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**PLAYING WITH FIRE:
MARY SHELLEY, ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING
AND THE REWRITING OF THE PROMETHEUS MYTH**

**BY
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And whether Prometheus were a name for
Chance, Destiny, a Plastick Nature, or
an Evil Daemon; whatever was design'd by
it; 'twas still the same Breach of
Omnipotence.

Shaftesbury, The Moralists 1709.

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DEDICATION

To my Mother and Father

(And to the image of Eustacia Vye, abandoned, for now,
in the witch's fire and on the Titanic heath.)

ABSTRACT

PLAYING WITH FIRE: MARY SHELLEY, ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING AND THE REWRITING OF THE PROMETHEUS MYTH

According to Greek myth, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to mortals, either in the form of culture, or by using it to bring to life the clay people he had made.

Margaret Homans distinguishes between what she calls literal and figurative creativity (1980:223). The woman who is a mother, creating literally and naturally with her body, and who writes, creating figurative offspring, cultural texts, makes use of the Promethean fire in both of its possible senses. Only the literal, however, is seen by patriarchal culture as her rightful realm. Myth dictates that only men received from Prometheus the fire of figurative creativity, of language. The "woman writer," then, as a kind of contradiction in terms, is forced to suffer the conflict imposed by her choice to create, within the dictates of culture, with both forms of "fire."

In the face of this conflict, Alicia Ostriker suggests that the project of women writers should be to rewrite the mythology of patriarchy and, in doing so, take from men their sole possession of the fire of culture, an ownership which empowers them in the same way as it did Zeus, the tyrannical father-god. In her words, women writers should become "thieves of language, female Prometheuses" (1986:211).

Women who re-write the Prometheus myth may then be seen

as both figuratively revising the theft by re-telling its story, and as literally re-enacting the myth itself by rebelling against the limitations of androcentrism. The "female Prometheus" re-creates the myth, bringing together the definitions of herself as woman and writer in what I argue is a disruptive and positive form of hybridism.

Chapter One examines the mythic complex which surrounds the figure of Prometheus, concentrating on the versions by Hesiod, Aeschylus and Ovid, and considers the implications of its appropriation and revision by women writers.

Chapters Two and Three analyse the way in which two nineteenth century women, Mary Shelley and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, rewrote the myth. Shelley's novel, Frankenstein, presents two Promethean figures - the scientist and the monster - and so embodies the ambivalence of its author. Barrett Browning translated Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound twice, and then wrote Aurora Leigh, a hybrid novel-poem in which the central character is female, a writer and Promethean.

I argue that both succeeded, in different ways, in liberating language from the limitations of the patriarchal symbolic, so carrying out a theft of linguistic "fire," the act recognised by Shaftesbury as a "Breach of Omnipotence."

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CHAPTER ONE

THE REWRITING OF FIRE

Yes! I am satisfied to 'take up' with the blind hopes again.... It is as well to fly towards the light, even where there may be some fluttering and bruising of wings against the windowpanes, is it not?

Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning,
5 March 1845. (1:35)¹

There is a moth named after the thief of fire. It is the giant North American silk moth, Callosamia promethea.² Like all moths, no doubt, it is fascinated by light, and will batter itself to death against a lightbulb or a lighted window, or will circle the flame of a candle, coming closer and closer until, inevitably, it is burned up by the fire.

Naming the moth after Prometheus probably refers to the creature's fascination with fire, rather than to the Titan's theft. In Greek, the name "Prometheus" means foreknowledge. If the moth were truly Promethean, it would know that the fire was going to burn it, but nonetheless let its desire for the incandescence of the flame override its instinct for self-preservation. Perhaps this is true. Perhaps moths know that they are mortal and ephemeral, and to die ignited in union with the object of desire is simply better than any

other death.

Or perhaps they are not in this sense Promethean, but rather fly at the flame in the blind hope that its beauty, its fascinating warmth and its brightness, are all there is. Perhaps the moth does not know that fire can burn until it is too late.

Prometheus stole fire from Zeus, ruler of the gods. Alicia Ostriker finds in the myth a fitting metaphor for the project of women writers: the theft undermined Zeus's ownership and control of fire. In the same way, women need to liberate language from its possession by a culture which defines itself by silencing women. They should carry out what Ostriker calls

a vigorous and varied invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language, the treasuries where our meanings for "male" and "female" are themselves preserved. (1986:211)

This theft constitutes not only a revision of the myths themselves, but potentially a far more radical re-creation:

Where women write strongly as women, it is clear that their intention is to subvert and transform the life and literature they inherit.... revisionist mythmaking ... is a means of redefining both woman and culture. (ibid.)

In doing so they re-enact and re-interpret the Titan's audacious theft, becoming "thieves of language, female Prometheuses" (ibid.).³

I intend to explore the far-reaching implications of this metaphor. Ostriker names women writers, specifically those who actively rewrite and revise the myths of patriarchal culture, after Prometheus. If the project of women writers is to revise existing myths, what is the

purpose of naming them after an existing mythical figure, and so situating them within the patterns they wish to disrupt? The name of Prometheus carries with it a complex and multifaceted act of transgression the effects of which can extend beyond and so subvert the system which first produced the myth.

Further, this naming includes the writers themselves in the work of their writing: as the attribution of the name implies, in revising mythology they actually become revisions of the myth. When the figure in question is that of Prometheus, this is emphasised: in rewriting the myth, Mary Shelley and Elizabeth Barrett Browning also re-enact it. The writer becomes the literal embodiment of the new myth, which in turn figures her act of writing it.

This conflation of the figurative and the literal has significant implications for women writers. The contradictory and ambivalent relationship between women and writing may be attributed, as Margaret Homans suggests, to the dependence of symbolic language on the dualism between the figurative signifier, present in discourse, and the literal referent, necessarily absent (1986:4). Lacan's myth of the origin of language identifies the masculine and the phallus with the signifier, required to be present in the speech of the subject, and the feminine, particularly the maternal, with the desired but absent referent, the object of discourse. The child's entry into the symbolic is, for Lacan, simultaneous with the rejection of the mother and the language of the imaginary, in which referent and sign were indivisible. Identifying the feminine with the literal,

then, makes it a contradiction in terms for a woman to be a writer.

But, as Homans points out, Lacan's child is implicitly male. The daughter's acquisition of language is different in that the incest taboo is not so harshly imposed: it is less urgent for the daughter to reject the mother. This results in a less clearcut distinction between the literal and the figurative, leaving women free to retain something of the "presymbolic language" which, rather than re-presenting what has been removed, the absent mother, enacts her literal presence. As Homans puts it, the "daughter therefore speaks two languages at once" (1986:13).

The distinction between these "two languages" needs to be clarified, for the literal may itself be defined in different ways. As the "presymbolic communication" that occurs between mother and child before the entry into the symbolic, the literal is non-referring (Homans 1986:13). The ideal communication of the presymbolic dyad is based on presence, sameness, rather than difference, but in this form is of little use to the woman writer, being identified with the non-signifying and inarticulate, which in cultural terms is the silent. Juliet Mitchell's analysis of Freud's myth of the origin of culture suggests that any apparent escape from the binary structures of patriarchy is simply an acceptance of culture's exclusion of women, for "the freedom of women is pre-historic, pre-civilization" (1974:366). Ironically, this implies that rejection of the patriarchal symbolic is the same, for the female child, as accepting her defined place in androcentric culture: symbolic absence.

Taking on the voice of the speaking subject within the symbolic, then, means denying the literal: "to be in the place of the speaking subject ... is to remove herself from her pleasure in 'woman's place' in the object world" (a world where the mother is not required to be absent, or dead) and trying to find a compromise between the literal and the symbolic is for the woman "bearing ... the word of her own silencing" (Homans 1986:36). In writing, women are required either to use the literal, so risking unintelligibility and finally silence, or to reject their first language and identify entirely with the figurative.

It is possible, though, as Homans shows, to find strategies for transferring the literal into the symbolic, for working within this duality of language. It is paradoxical that the "literal" as defined from within the symbolic, is what functions as a sign: to mean something literally is to use reference at its primary level, without any mediating figuration within language. The symbolic's devaluation of the literal ("To take something literally is to get it wrong" [Homans 1986:5]) is thus also ambiguous.

The balancing or mediation of opposites required by the woman's double language can be fruitful, then: the ambiguity of the role of the literal - either as the "non-sense" of non-symbolic language or as the recalling of a sign's referent into the realm of the symbolic, by literalisation - has the potential to be a space for the return and acceptance of the absent mother, rather than a site of the painful ambivalence imposed on women writers by androcentric culture.⁴

The two central female characters connected with the myth of Prometheus, Pandora and Io, reveal the contradictory nature of the literal in their disparate linguistic implications. I intend to show that both offer analogies for the simultaneous rewriting and re-enactment of the myth by Shelley and Barrett Browning. Both writers find ways of collapsing the duality between the figurative and the literal, revealing the possibility that women writers can, without abandoning their identity as women, be present in - and possessed of - the language which all patriarchal mythology, including Lacan's, bestows on men.⁵

The revisionist theft is not easily accomplished; as the naming of the moth after Prometheus overtly emphasises only one aspect of the figure, so Ostriker's naming of women writers elides that same aspect: the danger of fire, the likelihood of being burnt. Prometheus was punished for his audacity. This was not something which nineteenth century women writers could forget for long, as Barrett Browning's letter reveals. Her certainty is modified even before she reaches the end of her sentence: "It is as well to fly towards the light . . . , is it not?"

I intend to explore the implications of Ostriker's name for the "thieves of language" by taking her metaphor literally and exploring the extent to which Shelley and Barrett Browning, both in what they wrote and in the act of writing, re-created the myth of Prometheus.

To do this it is necessary first to examine the existing myth, to find the recondite connections between the moth and the thief, the woman and the writer. These reside

in fire, that mutable element which underlies all versions of the myth and which, shifting with each interpretation, can either exacerbate or resolve the contradictions facing the woman writer.

HESIOD: THE TRICKSTER AND THE FIRST WOMAN.

But afterwards Zeus who gathers the clouds said to [Prometheus] in anger:

"Son of Iapetus, surpassing all in cunning, you are glad that you have outwitted me and stolen fire - a great plague to you yourself and to men that shall be. But I will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction."

So said the father of men and gods, and laughed aloud.

Hesiod, Works and Days (7)⁶

The "evil thing" whose invention so amuses the father god is the first woman. This aspect of Hesiod's early version of the myth is usually ignored in later revisions, yet naming woman as the "price for fire" is, as I shall show, both a foreshadowing of Lacan's linguistic myth and a potentially fertile site for feminist reconstructions of the origins of language.

In Hesiod's Theogony and Works and Days, Zeus is presented as the wise and just ruler of the gods, while Prometheus is a trickster, threatening Zeus with the disruption of his divine order. At the initiation of the sacrifice ritual which mediates between gods and mortals,

Prometheus tricks Zeus into choosing the bones of the sacrificial ox, rather than its flesh. The angry god responds by withdrawing from man the use of fire, also called "the means of life" (Works and Days, 5). This makes all sacrifice impossible and so breaks the bond between men and gods. But the Titan steals it back.

