? The time at length arrives when grief is rather an indulgence than a necessity; and the smile that plays upon the lips, although it may be deemed a sacrilege, is not banished. My mother was dead, but we still had duties which we ought to perform; we must continue our course with the rest and learn to think ourselves fortunate whilst one remains whom the spoiler has not seized.”<sup>49</sup>

As has already been noted, every character in the novel is motherless and the novel is never deprived of motherly characters although mothers con-

<sup>47</sup> R. BAUMANN, *n. dj.*, str. 48.

<sup>48</sup> M. SHELLEY, *n. dj.*, str. 42.

<sup>49</sup> *Isto*, str. 43.

stantly die. Caroline dies but is immediately succeeded by Elizabeth. Her „transitional maternal identity is further demonstrated by how her time before Caroline's death was largely spent on the periphery, patiently waiting for her opportunity to secure an important position within the family unit.”<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth is often understood as Caroline's „replacement role as the family's matriarch.”<sup>51</sup> That is why Caroline emphasizes and wishes for Elizabeth and Victor's union: „Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to my younger children.”<sup>52</sup> This is a role she readily and devoutly accepts: „Never was she so enchanting as at this time, when she recalled the sunshine of her smiles and spent them upon us. She forgot even her own regret in her endeavours to make us forget.”<sup>53</sup> Her role as the family's matriarch is further strengthened by referring to her as „Victor's 'more-than-sister' and Alphonse's 'more-than-daughter.’”<sup>54</sup> Caroline and Elizabeth merge into one person and „the ultimate union of both women's identities” signifies „an aspect of the story that is best illustrated in Victor's nightmare on the night of his Monster's birth.”<sup>55</sup> This is precisely one of the scenes that feminist psychoanalytical theories of *Frankenstein* are based on. The other scene is the destruction of the female creature. In the dream, young Elizabeth walks the streets and turns into Victor's mother. According to this theory, the sexualized Elizabeth represents desire while the mother represents lack. Thus, the dream is conflation of the desire and the lack. After seeing the hideous creature, Victor tries to fall asleep:

“I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Donna MITCHELL, „Of Monsters and Men: Absent Mothers and Unnatural Children in the Gothic 'Family Romance'“, *Otherness: Essays and Studies*, god. IV, 2014., br. 2. str.114.

<sup>51</sup> *Isto*, n. dj., str. 113.

<sup>52</sup> M. SHELLEY n. dj., str. 42.

<sup>53</sup> *Isto*, str. 43.

<sup>54</sup> D. MITCHELL, n. dj., str. 114.

<sup>55</sup> *Isto*, str. 113.

<sup>56</sup> M. SHELLEY, n. dj., str. 57.

Elizabeth as Victor's sexualized object becomes a substitution for the mother once again.

"The desire for the mother figure is overwhelming. As Joan Riviere argues, "it is by turning away from our mother that we finally become, by our different paths, grown men and women". Dreaming of his deceased mother, and simultaneously allowing the loved object to become his dead mother, prevents Victor from breaking the bond with Caroline Frankenstein."<sup>57</sup>

Margaret Homans claims that the creation of the creature means the killing of Elizabeth because Victor had circumvented her maternal function:

„to bring a composite corpse to life is to circumvent the normal channels of procreation; the demon's "birth" violates the normal relations of family, especially the normal sexual relation of husband and wife. Victor has gone to great lengths to produce a child without Elizabeth's assistance, and in the dream's language, to circumvent her, to make her unnecessary, is to kill her, and to kill mothers altogether."<sup>58</sup>

Having taken on the role of the mother, Elizabeth inevitably must be killed and becomes another image of a death-bearing mother: „She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Everywhere I turn I see the same figure – her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier."<sup>59</sup> The close connection between women and death goes hand in hand, as Mitchell claims, with „Cixous' argument that patriarchy always demands for femininity to be associated with death."<sup>60</sup>

Justine is also condemned and executed and the female creature is destroyed. Although Justine Moritz is a minor character, she plays an important role as she is motherless and acts as a surrogate mother to William. She was taken in by the Frankenstein family as a servant even though she was never referred to as such. In a letter, Elizabeth informs Victor that Justine had been summoned by her dying and penitent mother who had abandoned her: „Poor girl! She wept when she quitted our house; she was much altered since the death of my aunt; grief had given her softness and a winning mildness to her manners which had before been remarkable for vivacity. Nor was her resi-

<sup>57</sup> S. JOFFE, *n. dj.*, str. 121.

