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Despite the classic cinematic image of animation by lightning strike, the creation sequence in the original novel version of *Frankenstein* is much more intimate, more biological than electrical or even scientific. There is a striking absence of scientific instruments in Frankenstein's "workshop of filthy creation" (78). Instead, Frankenstein's focus is on the physicality of his work, repeatedly insisting that the creation of life is the "work of my hands" and "profane fingers" (78). More broadly, there is a telling bodily connection between Frankenstein and his work. Frankenstein's physical deterioration and illnesses coincide suggestively with his two attempts at creation. Shelley describes him as growing pale, emaciated, frequently feverish, and subject to fits and seizures: "I was a shattered wreck—the shadow of a human being. My strength was gone. I was a mere skeleton, and fever night and day preyed upon my wasted frame" (198). Once Frankenstein completes the Creature, he recovers only to deteriorate again when he works on the Creature's mate. Frankenstein says, "I was carried out of the room in strong convulsions. A fever succeeded to this. I lay for two months on the point of death" (199).

The most persuasive explanation of the link between Frankenstein's ability to create life and his physical illness is offered by David Musselwhite: masturbation. Musselwhite argues that masturbation is "the one human activity" that explains Frankenstein's "guilty addiction" to his process of "filthy creation": "the secrecy, the haste, the furtiveness, the delay, the guilt, the addition—plus the supposed symptoms of paleness, emaciation, and eye-strain" are all consistent with early nineteenth-century beliefs about the behaviors and effects of frequent masturbation (62).[1] Anti-masturbation writings were common at the time of *Frankenstein*, ranging from the regularly reprinted sensationalized pamphlet, "Onania; Or, the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and All its Frightful Consequences" to the influential 1812 medical text, "On Diseases of the Generative System" by John Robertson. The Onania notes, "In some [masturbation] had been the Cause of fainting Fits and Epileposies; in others of Consumptions; and many young Men who were strong and lusty before they gave themselves over to this Vice, have been worn out by it, and by its robbing the Body of its balmy and vital Moisture, without Cough or Spitting, dry and emaciated, sent to their Graves" (2).[2] In the same vein, Robertson writes, "the face becomes pale and cadaverous, and the body flabby or emaciated [...] all attempts at sleep are interrupted by the most frightful dreams" (136).[3]

Frankenstein's symptoms match these descriptions quite compellingly: "My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement [...] Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree—a disease I regretted the more because I had hitherto enjoyed excellent health and had always boasted of the firmness of my nerves" (78-80). As Robertson describes, Frankenstein also suffers regular nightmares.

In my next post on *Frankenstein*, I will explain the plausibility of masturbation as the source of the Creature's life in terms of contemporaneous theories of reproduction, but before concluding this month's writing, I would like to reference a few passages that, I think, hint at Frankenstein's masturbatory practices with an almost bawdy suggestiveness:

My application was at first fluctuating and uncertain; it gained strength as I proceeded and soon became so ardent and eager that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory (74)

I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life. Nay more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter. The surprise which I at first experienced on this discovery soon gave place to delight and rapture (76)

A resistless and almost frantic impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit (78)

Often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion (79)

As I argued last month, the novel is interested in paternal childbirth, and, in this reading, Frankenstein's creative process is aggressively and exclusively masculine. By masturbating, Frankenstein produces semen that he believes will provide the generative force to bring the form of the Creature to life. Because he does not have access to a real womb, he instead "prepare[s] a frame for the reception of it" (77). Frankenstein, in effect, creates an artificial womb to carry his child to term, eliminating the need for a female partner. Next month we will examine contemporaneous preformationist theory and see how the centrality of semen as the animating force offers a compelling, coherent connection between Frankenstein's masturbatory practices and the ultimate production of human life.

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[1] Musselwhite, David E. "Frankenstein: The Making of a Monster." *Partings Welded Together: Politics and Desire in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1988, pp. 43–

[2] *Onania or, the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and All Its Frightful Consequences, in Both Sexes, Considered, with Spiritual and Physical Advice..* Printed for the Author, and Sold by N. Crouch; P. Varenne; and J. Isted, 1718.

[3] Dr. John Robertson, quoted in Anolik, Ruth Bienstock. *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature*. McFarland & Co., 2010.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. *The Original Frankenstein*. Ed. Charles E. Robinson. New York: Vintage, 2009. Print.