In the Theogony, Zeus punishes Prometheus by binding him to a "pillar" and having an eagle come each day to eat his liver, which grows back each night. Hesiod tells that Prometheus will be set free eventually, by Herakles, but "not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high" (in Kirk 1974:136). According to Hesiod's version, then, Zeus succeeds in subduing Prometheus, and is justified in doing so.

The consequences which man suffers for receiving the stolen fire are given greater emphasis by Hesiod than Prometheus's punishment. In Works and Days, Hesiod calls the first woman Pandora ("all-endowed") because she brings with her a jar containing "gifts" from the gods: suffering, misery, toil and disease, as well as one redemptive factor, hope (9).

In the Theogony, the first woman is nameless and, instead of carrying evil in a separate vessel, is literally its embodiment and its source: "from her are the destructive race and tribes of women, who dwell as a great misery among mortal men" (in Kirk 1974:140).

Hesiod's myth of the creation of woman has a number of implications for the aspirant "female Prometheus." Like Eve, Pandora is created second, after man and god have drawn up

the conditions of their relationship (in this case the practice of sacrifice), and so excluded from the origins of the social order. She is also instrumental in man's fall from a perfect state: before she is made, "the tribes of men lived on earth remote and free from ... ills and hard toil and heavy sicknesses" (Works and Days, 9). Unlike Eve, though, she is not tempted by a source of evil external to herself and the deity, but is rather created expressly to bear that evil, whether in a jar or, as the mother of the "destructive race ... of women", in her body. In Hesiod's particularly misogynistic version of the myth, the existence of woman is inseparable from the suffering of man (I do not use the term generically) for his acceptance of stolen fire from Prometheus.

What exactly is this fire? It is the "means of [civilized, human] life" (5). Used for burning sacrificial offerings, it is the medium of man's communication with the gods, with his source of universal and moral significance. As the cooking fire, it represents man's power to transform nature at will, to take his environment in its "raw" state and suit it to his needs, make it more digestible. Hence, the gift of fire cannot be separated from that of culture.⁷

Language also plays a significant role in the myth. In Works and Days, after Pandora has opened the jar,

... diseases come upon men continually by day and by night, bringing mischief to mortals silently; for wise Zeus took away speech from them. So is there no way to escape the will of Zeus. (9)⁸

Zeus has the power to bestow and to rescind both fire and speech, but the effect of the afflictions appears to be

strengthened, rather than weakened, by their loss of speech. This connection between "mischief" and silence, juxtaposed as it is with Hesiod's final affirmation of Zeus's wisdom and power, reveals - ironically, perhaps - the understated but crucial role of language in the myth.

This is strengthened by the explicit association of women with language. The creation of Pandora is described in detail: Zeus tells Hephaestus to

mix earth with water and to put in it the voice
and strength of human kind, and fashion a sweet,
lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal
goddesses in face.... (Works and Days, 7)

The blacksmith of the gods, who usually creates with fire, makes woman from inanimate and natural matter - mud - which he brings to life by adding "voice and strength." This connects the original (and originary) voice with the breath, the source of life only later shaped into speech. As potential speech, this first "voice" may be likened to the literal language of the presymbolic.

Hermes is then told to "put in her a shameless mind and a deceitful nature" (7):

[he] contrived within her lies and crafty words
and a deceitful nature at the will of loud
thundering Zeus, and ... put speech in her. (7-9)

The "evil" brought by woman is thus inseparable from her speech. Rather than being denied access to language, Pandora is given two forms of it, the prelapsarian and implicitly non-symbolic "voice" which already exists among men as the "strength of humankind," and a new language which is characterised by its capacity for lies and deceit, for misrepresentation.

The idea of woman as "price for fire" in Hesiod, then, both presages and contradicts Lacan's myth of language acquisition. In the latter, she is the "price" for language in that, as the mother, she is relinquished in exchange for entry into the symbolic. She becomes the ultimate object, the eternally unattainable referent, both feared and desired, but above all absent.

For Hesiod, conversely, it is the presence of woman that man must suffer as the price for accepting the fire of culture. The language Pandora speaks as the "evil" mother is defined not by the absence of the referent, but by its possible non-existence, and the mother is the speaking subject rather than the referent of the sign. In Hesiod, the literal "voice" is associated with the period preceding culture, before sin and punishment by god (the "no" of the father?), but woman is not connected primarily with this kind of language. Pandora, rather than being relegated to the desired but absent prelapsarian world, is centrally present in the new order. Man is made speechless by Zeus, but Pandora introduces the possibility of taking the symbolic to its logical conclusion: fiction, or even fantasy, where the referent may be non-existent. At this point language begins once more to resemble the non-referentiality of the literal. To this extent, the myth has radical implications for feminist linguistics: Pandora conflates the "voice" of the presymbolic language with "lies and crafty words," the subversion of reference, the signification of what does not exist. This misrepresentation is the basis of fictive and poetic language, of the positing

of alternative realities, and of changing existing ones. The figure of Pandora, which is specifically designated as maternal, is thus the site of the first potential subversion of language, the ability, as Ostriker puts it, "to subvert and transform ... life and literature" (1986:211).

There are connections between Pandora and Prometheus in Hesiod's version of the myth. Not only does she provide the consummation of the Titan's gift as well as the ambivalence that is to characterise it but, as dissembler and bringer of ambiguous gifts to man, she resembles him. Pandora may be seen as the first "female Prometheus." It is ironic that the most conservative and misogynistic version of the myth should have the potential to be the most positive for the woman writer.

It is small wonder that the connection between Prometheus and Pandora is usually suppressed. In Aeschylus's later version of the myth, all that remains of Pandora is the one gift she brings which is not apparently a punishment.⁹ In Prometheus Bound, the Titan gives man two things: one is fire, the other is hope.

AESCHYLUS: THE HERO, THE TYRANT AND THE COW

IO:

Who of the company of the unfortunate endure - ah me! - sufferings such as mine?... declare it to the hapless, wandering virgin.

PROMETHEUS:

I will tell thee plainly all that thou art fain to know, not weaving riddles, but in simple language, even as is right to open the lips to friends. Behold, I whom thou seest am Prometheus, that gave fire unto mankind.

Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound (vv.601-612)¹⁰

Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound is probably the most influential version of the myth. The tragedy is one part of a trilogy, the rest of which, apart from a few fragments, has been lost. Its setting and central issue is Zeus's punishment of Prometheus in which, as in Hesiod, the Titan is staked to a rock. The implications of the punishment, however, are examined in far more detail in the later work.

Aeschylus depicts Zeus as a tyrant, harsh, unforgiving and unjust, and Prometheus is far more than a simple trickster; he is noble and heroic, suffering for the sake of mankind, whom he has saved from Zeus's plan to destroy them. Prometheus gives man "blind hope" (v.252), the ability to act in the belief of significance, undaunted by the apprehension of his inevitable death. This makes possible the use of the gift of fire, which is now defined as culture: "every art possessed by man comes from Prometheus" (vv.505-6). The gift explicitly includes language, "combining of letters, creative mother of the Muses' arts, wherewith to hold all things in memory" (vv.460-3). George

Steiner, in explicating the connection between language and fire, "between the live twist of flame and the darting tongue" mentions a significant addition to the role of language in the myth:

Prometheus is the first to hold Nemesis at bay by silence, by refusing to disclose to his otherwise omnipotent tormentor the words which pulse and blaze in his own visionary intellect. (1975:230)

Prometheus knows the secret of Zeus's possible downfall, but he refuses to reveal it. As well as giving language to man, then, he makes use of it himself to threaten the god's power, for deliberate silence is a significant manipulation of the possession of language.

Further, the words of Prometheus's secret knowledge are, like the foresight for which he is named, given to him by his mother, Themis, also called Gaia, the earth goddess: Mother Nature. While Gaia is an overtly silent and immanent force in the drama, her role is implicitly an active one. Conacher describes her function in the "divine succession" of the first Greek gods (1980:6). She undermines the rule of each. Ouranos, the sky god, fathers in her the first beings to live on earth, but will not let them escape from her womb. She enables Kronos to castrate his father from within her body and he becomes the first ruler. Gaia then helps Rhea give birth to Zeus in secret so that he can overthrow Kronos. She also aids Zeus in the war by providing him with his weapons, thunder and fire (in the form of lightning), and by giving Prometheus prophetic advice which he uses to help Zeus. As in the figure of Pandora, linguistic power is linked to the female:

Full oft my mother Themis, or Earth (one form she

hath but many names), had foretold to me the way in which the future was fated to come to pass - how it was not by brute strength and not through violence, but by guile that those who should gain the upper hand were destined to prevail. (vv.211-215)

Again, when Zeus ungratefully punishes Prometheus, she gives her son the secret which empowers him, "the oracle recounted to me by my mother" (v.873-4).

Nature, then, is presented as a force controlling and potentially transcending culture, limiting the rule of each god before he becomes too strong. The identification of the female with nature, and with power, has conflicting consequences for the woman writer, for nature is still opposed to the culture in which women want to write. Like Pandora's possession of language, Gaia's power is ambiguous. It is potentially a source of strength, a way to disrupt culture's exclusion and silencing of women but, at the same time, identification with nature means embracing that exclusion. This problem is emphasised in the figure of Io.

Io is a mortal maiden who is desired by Zeus. She is turned into a cow (either by the god, or by his jealous wife, Hera - Aeschylus is ambiguous about which), and made to wander the world pursued by a stinging fly. Unlike Prometheus's suffering, hers is not a punishment for a misdeed, but the result of her passive physical desirability. Aeschylus emphasises her virtue, her innocence and purity. She is powerless over her beauty and its consequences. Her association with the cow, a symbol of natural fertility, is fitting, for even in her restored form, her function is biological reproduction.

Charles Segal explicates the difference between Io and Prometheus, saying their meeting is like "the confrontation of oral and written mentalities" and that Prometheus, in telling Io to write down "on the recording tablets of [her] mind" (v.789) what he tells her about her future, "provides her with both the temporal and spatial organisation that the ordering of reality by writing makes possible" (1986:85). As well as developing the connection between the gift of fire and writing, the interchange between Prometheus and Io distinguishes between the masculine hero's possession of symbolic language and the female victim's lack of it. Prometheus promises to tell everything plainly to Io, "in simple language," without "weaving riddles." From the point of view of the symbolic, this means as literally as possible. While the stated reason for this is his sympathetic friendship, it also implies her inability to understand anything more complex, and carries with it the patriarchal symbolic's devaluation of the literal, either as apparently simple signification or as the non-referential presymbolic. The fact that Io is bovine makes explicit the connection between the woman as object of desire (in this case, Zeus's lust) and her positioning within nature, essentially excluded from the subjective, figurative and symbolic use of language. The inarticulate cries that precede many of her speeches represent her alienation from the symbolic and her links with the presymbolic form of the literal. Kott describes Io's entrance, "running onto the stage mooing and wailing" (1974:30) and, as I shall show, Ovid considers her difficulty in using symbolic language

after the curse is lifted.

Aeschlyus's version of the myth, like Hesiod's, introduces both positive and negative elements for the woman writer. Io and Gaia, unlike Pandora, are inseparable from nature and the inarticulate, despite being potentially powerful.