<sup>58</sup> M. HOMANS, *n. dj.*, str. 104.

<sup>59</sup> M. SHELLEY, *n. dj.*, str. 186.

<sup>60</sup> D. MITCHELL, *n. dj.*, str. 109.

dence at her mother's house of a nature to restore her gaiety."<sup>61</sup> As Elizabeth reports, the mother condemned her for the death of her siblings. Although Justine does not portray as strong an image of the death-bearing mother as Elizabeth does, she still acts like one.

The threatening image of the power of motherhood (i.e. femininity) is most directly depicted in the creation of the female creature as Victor is afraid of the creature's reproductive powers. His procrastination, finally giving up on the female creature, „voices the fear of femininity that is a common feature of many Gothic texts."<sup>62</sup> Victor describes his reluctance,

„day after day, week after week, passed away on my return to Geneva; and I could not collect the courage to recommence my work. I feared the vengeance of the disappointed fiend, yet I was unable to overcome my repugnance to the task which enjoined me. I found that I could not compose a female without again devoting several months to profound study and laborious disquisition."<sup>63</sup>

Victor cannot stand another birth process. Shelley herself was burdened by the process of creation so „birth is a hideous thing in *Frankenstein*, even before there is a monster."<sup>64</sup> Finally, he destroys the potential mother in a „violent scene that suggests rape."<sup>65</sup>

The mothers in Shelley's novel are constantly present. They succeed one another and die in cyclic turns. This affirms the fact that the mother's body can never be fully rejected and as such, always exists on the „borders of one's identity."<sup>66</sup>

## 5. Patricide as a Critique of Patriarchy

As already noted, Ellen Moers was the first to define *Frankenstein* as „a birth myth". Kate Ellis expands on this notion, adding, „*Frankenstein* is indeed a birth myth, but one in which the parent who brought death into the world, and all our woe is not a woman but a man who has pushed the masculine prerogative past the limits of nature, creating life not through the female

<sup>61</sup> M. SHELLEY, *n. dj.*, str. 64.

<sup>62</sup> D. MITCHELL, *n. dj.*, str. 109.

<sup>63</sup> M. SHELLEY, *n. dj.*, str. 143.

<sup>64</sup> E. MOERS, *n. dj.*, str. 95.

<sup>65</sup> E. SCHOR (ur.), *n. dj.*, str. 13.

<sup>66</sup> D. HOEVELER, *n. dj.*, str. 51.

body but in a laboratory.”<sup>67</sup> Shelley’s critique of patriarchal dominance and self-sufficiency is obvious. But even more expressed is her critique of inadequate parenting directed towards her own father, William Godwin who had abandoned her twice. In a succession of matricides, she commits patricide as well and deliberately destroys the „mythical image of a strong and protective father.”<sup>68</sup>

The critique is most obvious in the circumvention of the female in the birth process and its catastrophic consequences. Numerous feminist perspectives on the novel have considered it „first and foremost a book about what happens when a man tries to procreate without a woman. As such, the novel is profoundly concerned with natural as opposed to unnatural modes of production and reproduction.”<sup>69</sup> Gilbert and Gubar recognized „the patriarchal notion that the writer ‘fathers’ his text just as God fathered the world” and termed it as „all-pervasive in Western literary civilization.”<sup>70</sup> Shelley challenges and criticizes this notion as her “novel challenges the privileged position of the male in a patriarchal system – most particularly by challenging narrative conventions that powerfully articulate the fiction of man as the locus of truth, identity, knowledge – but it also records the anxiety of a woman participating in an alien system: the symbolic order belongs to the father.”<sup>71</sup>