To appropriate language, then, the woman writer must rather identify with Prometheus because of his possession of the symbolic. But in doing so she has to confront another danger: the tragedy is pervaded with the pain that is the consequence of rebellion against Zeus, of the certainty that to be Prometheus means to be - figuratively at least - burnt by the stolen fire.

The conflict between the symbolic use of language and the association of women with its opposite is most explicitly highlighted in Ovid's version of the Prometheus myth.

OID: THE OTHER FIRE

Prometheus on his crag

Heard the cry of the wombs.

He had invented them.

Then stolen the holy fire, and hidden it in them.

.

... the vulture was the revenge of those wombs
To show him what it was like....

Ted Hughes (1979:83)

Prometheus, son of Iapetus, took the new-made earth which, only recently separated from the lofty aether, still retained some elements related to those of heaven and, mixing it with rainwater, fashioned it into the image of the all-governing gods. Whereas other animals hang their heads and look at the ground, he made man stand erect, bidding him look up to heaven, and lift his head to the stars. So the earth, which had been rough and formless, was moulded into the shape of man, a creature till then unknown.

Ovid, Metamorphoses (31)¹¹

For Ovid, Prometheus is not just man's benefactor, but his creator. To this extent fire, implicit in the "elements related to those of heaven," has been transmuted from culture - figuratively the essence of humanity - to the "spark of life" used in the literal creation of human beings.

As the variations of the myth attest, fire has the potential to be an all-encompassing image, a natural phenomenon which the human mind may imbue with many and potentially conflicting meanings. In terms of the complex of myths connected with Prometheus, fire begins as the gift given to Zeus by Gaia: the figure of feminine nature provides the masculine god with a natural element to use as a weapon. The first meaning of fire, then, is related to

man's need to explain lightning - the most natural form of fire? - and the terrifying conflagrations it could cause. Fire is to some extent controlled by suggesting that nature deliberately gave it to the deity, and that the frightening occurrences of natural fire have a reason: the god is angry.

The first direct involvement of man with fire is through the sacrifice ritual. As I have suggested, this symbolises communion between gods and men, expanding the interpretation of Zeus's use of lightning: the god lets man have some control of fire. The step from burning the sacrificial animal to cooking it for food is an obvious but crucial one: not only is fire controlled by man, but it is now used as a means of domesticating other parts of nature for man's use. The connections between fire and nature shift as man's developing culture begins to use Gaia's gift to control her domain.

Aeschylus's reading of fire as culture, removing all connections with its natural source, is a logical development from this. Fire, in domesticating nature, has itself been further demarcated and controlled; the alien and inexplicable natural force, a physical element which literally burns when present, has gradually been absented. The word for it, its signifier, is made into a symbol, a figure for something else. Fire is no longer present in Aeschylus as a literal flame, and Zeus's punishment of Prometheus is not literally by the burning thunderbolt. "Fire" as a signifier is, in its mythical journey into the patriarchal symbolic, purified of the natural and made to refer to the referent at the root of all reference: culture.

Man's ambivalence about this exclusion of nature is revealed in introducing Prometheus as the thief: there is something illicit and presumptuous about culture. The thief, neither god nor man, is made (created, and obliged) to take responsibility for this. He is both benefactor and scapegoat.

Ovid's reading of the myth both extends and brings full circle the significance of fire. Prometheus has gone from being culpable trickster, spoiling with no apparent motivation man's relationship with the god, via magnanimous hero, defender of man's rights, to the very creator of man. Fire has become the source of life. But this does not imply a return to nature; fire here is not literal, but further emptied of all but symbolic meaning. Literal fire has been appropriated by culture, and is now used to usurp Gaia's role in creation: the masculine creator becomes the source of life, of the spark giving significance to the inanimate and silent muddy matter of nature. And because of Prometheus's role, man is created different from, and implicitly better than, nature. Animals "look at the ground" while man "look[s] up to heaven, and lift[s] his head to the stars," denying his connection with the earth, with the literal, with the mother.

In the Metamorphoses, Io and Pandora are no longer associated with Prometheus. He creates alone, the new revision of his myth having ingested both the language of Pandora and the biology of Io, in the same way that the symbolisation of fire incorporates and so denies the function of the feminine. The division between the natural

referent and the cultural sign is complete; man's theft of fire from nature has been accomplished.

The woman writer is, as female, identified with nature and so excluded from the symbolic order which has appropriated the image of fire. As a writer, she attempts to position herself as a subject within that order. The conflict between the two roles is echoed by the duality of fire: the woman who writes must seize these opposites and weld them together into a new entity, or she will herself be consumed.

WOMEN'S FIRE, WRITERS' FIRE: THE MOTH AS MONSTER

[University education for women] would result in the creation of a new race of puny, sedentary and unfeminine students, ... and would disqualify women for their true vocation, the nurture of the coming race....

J.Fitch "Women in the Universities,"
Contemporary Review 1890 (in Morgan 1989:161)

A learned girl is one of the most intolerable monsters of creation.

Saturday Review 1870 (in Morgan 1989:158)

A "new race" of "intolerable monsters": women writers. These nineteenth century opinions emphasise, in their choice of metaphor, the perceived conflict existing between the two uses for fire found in the Prometheus myth, the figurative creativity that produces writing and the literal creativity that produces children.

Margaret Homans introduces these terms in Women Writers and Poetic Identity:

Motherhood is literal creativity. It must be difficult for a woman to choose as her vocation poetry [writing] or figurative creativity, perhaps to the detriment of the maternal vocation with which she is expected to be contented, because the values associated with motherhood and with poetry are so very different. (1980:223)

Elaine Showalter quotes a review of Barrett Browning's work which reveals the use of this contradiction to discourage women from pursuing figurative creativity:

It is very doubtful if the highest and richest nature of woman can ever be unfolded in its home life and wedded relationships, and yet at the same time blossom and bear fruit in art or literature with a similar fulness. What we mean is, that there is so great a draft made upon women by other creative works, so as to make the chance very small that the general energy shall culminate in the greatest musician, for example. The nature of woman demands that to perfect it in life which must half-lame it for art. A mother's heart, at its richest, is not likely to get adequate expression in notes and bars, if it were only for the fact that she must be absorbed in other music.

(Gerald Massey 1862, in Showalter 1977:76)

Massey (or his plural speakers who try so hard to say what "we mean") does not even consider that the woman will let her choice of art be "to the detriment" of motherhood, still less that literal and figurative creativity could ever co-exist with success. His "that" which supposedly perfects woman's nature "in life," which is in turn carefully opposed to "art," is literal creativity, this "other" music that deafens - handicaps - women who attempt figurative creation. His objections are couched in admiring terms: his repetition of "richness" and the use of nature imagery for both kinds of creativity support his assumption that the "nature of

woman" will leave her a "half-lame" artist, making her foolish even to try, when she is, he implies, already so bounteous a creator.

For the woman writer the conflict between the two kinds of creativity underlies her ambivalence, her fear that as a "female Prometheus" she will be punished for her ambition, either with failure in one or other sphere or, if she dares to do the unmentionable and succeed, with worse. She is "expected" to be contented with literal creativity because she is associated with nature, with Gaia who gave up fire to the warring god and who is ignored beneath the feet of men gazing up at the unattainable objects of their figurations. If she writes successfully she appears to take on the values of those men and so becomes a dual creature, a hybrid of the two gendered forms of fire, not quite a man and not quite a woman. She is reviled as a monster.

The implications of the chosen epithet are significant. There is a kind of writing by women which was, especially in the nineteenth century, quite acceptable: there was a kind of self-effacing, sentimental verse which could be indulged as harmless by patriarchal society. Showalter discusses the way Victorian critics found new terms which classified those women writers who were not threatening as something other than genuine creative artists,

[straining] their ingenuity for terms that would put delicate emphasis on the specialness of women and avoid the professional neutrality of "woman writer": authoress, female pen, lady novelist.... (1977:74)

Women who revealed intellectual powers beyond what was

acceptable for the "proper lady" could not be treated with such patronising politeness. They were attacked as monstrous for, instead of writing within their given role as ladies, they, as women, actively appropriated the figurative.¹² For this reason, they were perceived as abnormal, and immensely threatening. The monster inspires not only loathing, but terror. The descriptions used to attack such women writers unwittingly reveal their power, as Rufus Griswold, the compiler of Women Poets of America (1848), shows in his distinction between the acceptable poetess and

the ruder sort of women ... casting aside their own eminence [moral], for which they are too base, and seeking after ours [intellectual], for which they are too weak, they are hermaphroditic disturbers of the peace of both. (in Ostriker 1986:31)

A description using these terms is clearly intended pejoratively. In fact, however, what the definition implies is not unlike what women writers strive for. They need to be abnormal, if to be normal is to be the silent lady, the domestic angel whose vocation is exclusively the reproduction and "nurture of the coming race." To be a monster is to be that which is "out of the common course of nature."¹³ To sidestep that "common course" is precisely the ambition of the woman writer. To be "hermaphroditic," an appalling mixture of the categories of male and female, is to "disturb the peace," to confound the structures which connect woman with nature and man with culture.¹⁴

In the Prometheus myth, Io is the most overtly monstrous female character, a woman in animal form. But in the terms of the quotations above, she is not a monster at

all; being half-woman and half-cow does not really contradict culture's definition of women. As I have suggested, the bovine Io is simply a literalisation of the "normal" vocation imposed on woman: reproduction. Aeschylus's association of her with simple, literal language is apt, as is her destined impregnation by Zeus and mothering of the race of Egypt. At the same time, she is powerful: like Gaia, her connection with nature makes her a potent threat to the symbolic order. This is emphasised by her role as progenitor of Herakles, the eventual rescuer of Prometheus.

Io represents the possibilities and the disadvantages inherent in literal creativity. In Ovid's Metamorphoses, she and Prometheus no longer have anything to do with each other, but Io remains an image of feminine desirability and virtue. At the end of her suffering,

Io resumed her former appearance, and became what she had been before. The hairs fell from her body, her horns disappeared,.... Nothing remained of her cowlike shape, except her snowy whiteness.... She was afraid to speak, in case she should low like a heifer, and timidly attempted the words which she had not used for so long. Now she is a goddess of high renown.... (48-9)

Ovid retains her innocence, her connection with presymbolic language (the heifer's lowing, her fear of speech), and her ultimate power, a function of her literal creativity.¹⁵

The woman writer has the option to deny the duality which makes her monstrous. She can choose to embrace her role as literal creator, but this role, taken to its logical conclusion, will make her speech unintelligible and writing impossible. It will finally silence her.

She also has the option of rejecting entirely her connection with Io and the maternal, writing instead like a man. This strategy was frequently used in the nineteenth century, as my discussion of Barrett Browning will reveal. But choosing to be a writer rather than a woman involves as much of a denial as the reverse. Rather than embracing the monstrous dual role of the woman writer, she tries to conform to the normal role of the male. The woman writer can try to be a "male Prometheus," striving for an unassailable subject position within the symbolic and denying her early, literal language, her connection with the power of Gaia.

A third alternative is to confront the dissonance between literal and figurative. Prometheus is a useful model in this regard because, as both the source of human culture and the literal creator of man, he embodies both uses for fire. But his role as creator, as I have suggested, is problematic. The separation of fire from its natural source sidesteps rather than resolves the conflict of the woman writer. The attribution of literal creativity to a male figure simply denies it to the female. He is still the "male Prometheus," a forerunner in this form of Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, whose disastrous masculine mothering of his creature reveals the danger of "consuming" the female.

The woman writer, in rewriting the myth of Prometheus, has to find a way to deconstruct the gendering of "fire," not only by combining its figurative and the literal forms, but by avoiding the masculine gendering of that combination. She has to try and confound the binary definition of gender itself. It is here that the most profound implications of

her capacity to be a "hermaphroditic disturber of the peace" may be found.

Prometheus is hybrid not only because of his conflation of the literal and figurative across the interpretative history of the myth, but because inherent in his character as trickster and as Titan is his role as mediator. Neither god nor man, he is situated between Olympus and the world of mortals. Kott analyses the Titan's role in relation to "The Vertical Axis" of the classical cosmos: fathered by God and mothered by Earth, he is a "personification ... and instrument ... of mediation in the universe split into the above and the below" (1974:xiv-xv). He links the divine and the base.

For Kott, mediation is finally impossible in the Aeschylean universe: Prometheus Bound ends with the Titan hurled downward into Tartarus. Perhaps for the "female Prometheus," engendered by the Gaia of nature and the Zeus of culture, there may be a better chance. The source of this lies in her own hybridism. Capable of drawing together both motherhood and authorship, she is more monstrous than the Titan because of culture's initial marginalisation of the maternal.

This conflation of the intellectual and the bodily, of what culture labels respectively as superior and inferior, has the disruptive potential Bakhtin explores in his analysis of the "grotesque" and the "carnavalesque." The carnival, where opposites meet and freaks are displayed, is governed by the logic of the ungovernable,

the peculiar logic of the "inside out" ..., of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to

bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. (Bakhtin 1968:11)

Stallybrass and White point out the potential for transgression inherent in the carnivalesque; its logic disrupts that which supports any stable hierarchy:

[s]ymbolic polarities of high and low, official and popular, grotesque and classical are mutually constructed and deformed. (Stallybrass and White 1986:16)

This construction of dualisms is similar to the Lacanian model of (masculine) identity, the rejected being as important, symbolically, as what is retained. Stallybrass and White, writing on transgression, say that they set out to "explore the contradictory constructions of bourgeois desire ... a construction of subjectivity through totally ambivalent internalizations of the ... carnivalesque" (1986:21).¹⁶ Subjectivity and desire are constructed through the rejection of the low, the popular, the grotesque - as well as the literal, the natural and the female - and at the same time deformed by the insistent presence of what is rejected. The woman writer embodies both of the poles which the subject within culture needs to keep in a state of tense separation. The result of this mediation is a transgression like that of the carnivalesque, a "symbolic inversion" of the classical axes of higher and lower, culture and nature, male and female (Stallybrass and White 1986:18).

The monstrous woman writer, positioned as she is in the anomalous no-man's land between culture and nature, has the capacity for such transgression. She is not simply base, but a mixture: her aberration is that she is a hybrid, offspring

and evidence of the union of high and low. Stallybrass and White give a useful definition of the hybrid as:

the grotesque ... formed ... through a process of hybridization or inmixing of binary opposites ... such that there is a heterodox merging of elements usually perceived as incompatible, ... and [which] unsettles any fixed binaryism.... (1986:44)

This ability to unsettle the binary is the crux of the woman writer's subversive potential: because the hybrid makes impossible the simple exclusion of one term or the other, it undercuts at its source the dualistic basis of the symbolic, producing

new combinations and strange instabilities in a given semiotic system. It therefore generates the possibility of shifting the very terms of the system itself, by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it. (ibid.58)

The cultural contradiction between being a woman and being a writer which is the source of the woman writer's ambivalence can paralyse her, forcing her to choose one side of the duality or the other. It can also become a way into a space where, refusing to be relegated to either pole of the binary opposition, she stubbornly remains in the middle, incorporating the figurative and the literal. In this way, she has the potential to threaten the very constitution of the patriarchal symbolic. In her enactment of the Promethean theft, the woman writer rebels, like the Titan, against the construction of the cosmos in which she has been positioned: she has the capacity to carry out a symbolic inversion, or even a disruption of the symbolic itself.

The word "hybrid" is etymologically associated with the "Greek hybris, insolence, overweening," the source of the term hubris.¹⁷ The hybrid carries with it the meaning of the

Promethean, the heroic audacity which enabled the Titan to steal from the gods. At the same time, hubris is associated specifically with the tragic hero: so arrogant a disruption of universal order seldom goes unpunished. The woman writer's identification with Prometheus, then, carries with it the likelihood of punishment; it is hard to play with fire without being burnt.

The "female Prometheus" must carry off her stolen fire in the spirit of the moth which flies into the flame, either with the Titan's prescience, choosing to embrace known suffering, or with "blind hope," the gift that is not fire, but facilitates its theft, the only one of Pandora's gifts allowed to remain in later versions of the myth. In either case she needs to convert that punitive definition of herself into the source of her subversion, taking the literal fire that was the source of Zeus's thunderbolts and using it for her own purposes.

Thus, Ostriker's decision to name the woman writer a "female Prometheus" carries a re-evaluation of monstrosity. In the nineteenth century, women writers who threatened to bring about the return of the rejected and repressed mother (and her disruptive and threatening language) were transgressing and could be made to suffer. But the critics of women writers, in defining them as monsters, unwittingly discovered a prophetic synonym for the name later given by Ostriker.

MONSTROUS MOTH(ER)S, MOTHERING MONSTERS.

I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper.

Mary Shelley,
Introduction to Frankenstein (60)¹⁸

The monstrous woman writer, in embodying the hybridisation of opposites, is potentially the mother of monsters: resulting from the abnormal combination of her dual capacity for natural sexual reproduction and symbolic, textual, production, the writing she engenders is the realisation of her transgression.

Rabelais's Gargantua is born through the ear of his mother, Gargamelle (Rabelais 1534; 1955:52). This recalls Athena's birth from the head of Zeus (Hamilton 1940:29) but, significantly, Gargantua is the product of his mother's womb and not her head. Unlike Athena, he is not the result of a mental conception. Gargamelle's labour is described as a grotesque intermingling of defecation and parturition and, as Bakhtin points out, the birth is "completely carnivalesque" because the "child does not go down, but up" (1968:226). Gargantua's inversion of the accepted bodily hierarchy of childbirth threatens the divisions between the lower body and the head. Similarly, a woman's textual offspring has the potential to disrupt the hierarchy of culture and nature, writing and bearing children.

The childbirth metaphor has frequently been applied to figurative creativity. Susan Stanford Friedman discusses the implications of this for women writers.¹⁹ She examines the effect which the gender of the writer using the metaphor has

on its function. Male writers' descriptions of their work as childbirth serves to emphasise the difference between literal and figurative creativity and to privilege the latter; their "brainchilds" (Friedman 1989:81) are, like Athena rather than Gargantua, entirely the products of the writers' minds. When used to refer to the creativity of the woman writer, by comparison, the metaphor

represents a defiance of historical [rather than biological] realities and a symbolic reunion of mind and body, creation and procreation.
(Friedman 1989:80)

It facilitates the fusion, as Friedman explains it, of the tenor (writing) and the vehicle (childbirth) of the metaphor (ibid.). This (con)fusion of culturally defined opposites is the project of the "female Prometheus," for she can give birth to both books and babies.

The character in the Prometheus myth who is associated with both forms of creativity at the same time as maintaining her female and particularly maternal identity, is Pandora, who produces both the figurative and the feminine. Like the texts of the woman writer, she is both transgressor and consequence of transgression. As the first "female Prometheus," she is the first of a new race of "intolerable monsters" (epigraph, 23 above).

Pandora is usually only remembered for her careless release of misery into an edenic male world. Her role as first mother is forgotten, because Hesiod's tale of the origins of childbirth was supplanted by versions which, like Ovid's, attempted to reduce the importance of the female. This is another case of what Homans recognises as the

absence, or death, of the mother in myths about the initiation of culture. Pandora is supplanted by her male counterpart, Prometheus. In producing the work of the "female Prometheus," then, women writers recall not only the Titan, but also the monstrous mother of the new race who brought together in her first form the two aspects of creativity which patriarchal culture has tried to separate ever since.

The hybrid is most threatening when it emphasises its monstrosity, when the work of a writer makes explicit her capacity for literal creativity. One strategy for doing this is when, instead of producing overtly original (and so, in culture's terms, masculine) writing, she allows the reproductive to impinge, revealing the femaleness in her Prometheanism and recalling the disruptive presence of the maternal. Shelley and Barrett Browning recall not only the presymbolic reproductive force revealed in their writing strategies, which I shall examine in more detail presently, but also a more literal mother figure, Mary Wollstonecraft.

Wollstonecraft was the biological but absent mother of Mary Shelley (whose birth caused her death), and both Shelley and Barrett Browning read her work while adolescents.²⁰ Her Vindication of the Rights of Woman, written in 1792, contains a detailed argument in support of the education of women. For this reason it was called, in a review, a "scripture, archly framed for propagating w[hore]s" (in Gilbert and Gubar 1979:222). Wollstonecraft also wrote two novels. Laurie Langbauer finds in the unfinished second one, Maria, or the Wrongs of Women, a

remarkably sophisticated confrontation with the duality of being a woman writer, of the ability to use both symbolic and literal language (in Mellor 1988b:208-219).

Wollstonecraft's heroine, Maria, is imprisoned in an insane asylum. In the midst of the unintelligible speech of the mad, she writes a letter to her daughter. Langbauer discusses the significance of this: the mother's writing

emphasize[s] that naming, language, is not just the function of the transcendental signifier, the phallus, but also of the undertones and side effects of signification - its babble and noise - that won't leave it alone, that call it into question.... The mother ... is half-man.... Locating the woman writer with motherhood, difference, and division allows her to make sense - and nonsense - within the paternal order, to work within it without completely accepting its rule. (1988b:215)

Maria finds a special language for her daughter, one which can include the "undertones" of signification, the devalued presymbolic language. Yet she is an active subject within the symbolic even while she recalls the language of her role as mother, a language not far, perhaps, from the "lowing" of Io. The marginalised context in which Maria's narrative is written is fitting. The background noise is unmediated, nonsymbolic and non-sensical, but certainly not meaningless:

groans and shrieks [which] were no insubstantial sounds of whistling winds ... modulated by a romantic fancy, ... but such tones of misery as carry a dreadful certainty directly to the heart. (1976:75)

Maria's letter is never finished, for its author died giving birth to her own daughter. Both narratives collapse into rough notes and ellipses, but both contain the possibility of simultaneously using and subverting the symbolic order. Wollstonecraft's novel expresses the "dreadful certainty" of

"misery" which is the dark side of her audacious writing. At the same time she confronts in her manipulation of the language of suffering (which is as "beyond words" as the "misery" which her own daughter was to describe thirty years later) the hopeful potential of the mother's language.