In Kristeva’s theory, the symbolic order indeed belongs to the father. She equals the Symbolic to language. For her, „to abolish the Symbolic is to abolish society. Without the Symbolic order, we live with delirium or psychosis. More than this, how could we have any discourse, emancipatory or otherwise, without the Symbolic?”<sup>72</sup> The loving, imaginary father, according to Kristeva, should act as protection against a devouring mother and as assistance in the process of separation from the mother. The father or the Archaic Third, as Kristeva calls him, should facilitate the child’s entry into language, i.e. the Symbolic Order. However, she differs from Freudian and Lacanian psycho-

<sup>67</sup> Kate ELLIS, „Monsters in the Garden: Mary Shelley and the Bourgeois Family“, G. LEVINE - U. C. KNOEPFLMACHER, *n. dj.*, str. 143.

<sup>68</sup> L. CLARIDGE, *n. dj.*, str. 17.

<sup>69</sup> A. MELLOR, *n. dj.*, str. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Sandra M. GILBERT- Susan GUBAR, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New York, 2000., str. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Devon HODGES, „Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel“, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, god. II., 1983., br. 2., str. 160.

<sup>72</sup> K. OLIVER, *n. dj.*, str. 9.



analysis that understands the father as the initiator of a child's entrance into language. „In Kristeva's scenario the father remains a third term that merely echoes with words the sounds already moving through this distant galaxy. The mother-child dyad provides a foundation for all social relations.”<sup>73</sup> In Shelley's novel, however, there is no loving, imaginary father. There is only its opposition.

The novel's spheres are both distinctly masculine and distinctly feminine. This is unsurprisingly so as women in the nineteenth century were equated with weakness, irrationality and were expected to submit to their male family members and other men. „Except in very rare circumstances, they could not initiate divorce. Children were father's property. Not only was it legal for a husband to beat his wife, but men were encouraged to keep women in check, punishing any behaviour that regarded as unruly.”<sup>74</sup> Ashley J. Cross recognizes the two distinct spheres of the novel that equal the two gendered spheres of the society: masculine and feminine, active and passive, scientific and domestic. She asserts: „either you are one thing (male, human, ruling class) or you are the other (female, monster, working class). *Frankenstein* exposes this process of exclusion even as it relies upon it.”<sup>75</sup> The prevailing voice of the novel is male as all three narrators are male: Walton, Victor Frankenstein and the Creature. The female voice is silenced. It belongs to the subtext. Even Shelley herself notes that she had been a silent listener to the stories of her husband and lord Byron: „Many and long were the conversations between lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener' (Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley 1969: 8)”<sup>76</sup> As Hodges claims, „in this way, her novel reproduces the traditional opposition of masculine and feminine, speech and silence, that makes so paradoxical the position of the woman who writes.”<sup>77</sup> Even more so, the biographers of the Shelley family make the same distinction with respect to masculinity and femininity. According to Percy Shelley's male biographers, Mary was a sexual and intellectual coward, conventional and often succumbed to religious su-

<sup>73</sup> *Isto*, n. dj., str. 65.

<sup>74</sup> R. BAUMANN, n. dj., str. 48.

<sup>75</sup> Ashley J. CROSS, „Indelible Impressions: Gender and Language in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*“, H. BLOOM., n. dj., str. 14.

<sup>76</sup> P. DUNCKER, n. dj., str. 97.

<sup>77</sup> D. HODGES, n. dj., str. 157.

perstitutions. As such, she was not „a fit and proper radical companion who could have inspired and fostered Shelley’s genius. She is also accused – and this is the unkindest cut of all – of being a nagging wife.”<sup>78</sup>

However, in the novel, the female sphere of childbearing and childrearing was usurped by the masculine. Women are on the margin and belong to the subtext as the father had taken over the role of the mother. This is precisely the core of the problem that Shelley endeavoured to depict and expose – an unlawful and imprudent usurpation of gender roles.

In Victor’s figure, Shelley depicts an autobiographical pattern of abandonment. Victor, who abandoned his creature after he had realized its hideousness, is actually Mary Shelley’s father, William Godwin, who had abandoned her twice. The first abandonment was his remarriage after Wollstonecraft’s death and the second one was after her elopement with Percy Shelley. The biographical data tell us that Shelley adored both of her parents, especially her father whom she considered a God although he was emotionally distant. In a letter to Maria Gisborne on October 30, 1834, she wrote: „I could justly say that he was my God... I remember many childish instances of the excess of attachment I bore him.”<sup>79</sup> The problems of the Shelley-Clairmont family were due precisely to Mary’s and her stepmother’s fight for Godwin’s benevolence. However, she must have felt betrayed by his abandonment, thus rendering Victor’s inappropriate parenting autobiographical: it is actually Godwin’s inappropriate parenting and neglect of his daughter.

Initiated by his mother’s death, Victor becomes infected by the ideas of alchemy and electricity and believes that he can reanimate his mother’s dead body. Once again, life and death are closely interwoven. Victor uses dead human and animal body parts hoping to reanimate his dead mother. This does not happen. Instead, he gives birth to a hideous creature. „Victor Frankenstein’s role as a father is intensified by that fulfilment of every parent’s dream: he can deliberately, knowingly create his child; he can actually choose the parts. It is especially ironic, then, that he hates what he sees.”<sup>80</sup> The ironic and grotesque scene of the creation reverses the normal image and the result of procreation:

<sup>78</sup> P. DUNCKER, *n. dj.*, str. 97.

<sup>79</sup> R. BAUMANN, *n. dj.*, str. 42.

<sup>80</sup> L. CLARIDGE, *n. dj.*, str. 21.

„How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? 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.”<sup>81</sup>

The reasons behind his fathering are also, indirectly, criticized by Shelley. Namely, Victor states, „A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.”<sup>82</sup> He imagines himself an adored and worshipped, moreover famous father instead of a caring and protective one.

Interestingly, the way and the terms Victor uses to describe the process of creation are metaphors connected to birth. He refers to the process as „a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour”<sup>83</sup> or „midnight labours,”<sup>84</sup> The secluded laboratory might imply a womb:

„I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and a staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to details of my employment.”<sup>85</sup>

These birth metaphors accentuate Shelley’s critique of male interference in a distinctively female sphere and prove that the sphere of childbearing still belongs to females. The forcible usurpation is perhaps best summarized in the lines Mary Shelley borrows from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: „Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me Man, did I solicit Thee / From darkness to promote me?”<sup>86</sup>

„Frankenstein is pervaded by the sense of the cost of creation”<sup>87</sup> so Victor’s scientific zeal ends in a tedious quest for the creature. In Shelley’s view

<sup>81</sup> M. SHELLEY, *n. dj.*, str. 56.

<sup>82</sup> *Isto*, str. 52.

<sup>83</sup> *Isto*.

<sup>84</sup> *Isto*, str. 53.

<sup>85</sup> *Isto*.

<sup>86</sup> John MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, X, 743. – 45., Philip PULLMAN (ur.), Oxford, 2005., str. 306.

<sup>87</sup> R. BAUMANN, *n. dj.*, str. 4.

he needs to be punished for inadequate parenting, reversing gender roles and playing God. As if the death of all of his family members is not enough, Victor, the abusive father, needs to die. It is obvious that Shelley deliberately destroys the father figure while criticizing, at the same time, through this patriarchal, fatherly figure asexual creation. Burdened by the demands of patriarchy, Shelley endeavours to commit patricide in which killing Victor means killing William Godwin.

## **Conclusion**

Shelley's novel is an autobiographical longing for a mother. It illustrates the impossibility of separating from a mother's body that is best seen in several repeated matricides. It is also a critique of the patriarchal society that marginalized a female, a woman and a mother. By basing her novel upon her own dream and by elaborating on the unusual motif of a man who interferes in the process of birth, Shelley expresses her own traumatic life experiences. This paper has tried to connect precisely these experiences depicted in the novel to Kristeva's theory of matricide.