Shelley and Barrett Browning both make use of the disruptive role of the maternal in their writing. Instead of recognising the literal by addressing daughters, though, both make reproduction part of the texts themselves, extending the results of Wollstonecraft's experiments. One way to include the literal and subvert culture's definition of it is by rewriting. The revision of existing material is a kind of hybridisation, for it both alludes to and transforms the female side of the woman writer's conflict. Literal creativity consists of the faithful, duplicative reproduction of the father's child and his name. When this is united with the ordinary powers of figurative creativity, a monstrosity results, a re-creation, a "new race" imbued with life stolen from the "common" one.

The methods of re-creation used by Shelley and Barrett Browning differ considerably, but both give figurative birth to hybrid progeny, conceived of the contradiction between the writer's mind and the woman's body. Both writers may be called translators, in that they carry across, from one form and meaning to another, the myth of Prometheus.

Homans discusses translation as a means of combining the literal and the figurative, showing how "the unwomanly selfishness of writing" can be converted into the seemingly harmless and hence subversive "selflessness of transmission"

(1986:31). Lori Chamberlain, in her analysis of the historical use of childbirth metaphors in the description of translation, perceives that "binary logic ... defines translation as ... an archetypal feminine activity"

(1988:467). George Steiner makes a similar point:

There is a strain of femininity in the great interpreter, a submission, made active by intensity of response, to the creative presence.
(1975:26)

The apparently selfless submission of translation, read by Steiner as a natural passivity inspired to action and simultaneously subdued by the originary creation of another, seems to be an acquiescence in the reproductive role. It is only partially so. The connection between translation and interpretation implies the impossibility of pure "selflessness." The translator, although "archetypally feminine" and so the object rather than the subject of symbolic discourse, is nonetheless never absolutely objective. Translation is still writing, its writer still its subject. In the same way that presymbolic literal language is retained as well as transformed when used by a subject within the symbolic, so the reproduction of texts remains a textual rather than a sexual act: the woman only seems to be carrying out the silent transmission of another's creation. The complex re-creation facilitated by the work of female translators is thus another form of hybridism.

Stallybrass and White examine the connections between authorship and transgression, discussing the ambivalent rejection of the hybrid in Augustan literature. Pope's

Dunciad attacks writers who did not actively separate the domains of the high and the low, whose works were a danger to both "literary and social marks of difference" (1986:114), for such transgression has linguistic consequences: "grotesque hybridization threatens to subvert the distinction between words and genres" (1986:115). The hybrid writer's subversion extends to language itself, and the woman writer, although not the same kind of monster as the male writers attacked by Pope, is even more threatening because of her inherent hybridism.

Shelley and Barrett Browning use different modes of "translation," but both produce new and disruptive forms from existing material. Frankenstein is the revision of a number of versions of the myth, incorporating as it does two Promethean figures, each of which embodies different aspects of the Titan. It may be seen as a translation of the myth into the genre of the novel and is, at the same time, the creation of a new genre - Brian Aldiss calls it "the first real novel of science fiction" (1986:51) - and of a new and particularly modern myth. Barrett Browning's revisions of Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound are linguistic translations, carrying it from Greek into English. Her later work, Aurora Leigh, which I shall argue is a further rewriting of the myth, is also a hybrid, a Victorian novel-poem. Both writers carry the myth from its position within androcentric culture into a new place, one occupied by the woman writer whose revision of the myth hybridises it, through her own paradoxical identity, into a subversion of its source.

Barrett's translations were criticised for their

"grotesque peculiarities," for "it was rarely her pleasure to be faithful to her text" (Stedman 1904:121-2). Her translations were, by implication, monstrous. No wonder the critic hurried to domesticate her, purifying the feminine of its connection with writing: "The chief element in the life of Elizabeth Barrett was her marriage" (132). The translations, like Mary Shelley's novel and Victor Frankenstein's creature, are Barrett's "hideous progeny," the illegitimate offspring of the union of nature and culture, the literal and the figurative.

Walter Benjamin describes "The Task of the Translator" as

to release in [the translator's] own language that pure language which is under the spell of another [trapped beneath what he calls the burden of meaning], to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. (1970:80)

The ideal of setting language free resembles Ostriker's call for women writers to carry out an "invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language," of that place where the symbolic binary dualism at the root of patriarchal culture is kept as the possession of men (1986:211). Benjamin states that language is liberated in the absolutely literal translation (1970:78). The literal, in his sense, is not a clear symbolic connection between sign and referent (which would require the translation to be faithful to the literal meaning of the original), but is rather the presymbolic literal: for him, the ideal translation carries only the letter of the original, at the cost of signification. This literal, then, is very close to that of the maternal.

Benjamin establishes that there are two aspects of an

original text which can be translated from the source language into the target language, and absolute fidelity to either one of them necessitates a failure or an infidelity in translating the other (1970:74). All translation, (and this may be said of all rewriting) is different from reproduction to this extent: the translator/mother can never be entirely effaced, entirely "selfless."

While neither Shelley nor Barrett Browning carry out literal translations in Benjamin's sense, the disruptive effect such rewriting can have on language and the metaphors used to describe them provide a useful paradigm for the woman writer's theft.

The two aspects of a text which can be translated are the "intended object," the meaning, or signified, and the "mode of intention," the signifier (Benjamin 1970:74). These, respectively, are carried by the sentence or proposition, and the word, the basis of syntax. Paul de Man, in his analysis of the English and French translations of Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," retranslates them as meaning-bearing "logos" and structuring "lexis" (De Man 1985:39). Fidelity to the logos, then, implies emphasis on the communication of meaning, while the literal translation is true to the lexis or its component, the letter; that is, its concern is not so much with figuring the absent referent as with the present linguistic surface. The absolutely literal translation is non-symbolic in the same way as the pre-symbolic "non-sense" talk between mother and child is: presence is all.

This liberation of language from figuration, Benjamin

writes, "completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility"; he describes such work as "monstrous" (1970:78). Absolute fidelity to the lexis of the original necessitates infidelity to, even complete denial of, the logos. This recalls the disruption by the hybrid of the terms of a semiotic system: the literal/body's invasion of the figurative realm reveals, by causing a collapse of meaning, an inherent weakness in the symbolic. Translation discloses the difference between man's word and the divine Logos of originary creation where for once, according to myth (Judaean-Christian, Greek and Lacanian), the figurative and the literal were inseparable. Translation can reveal that the woman writer's acquiescence in reproducing the products of men is potentially deceptive and unreliable, that the symbolic is man's ultimately feeble attempt to own and domesticate the fire of nature.

Translation, then, as the carrying across by women writers of a text or myth from one form, genre or language to another, has the potential to disrupt the logic which deprives women of an empowered relationship to language. Instead of choosing one side of the literal/figurative opposition, women writers can bring the two into both conflict and conjugality. As Benjamin's theory implies, the resulting hybridism makes possible the dislocation of language from the structures of the symbolic, the same structures which deny it to women. Translating, or rewriting, is a means for women writers to give birth to monstrous texts which, like Gargantua, invert the

hierarchies of culture and connect, inseparably, the womb and the head.

But this theoretical discussion of potential conceals the immensity of the transgression, and the likelihood that it cannot be carried out completely, or with ease and impunity. The woman writer, especially in the nineteenth century, would not have been surprised if the consequences of her theft of language were more cataclysmic for herself than for culture. The ambivalence that characterises the writing of both Shelley and Barrett Browning is partly a result of this fear.

AMBIVALENCE AND THE DANGER OF BURNING

At the top of the pole stuck on to the pyre he could make out a scroll listing the sixteen charges of which Jeanne had been found guilty: Jeanne, who called herself the Maid, a liar, a pernicious woman, a betrayer of the people, a soothsayer, superstitious blasphemer of God, presumptuous, unbeliever in the faith, boastful, idolatrous, cruel, dissolute, invoker of devils, apostate, schismatic, heretic.... The stake was too high for the executioner to strangle her.... So Jeanne had to endure inhuman torments to the end.

Michel Tournier, Gilles and Jeanne (1983:34)

The fate of Joan of Arc, and innumerable suspected witches: purification by burning, the cauterisation of the monstrous by man's Jovian use of fire for punishment. While Tournier's account of Jeanne's immolation is fictitious, the litany of her sins is relevant, for it defines her as Promethean. She

is presumptuous, a rebel against God, and she does not believe in the dictated faith. Above all, though, she has dressed as a man and "called herself the Maid." Her first transgression, her hubris, is that she is a hybrid, and for that she burns.

The nineteenth century labelling of women writers as monstrous has its roots in that litany, or similar ones, and the public condemnation of the "pernicious woman" is equivalent to burning at the stake. The fear of burning remained in the ambivalence of the woman writer. Her rewriting was not only a way of changing the world she found herself in; it was also her response to that potentially crippling ambivalence. She did not only rewrite patriarchal mythology. She also rewrote her own revisions. Shelley revised her 1818 version of Frankenstein in 1831 and Barrett Browning called her second translation of Prometheus Bound an "expiation" of the "sin" of the first. As I shall show, there were times when their "blind hope" or their heroism failed, and fear made them go back and try to hide their most audacious re-creations, to make retractions - the promethea moth may waver in its flight.

To sum up, then, Alicia Ostriker's naming of women writers as "female Prometheuses" positions them in such a way that they re-create themselves as well as the myth they revise. The contradiction which underlies women's exclusion from culture is that between the literal and the figurative. The definition of the "woman writer" is read by the patriarchal symbolic as a contradiction in terms. The hybrid "female Prometheus" enacts this contradiction and in doing

so can revise the name and the dualism which is the source of her ambivalence. The monster, as writer and as text, as mother and as child, reveals the positive potential in what has usually been interpreted by existing mythology as loathsome and dangerous.

When the Promethean theft of language is complete, those apparent contradictions will be recognized for the fertile space they provide. Meanwhile, though, "monster" remains associated with the horrifying and, like the presymbolic maternal, is marginalised rather than embraced by culture.

The theft of fire bears with it the danger of burning: the father-gods are still insistent that Pandora must be ignored and Prometheus must be punished. Mary Shelley and Elizabeth Barrett Browning flew towards the flames with immense courage in their aspirations to be both female and Promethean. Or to put it another way, in striving to steal fire from its safe place within patriarchal culture, they risked being struck by Zeus's lightning.

CHAPTER TWO

CREATION AND REMORSE: MARY SHELLEY

I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump.... I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed.

Shelley, Frankenstein (89)

Mary Shelley began writing Frankenstein in June 1816. She was eighteen years old, had eloped with Percy Shelley and was living with him, her stepsister and the poet Byron in Europe. She had already given birth to two illegitimate children and by the time she finished the novel in May 1817, she was five months pregnant with a third.

As many critics have pointed out, the acts of literal and figurative creation could hardly have failed to inform each other in Shelley's case and the novel, her "hideous progeny," is frequently read as a "birth myth," her rewriting of motherhood.¹ At the same time, the novel is about writing, about birthing texts.² The writing of the "female Prometheus," as I have argued, is a kind of translation, the act of carrying material from one form and

interpretation to another, and is often done in two contradictory ways: the audacious revision of existing (patriarchal) myths, and the subsequent self-censoring "expiations." The two kinds of rewriting can also be simultaneous, for the revised figure can be re-created twice, split and doubled. Shelley and Barrett Browning use the myth to test their own identification with the Titan: both Frankenstein and his creature, both Romney and Aurora Leigh, embody different aspects of the myth and of the ambitious act which their authors carry out.

Writing in the company of two of the great poets of the Romantic period, Mary Shelley could not have avoided the influence of the dominant literary tradition of her time, that of the subjectivity of the Romantic poet. As Homans has pointed out, the Romantic tradition implicitly emphasises the contradictions of being a woman and a writer, for the female was both reified and adored as the other, the silent material which the poet articulates and endows with meaning. The death of the mother, in terms of Lacan's myth of the subject's entry into the symbolic, was perhaps most effectively - and most damagingly for the woman writer - institutionalised by the Romantic poets.³

Mary Shelley's response to her situation could not be anything but ambivalent. Mary Poovey discusses Shelley's contradictory position between the revolutionary lives and beliefs of her parents and future husband and the increasing social approbation of self-effacing feminine behaviour: she was caught in the "collision between what we now call the 'Romantic' model of originality and the 'Victorian' model of

feminine domesticity" (Poovey 1984:116). Shelley's writing reflects this particularly complex biographical situation. She began her adulthood with an escape from the strictures which usually limited the life of the nineteenth century woman. Paradoxically, but not surprisingly, much of her life appears to have been spent regretting her transgression and trying to return to the insignificance and safety she had rejected.

Frankenstein embodies this ambivalence. If Victor Frankenstein, thief and creator, is read as Prometheus, then the monster is man, recipient of his gift. If the monster is seen as Promethean for rebelling against his creator, then Frankenstein, attempting to use the power of lightning, becomes Zeus. As a "female Prometheus," Shelley interpreted her own position as writer-creator and woman-rebel in relation to the order against which she had already transgressed. The figures of Frankenstein and his rebellious creature offer a critique of Romanticism that is at once conservative and revolutionary. Its voice is that of the "proper lady," warning against all egocentric ambition, and also that of the "female Prometheus" who not only appropriates the subjecthood of the patriarchal symbolic, but threatens culture with the subversive potential of her hybridism. In her revision of the Prometheus myth, then, Shelley enacts a double response to culture. She works within the Romantic tradition even while she explores the dangers of doing so.

In 1831 a revised version of the novel was published; by this time, Shelley was thirty-three. Percy was dead, as

were all three of the children whose gestations coincided with that of Frankenstein. She was back in England, living with her one surviving son. Her journal entries describe her feelings at the time:

I have felt my solitude more entirely but never more painfully than now. I seem deserted - alone in the world - cast off.... (18 December 1830)

God grant that after these few months are elapsed I may be able to take refuge in Nature & solitude from the feverish misery of my present existence.... I am miserable beyond words. (8 March 1831)⁴

This is the voice of the despairing Prometheus, bound to the rock and suffering for his defiance. The punishment consists of solitude, of being "cast off" from the world of human relationships, yet Shelley also yearns for the relief of "Nature & solitude," for an escape implying death. For Shelley, isolation is ambiguous, meaning both pain and solace. This is connected with the double meaning of the literal: from the point of view of culture, the woman writer is punished by being excluded, labelled as monstrous and so banished to the margins of normal society. Her refusal to relinquish either her figurative creativity or her connection with the literal positions her in an ambiguous mediating realm. This is not in the circle of the family, the cosy hearth where the literal (as both fire and fertility) is entirely domesticated by figuration, but in what culture perceives to be a lonely and frightening place on the edge of the symbolic. At the same time as resenting her loss of community, Shelley longs to escape society altogether and enter willingly the presymbolic maternal dyad, the unambivalent union with nature which, preceding

entry into the figurative, is entirely free from culture's definition, from the father's law. Shelley's expression of her suffering contains the paradox of the "female Prometheus" and reveals the consequence of doing so: solitude, whether as isolation within culture or complete exclusion in the form of the silence of death. In either case, her misery is indeed "beyond words." In her presentation of the suffering of Frankenstein and his monster, Shelley explores the possibilities for resolving the crisis of the woman writer. In re-creating two Prometheuses, Shelley explores her own ambivalent position.

The 1831 revision of Frankenstein reveals Shelley's increasing conservatism, based on the remorse she feels for her earlier transgressions (both social and literary, if the two can be separated). Victor Frankenstein's development is rewritten in such a way as to reduce his responsibility at the same time as increasing the sense of his sin. Poovey points out that Shelley both enhances the destruction caused by his egotistical ambition, and at the same time makes him more the victim of his own externally determined and inevitable transgression than the wilful and deliberate sinner (1984:133-4). To this extent, in revising his character, Shelley does not so much reconsider the myth as emphasise her existing reading: the revisions "extend her criticism of imaginative indulgence, already present in the 1818 text, and direct it more pointedly at the blasphemy she now associates with her own adolescent audacity" (Poovey 1984:133). Her "modern Prometheus" is made more harmful but less heroic and less culpable: to the extent that she

identified with him, this is consistent with Shelley's changed position.

Significantly, though, the narrative of the monster, which I shall argue contains the more positive aspects of Shelley's Prometheanism, is virtually unchanged in the second version.⁵ Shelley's declaration at the end of her 1831 introduction that she has left "the core and substance [of the novel] untouched" (60), a statement Mellor calls a "defensive lie" (1988a:176), is truer than it appears: at the centre of the novel the monster is given a voice, and this voice is hardly modified at all.

I shall not carry out a close analysis of the differences between the two versions of Frankenstein. Apart from the fact that a number of such analyses have already been done, the revisions emphasise an ambivalence already present in the 1818 edition: Shelley's dual re-creation of the Prometheus myth exists as much within the novel as between versions.⁶ For this reason, I shall use as the basis of my reading the 1831 edition, which emphasises the woman writer's fear and guilt in its revisions of Frankenstein, at the same time as retaining her defiance in the form of the monster. The Promethean creator is subjected to the power of the author, while the rebellious Promethean creature escapes.

It is in relation to Victor Frankenstein that Shelley's fear of her own punishment finds its most active expression. The character of Frankenstein may be seen as the Promethean Romantic hero taken literally, and taken to its logical conclusion, by a repentant Romantic.

MAN TO CHILD AS WOMAN TO TEXT? FRANKENSTEIN AS MONSTER

'I agree with you,' replied the stranger
[Frankenstein]; 'we are unfashioned creatures, but
half made up, if one wiser, better, dearer than
ourselves ... do not lend his aid to perfectionate
our weak and faulty natures....'

Shelley, Frankenstein (77)

Prometheus was a popular Romantic figure, seen by both Percy Shelley and Byron as standing for what Peter L.Thorslev calls "the ultimate in titanic rebellion ... which asserted the independence of the individual and the primacy of his values not only in the face of society, but even in the face of 'God'" (1962:172). As well as being humanity's champion, he is, as "the Romantic Hero apotheosized, ... pure allegory; there is nothing in him of the Gothic, nothing of the dark mystery or taint of sin of the other Romantic heroes" (Thorslev 1962:112). Shelley takes this ideal figure and puts him into what M.K.Joseph calls the "real and inescapable" world of science, of the physical (1969:xiv). She makes literal the allegorical or figurative Romantic hero. In her Gothic novel he is carried into mysterious, sinful reality and tested, along with the ideals he has been made to stand for.

If Shelley is seen as identifying with Frankenstein, if her double rewriting results from her perceiving in his illicit creation the culpability of her own, then perhaps he is in some way monstrous too: where the woman writer who steals figurative creativity becomes a "half-man," his literal creation might make him a kind of "half-woman." But

both thefts are more complex than this, as Shelley's presentation of nature, the source and site of literal creativity, suggests.

The lesson Frankenstein learns is that humans are "unfashioned creatures" if they are not completed by human relationships, by love. Egocentric ambition separates the individual from community, from the culturally perceived feminine values of self-effacing altruism and caring for others.⁷ Frankenstein's denial of these values, Shelley suggests, makes him a monster.

Frankenstein is like Ovid's Prometheus in that he creates literally, giving life to a new creature. At the same time, as Prometheus brings the clay to life without using fire in any but the figurative sense, so Frankenstein does not literally become pregnant and bear a child. By producing a living creature, he appropriates the role of the maternal, but the act itself is entirely cultural. Nature is used simply to provide the materials for his own scientific/artistic creation. This distortion of reproduction is revealed by the particular elements of nature used by Frankenstein: corpses and lightning, the dead and the destructive. He inverts natural procreation by associating it with death. In this way the maternal, as the capacity of the female body to bear children, is rendered obsolete. Homans differentiates between circumvention and appropriation, suggesting that Frankenstein "does not so much appropriate the maternal as bypass it, to demonstrate the unnecessariness of natural motherhood and, indeed, of women" (1986:105). His distortion of natural reproduction is

like that of Ovid's Prometheus in that both incorporate the literal within an act of figurative creation, so denying its importance. The implication is, as Friedman points out in relation to male use of the childbirth metaphor, not that women can create in a way that men cannot, but that figurative creativity can replace all other kinds, which are hence devalued. Frankenstein creates with culture - with language: "masculine appropriation of the creative Word attempts to reduce woman to the processes of her body" (Friedman 1989:76) - the idea of "reduction" is telling here. This resembles culture's "theft" of fire from nature: the literal and threatening flame is rendered harmless by making it into a figure of speech. Frankenstein's theft of the evidence of death and decay suggests a similar desire to incapacitate the literal.

Ovid's Prometheus completes the cultural domestication of fire by drawing it into the symbolic, but in the myth fire continues to exist as a literal and dangerous force outside of culture. Similarly, Frankenstein excludes the role of Gaia/woman from his act of creation but he cannot usurp the natural form of creativity. The presymbolic maternal, in the form of nature, is unscathed by his theft. It is he who suffers, not so much for creating as for failing to parent his creature. Shelley suggests that Frankenstein is culpable, monstrous even, less because he stole "fire" from the natural female than because of his refusal to accept the culturally defined feminine consequence of motherhood, self-denying care of others. Shelley emphasises this lack by surrounding Frankenstein

with ideal Romantic role models of the feminine.

The novel's female characters are, virtually without exception, what Homans would call "models of femininity ... who, by their passivity and infantility, pose the least threat to the 'superiority of the masculine principle'" (1980:16). Victor's mother has a "soft and benevolent mind" (82) and martyrs herself in caring for Elizabeth, his future wife, who is presented to him as a "pretty present" and seen as his possession, his "to protect, love and cherish" (84). Even Safie and Agatha, seemingly part of a more enlightened family, are weak and in need of masculine protection. As well as being good and kind, the female characters are also, almost without exception, "orphans and beggars," isolated from family - and from money. They are only too willing to be cared for, taken in (in both senses of the phrase).

Shelley pursues the virtue of self-abnegation to its logical conclusion: death. Virtually all her central female characters die: they are not real protagonists, but symbols of the ideal Romantic woman. Part of inarticulate nature, with its implications of passivity, they are apotheosised in death. This valorisation of feminine martyrdom, particularly the deaths of mothers, both conceals and hints at the other kind of death, undomesticated by culture, which Frankenstein encounters. Like fire, the mother and death are deprived of their literal power by being defined within the symbolic.⁸ Shelley makes Frankenstein uncover this power. Gilbert and Gubar describe women's "alienation from the patriarchal chain-of-being" (1979:227): as "aliens," though, they are, even while disempowered within the structure of culture,

also potentially threatening to the same structure.

Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley's mother, died ten days after, and as a direct result of, giving birth to her. The death of the mother, the figurative loss of the maternal required by the symbolic, was thus painfully literal for Shelley. It seems unlikely that the infant had any experience of her mother at all; Godwin describes in his memoirs how the doctor "forbad the child's having the breast, and we ... procured puppies to draw off the milk" (1798:117). The literal presence of Shelley's mother was replaced by figuration: she read about her mother and she read her mother's writing. This too was a source of ambivalence, for while Wollstonecraft's work was egotistical and original, her death was, for all her radical feminism, described by her husband as that of the ideal lady:

She was affectionate and compliant to the last.... whenever her attendants recommended her to sleep, she discovered her willingness to yield, by breathing ... in the manner of a person who sleeps.... (1798:121)

Wollstonecraft was thus both a strong model for the rebellious appropriation of cultural, and particularly linguistic, power and at the same time absent as the result of death in childbirth, that most female of all fates. This irony was not lost on her critics: the Rev. Richard Polwhele, in a work called The Unsex'd Females (1798), used Wollstonecraft's death to demonstrate women's proper place:

She died a death that strongly marked the distinction of the sexes, by pointing out the destiny of women, and the diseases to which they are liable.... (in Kelly, ed. 1976:vii)

The death of Shelley's mother seemed a poetically just

punishment for daring to try and escape the natural cycle of birth and death that patriarchal culture determines to be female destiny.

Shelley makes her female characters submit wholly to their "destiny." It is Frankenstein who rebels against the limits of his own sex in trying to deny nature the sole power of literal creation and then, having appropriated the role of "mother," refuses the consequences culture has already attached to such a role. In the myth, Prometheus both creates man and protects him, becoming his champion against a hostile god; Frankenstein, at the moment of giving life to his creature, repents of what he has done and rejects the beneficiary of his stolen gift.

In Hesiod and Aeschylus's versions of the myth, Zeus is the paternal ruler, master of all. Prometheus rebels against him and is punished. What strength he has comes from his alliance with nature, whose order is stronger and more permanent than the authority of the god. Nature is presented as female and maternal, as Gaia, Prometheus's mother. She may be said to embody an alternative law to that of Zeus, one which allows her to control the power of the male gods: her "name expresses the regularity of nature, the peaceful law shared by all its creatures," "the earthly maternal principle" in which "a just order has its natural foundation" (Kerényi 1959:100). This "justice" is an amoral cycle, limiting and controlling the strength of the individual. When each god strives to become too powerful, Gaia turns against him. Similarly among mortals, individual achievement and errors are all limited by the inevitable

destinies determined by nature, by birth and death.

In the myth according to Aeschylus, then, feminine nature is opposed to the tyranny of Zeus as a patriarchal ruler who abuses his power. To this extent she is a useful figure for the woman writer, who would rebel against a culture where the paternal bears power. The prehistoric power of Gaia is seen as ultimately antecedent to, and greater than, that of culture, despite man's domestication of fire. In this lies the difference between Frankenstein and the Aeschylean Prometheus: a creator as in Ovid's version, he is also unjustified, as in Hesiod's, because his defiance is against nature. Shelley explores in him the contradictions between ambitious patriarchal culture and the natural, between the symbolic and the presymbolic, or, for the pre-Oedipal child, between the paternal and the maternal. In exercising what Maurice Hindle calls the "aspiration of modern masculinist scientists to be technically creative divinities" (1985:23), Frankenstein performs a travesty of natural procreation by women.' His "technical creativity" is presented as unnatural and therefore dangerous.

Frankenstein justifies his motives as altruistic rather than egotistical and presumptuous: he intends to "banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death" (89), to master the art of resurrection in "renew[ing] life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (102) and to "pour a torrent of light into our dark world" by creating a race of "happy

and excellent natures" (101). He desires to take Gaia's power over birth and death. Walton, the aspirant Prometheus whose narrative frames Frankenstein's, is, as a physical explorer, in a position to state these ideals even more clearly: he seeks "dominion ... over the elemental foes of our race" (77), over nature. Percy Shelley connected his own aspirations with those of Frankenstein when he wrote Waldman's statement in the novel that "The labours of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind" (Hindle 1985:268, n.13). The novel, then, subverts the philosophy which Shelley's husband himself wrote into it.¹⁰

Each of Frankenstein's ambitious claims is called into question. He admires the "masters of the science [who] sought immortality and power" (95), rather than the good of others, and relishes the "glory" such a discovery would engender (89). His desire is to become the creator of a new race and he expects filial gratitude: "a new species would bless me as its creator and source.... No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (101-2). Implicitly, he would be a god rather than a father, and there would be no mother with whom to share the gratitude and allegiance of his creatures.

But before Frankenstein can create, he must understand. Despite the suffering he describes while working on the creature, his continued perseverance and his sudden disgust when the creature comes to life suggest that his remorse occurs only after he has carried out the final shift of nature's literal power into culture.¹¹ His initial research

is slightly different. Shelley sets up a comparison of Frankenstein's scrutiny of nature with the Romantic view of nature as a benevolent reflection of the mind of man. Respectful Romantic symbiosis is used to evince the moral health of both Elizabeth and Clerval, suggesting Wordsworth's concept of "natural piety," of a morality dependent on a close and reciprocal relationship with nature ("My Heart Leaps Up" l.9, 246).¹² This nature, though, is a figuration; Clerval "call[s] forth the better feelings of [Victor's] heart" by teaching him to "love the aspect [the face, or surface] of nature and the cheerful faces of children" (117), to appreciate visible and innocent beauty without seeking to act upon or change it. In Clerval's company, "happy, inanimate nature" gives Frankenstein pleasure. This imposed reading of nature as the passive and inanimate object of the Romantic gaze is what Frankenstein's remorseful narrative presents as positive but which, like the ladylike deaths of the novel's real mothers, is a view of nature from within the symbolic rather than of the literal maternal that exists outside it. Frankenstein's science forces him to confront the literal and unromantic realities of birth and death, unmediated by the words of culture.

The dream he has on the night the creature is brought to life reveals this discovery: he takes his future wife, Elizabeth, in his arms, but as he kisses her, she becomes the corpse of his dead mother, her face "livid with the hue of death," "grave-worms crawling in the folds" of her shroud (106). His ideal and feminine love object, "in the bloom of

health," is transformed by his embrace into a literalisation of the side of nature he has uncovered: a rotting corpse. The body is specifically maternal, evidence of man's rejection of the mother and at the same time of her defiant return, revealing the horror which underlies all nature - and particularly the female - despite its safely defined position (which includes beautifully sanitised and sentimentalised death) within culture.

Frankenstein's embrace of the corpse of his mother also signifies his own death, but his return to the arms of the maternal is not a regression to the blissful utopia of infancy, the embrace which heterosexual desire within culture strives to represent, but into the maternal that exists outside of the symbolic, the rot and decay that culture longs to deny, but which irrevocably destroys each subject. The dead mother here is Gaia who ensures the downfall of Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus, and by implication, also Prometheus, when their power becomes too great. She is the reality which Wordsworth's "intimations of immortality" would deny.

Frankenstein's relationship with nature is based on an obsession which presumes to usurp power through knowledge. His desire for the mother oversteps the limits of the Romantic perception of her: he is not content to look at nature's "aspect." While Elizabeth as a child is happy to "contemplate ... with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things," Victor, unsatisfied, "delight[s] in investigating their causes," and is "more deeply smitten with the thirst for knowledge" (85).

A stanza from Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned" appears to encapsulate the Romantic perception of nature's "lore," the doctrine against which Frankenstein transgresses:

Sweet is the lore which nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;
- We murder to dissect. (ll.25-8, 131)

Rather than appreciating the appearance of nature as impersonal -and impenetrable - beauty, Frankenstein tries to "dissect," to open and explore. Wordsworth's lines suggest that the object of "murder" is nature, but the novel reveals a greater complexity; the overreaching intellect "misshapes the ... forms" which are "sweet" and "beauteous" in the Romantic perception of nature.

Frankenstein only reveals what already exists and has been rejected because its implications are so threatening to culture. What he destroys is the Romantic image of nature, her figuration by culture as "sweet." Dissection reveals nature's power over culture, and implicitly reveals the danger to culture of the female when not domesticated into submissive femininity by the symbolic.

Frankenstein longs to return to the apparently moral Wordsworthian perception of nature, but Shelley is ambivalent, subverting the Romantic view even as she criticises Frankenstein's defiance of it. His dissection of nature is a revelation of the literal; his transgression against nature is in trying to create life and defy the inevitability of death, to deny the implications of what he has found. What he uncovers by dissecting corpses is the female nature repressed by the Romantic objectification of

feminine nature.¹³

Aptly, then, the aspects of nature Victor examines are not the superficially beautiful, but the deeper mysteries, the secrets of an active and animate nature. He does not specifically examine the details of conception and birth in his search for the secret of life; his study is of death and decay. He invades "vaults and charnel-houses" (99), the churchyard is to him "merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, ... food for the worm", and he describes his investigation of "every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings" (99-100). His "torture ... [of] the living animal to animate the lifeless clay" (102) is a parody of Prometheus's giving life to mud, but at the same time it suggests a recognition of the literal which Ovid's myth does not: Frankenstein's art does not simply look up at the stars.

This apparently clinical exploration of nature, this denial of "delicacy," is the centre of this Prometheus's "modernity." His science does not evince a sense of heresy in uncovering the secrets of nature. As Hindle points out, "the old God who ... had been the author and controller of Nature now falls silent in the overbearing presence of ... 'Victor'" (36). Silencing the words of a controlling God leaves nature uncontrolled and so far more threatening. Death, from having profound spiritual (and so figurative) significance, is recognized as an unmediated biological phenomenon.

Frankenstein's relationship with nature is also implicitly sexual. Carolyn Merchant discusses how the

figuration of "Mother Nature" shifted gradually to signify a rather different kind of female:

The constraints against penetration associated with the earth-mother image were transformed into sanctions for denudation. After the Scientific Revolution Natura no longer complains that her garments of modesty are being torn by the wrongful thrusts of man. (in Hindle 1985:41)

The way in which Frankenstein describes his obsession with nature makes her the object of a perverse and erotic desire; metaphorically, he seeks to "know" nature in the Biblical sense. His "gladness akin to rapture" is on learning "the hidden laws of nature" (85) and his desire is to "penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding places" (96). The imagery used to describe his feelings on discovering the secret of life emphasises this:

The astonishment which I had at first experienced ... soon gave place to delight and rapture. After so much time spent in painful labour, to arrive at once at the summit of my desires was the most gratifying consummation of my toils. (100)

This consummation is not the moment of bringing the creature to life; it is the moment of knowing how to. Frankenstein describes his loss of innocence in a conflation of sexual intercourse and childbirth. His discovery of the secret of literal creativity is also implicitly incestuous: Hindle discusses how Frankenstein's "presumptuous act of creating life marks an incestuous violation of ... mother nature" (41), an illicit union with what exists beyond culture, with the nonsymbolic. His invasion of nature's "hiding-places" is a seizure of power and in carrying it out he destroys his own affection for nature. Shelley presents as fatal Frankenstein's rejection of Romantic "natural piety" in

favour of the amoral secrets uncovered by his "meddling intellect." He defies the ethical system according to which his science is murder, estranging himself from what should, in Romantic terms, give meaning to his existence. He tells Walton that he "seemed to have lost all soul or sensation" while working with "profane fingers", and he describes how his "eyes were insensible to the charms of nature" (102). In carrying out his act of creation, Frankenstein is alienated from cultural perceptions of order even while he reveals the literal - as opposed to the "sweet" - lore of nature. Unlike Prometheus, he does not have the wisdom of Gaia or Themis to support him. Frankenstein's exploration of nature begins and ends as an attempt to gain her power; it is both a masculine sexual invasion of the female and an assumption of her role. The estrangement he feels from the "feminine," both as the Romantic perception of benign nature and as the social values of caring and community, indicate his discovery of the dangerous and alien power of the presymbolic maternal.

There is another side to Frankenstein's theft; in Aeschylus's version, Zeus, as law-giver, is defied by Prometheus, who is protected and defended by the natural order. In Frankenstein, a human being attempts to defy nature and steal her secrets, which include the source of Zeus's power: Victor aspires to be like the ancient philosophers who not only "penetrate nature", but in doing so "acquire ... new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven" (96). Implicitly, his ambition is to steal fire as the lightning initially given to Zeus by Gaia. Frankenstein's first intimation of the

power he desires is introduced in a thunderstorm. Ominously, the fire he perceives as the source of life has the opposite effect on the tree, which becomes "a blasted stump" and, as he points out, "I have never seen anything so utterly destroyed" (89). The remorseful Frankenstein later calls himself a "blasted tree," recognising this irony (205). The image of light is used again to reveal the irony of his aspirations: his plan is to "pour a torrent of light into the dark world" (101), but the creature comes to life "by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light" of Frankenstein's dying candle (105).

The scientist's appropriation of nature's fire in the form of lightning places him on the side of the gods overthrown by Gaia, rather than on that of Prometheus, defended by her. His dream is to illuminate the world with the light of his illicit knowledge; at the moment of its realisation, a symbolic darkness reveals his mistake. His Prometheanism is a reversal of that in Aeschylus's version.

In the myth, nature and the gods are not absolutely opposed; only when an individual god becomes too powerful a tyrant must nature limit his rule. Similarly, the law of the masculine gods is not entirely exclusive of natural justice: Gaia has helped Zeus, and only when his rule becomes unjust does she support the less powerful Prometheus. Nature is shown as regulating the masculine god's intellectually constructed cultural order. Frankenstein's work is illegal, against human as well as natural law, but Mary Shelley presents society as ambivalent about his actions and so incapable of controlling him. His theft is on behalf of

culture and to this extent, he is able to work against nature with the support of human law.

The relationship between nature's justice and man's law is demonstrated both within the Frankenstein family and in wider society. Victor's parents, Alphonse and Caroline, are presented ambiguously. He remembers them to Walton in ideal terms which suggest a reaction to guilt rather than a realistic representation of them. Alphonse is involved with the government of Geneva, described by his son as a man of "integrity" with a great "sense of justice" in his "upright mind" (80-1). Caroline has great courage and a "mind of an uncommon mould", which is "soft and benevolent" (81-2). They appear to be ideal parents, having a "deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life" and their disciplining of their son is likened to his being "guided by a silken cord" (82). Later, he admires their "spirit of kindness and indulgence.... [T]hey were not the tyrants to rule our lot according to their caprice, but the agents and creators of all the many delights which we enjoyed" (86). As natural parents, they fulfil the cultural responsibilities they owe their child. By Frankenstein's account, which does not distinguish here between the roles of mother and father, Alphonse is an unusually "feminine" father.

The ethical beliefs of the family have the potential to prevent Victor from carrying out his obsession, but are not adequately put into action. The Frankensteins' philosophy is close to the Wordsworthian view that morality and sympathy with nature are inseparable. Such sympathy includes human

social relationships:

A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind.... If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. (103)

Frankenstein tells Walton this as the conclusion he has reached after his suffering. The father's belief is in the ethic of human affection; what is "unlawful" is what is not proper for the "delicate," civilised human mind. The importance of tranquil domestic affections is associated with feminine values, with "kinship" rather than culture, opposed to the accepted extradomestic ambitions of the male (Mellor 1988b:229). Both of Frankenstein's parents profess these values, but his mother is dead, leaving his father to enforce them. Victor ignores the warning signs that become evident while he works: he forgets about home, failing to write, and "shun[s] his fellow creatures" (104).

Frankenstein's description of his father's justice is marred by his memory of a discussion they have about the work of Cornelius Agrippa. He shows the book to Alphonse, who looks "carelessly at the title page" and tells his son not to waste his time on such "sad trash" (87). Victor blames Alphonse for failing to prevent his downfall:

If ... my father had taken the pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded.... [i]t is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. (87-8)

Along with Alphonse's failure to instil in Victor any respect for the mysterious, this leaves the son without

guidance from his father, from the voice of cultural order. Alphonse realises that his son is in trouble - and Victor agrees that "he was justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from blame" - but he does not act on his awareness of justice to save his son: he makes "no reproach in his letters and only [takes] notice of [Victor's] silence by enquiring into [his] occupations more particularly" (103).

Frankenstein, Walton and Clerval all defy their fathers in striving to fulfil their ambitions. Walton disobeys his father's last injunction, that he should not go to sea. Clerval eventually manages to persuade his to let him choose his own future, but the terms used are Promethean:

Henry deeply felt the misfortune of being debarred from a liberal education. He said little, but when he spoke I read in his kindling eye and in his animated glance a restrained but firm resolve not to be chained to the miserable details of commerce. (93)

The law of human society is presented in three examples of legal cases. The ironically named Justine is found guilty of the murder of William, Safie's father is condemned to death in Paris, and Victor is acquitted of the murder of Clerval. The failure of human law emphasises that what Victor has done is beyond the control of a fragile cultural order; it is beyond the power of society to punish or forgive him.

In each trial, the law fails. The innocent Justine is hanged, despite Alphonse's assurance that she will be given a fair trial (he says she can "rely on the justice of our laws" [127]). Victor describes the "harsh, unfeeling

reasoning" of the judges, implicitly contrasting them, as "these men" (135), with the feelings of Elizabeth.

Justine is finally executed because she confesses to murder; the confession is a lie, but that makes no difference. She lies because her confessor has convinced her that she will be better off doing so. As she says,

I did confess, but I confessed a lie.... [M]y confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. (133)

He has the power to convince her of her own monstrosity. As a killer of children she would be an apt example of deformed, inverted motherhood, but it is her silence, her refusal to admit to the sin, to the man's definition of her, that makes him "besiege" her and call her monstrous. Her power over language is what has to be destroyed; once she has accepted his definition, she is left in peace.

Shelley's attribution of monstrosity to Justine is significant. The creature, before framing her for William's murder, talks to the sleeping girl:

Awake, fairest, thy lover is near - he who would give his life but to obtain one look of affection from thine eyes; my beloved, awake! (188)

Justine is both servant and adopted member of the Frankenstein family. Stallybrass and White call the role of the maid-servant "'the hole in the social cell', the site of transgressive desire" (1986:169). Elizabeth discusses Justine in a letter, revealing her hybrid position (apparently Percy Shelley wrote this section [Hindle 1985:269 n.17]):

A servant in Geneva does not mean the same thing as a servant in France and England. Justine, thus received in our family, learned the duties of a

servant, ... which ... does not include the idea of ignorance and a sacrifice of the dignity of a human being. (113)

Elizabeth reminds Frankenstein that Justine had been "a great favourite of yours; ... you once remarked that if you were in an ill humour, one glance from Justine could dissipate it" (113). Elizabeth's (slightly jealous?) description of the power of Justine's gaze foreshadows its importance to the monster, who desires the same look but cannot trust that he will receive it.

Of all Shelley's female characters, only Justine bears the disruptive potential of the hybrid. Her eyes remain closed; she does not see the creature's monstrosity, and so she does not reject him. The possibility that she could have looked at him with affection is deliberately not tested. The significance of seeing and not seeing will be expanded on later; what is revealing here is Shelley's association of the female servant with monstrosity and her juxtaposition of this incident in the monster's narrative with his plea for Frankenstein to make him a "companion ... of the same species and hav[ing] the same defects" as himself (189). The possibility is raised that Justine might be the monster's human and female equivalent. Her destruction is suitably brought about by the portrait, the artificial appearance and aspect of Frankenstein's dead mother, which the monster places near her. He says Justine is less beautiful than the idealised painting of the mother; she is real and has the potential to look at him. The monster, afraid to risk this, instead "frames" her, literally: in a more overtly negative version of the mother's miniaturisation in a portrait,

Justine is subjected to culture's definitions of her as female, a servant, a murderess, and a monster.

Frankenstein cannot rescue Justine by telling the judges the truth of his own responsibility for it is beyond the capacity of their reasoning, which does not admit the mysterious within its carefully bounded cultural circle. Frankenstein's truth is likely to be dismissed as madness. This is borne out later when he tries to tell his story to a magistrate, in the hope that the law will help him to destroy the creature. The man listens to the tale with "that half kind of belief that is given to a tale of spirits and supernatural events; but when ... called on to act officially in consequence, the whole tide of his incredulity return[s]" (243). This representative of androcentric law proves inadequate because of the limitations imposed by his confidence in his own system. Frankenstein's criticism of him points out culture's secure refusal to recognise the possible return of the rejected, of the deformation of its boundaries: "Man, ... how ignorant art thou in thy pride of wisdom!" (244). Frankenstein has learnt this for himself.

In a trial closely resembling Justine's, Safie's father is sentenced to death because of "his religion [he is Turkish] and wealth rather than the crime alleged against him" (168), and in the third case, Frankenstein himself is tried for the murder of Clerval. In an agony of guilt and longing for death, he finds himself "doomed to live" (221), despite the detailed evidence given against him. With the intervention of his father, he is acquitted.

Shelley presents the androcentric, and so flawed,

justice of human law: Justine, female and a servant, and the Turk, another cultural outsider, are unjustly punished, while Frankenstein, whose father is a member of government, is set free. These cases reveal both the assumed power of patriarchal language and its vulnerability as an inadequate patching over what men of the law choose to deny - in much the same way as Lacan's boy-child has to deny the maternal before he can take his place in the symbolic order.

Frankenstein remains faithful to human law. He believes he has defied his upbringing in creating the monster, but his "rebellion" is shortlived: at the moment of success, he rejects his creature. He is a Prometheus who steals fire for man and then helps Zeus punish the recipient of his gift. He does not consider duty while planning his project, for what counts is the gratitude he anticipates. His parents treat him as a

creature ... whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards [him].
(82)

Despite this, he forgets that he has involved himself with the cultural implications of the power he has stolen. His failure is that he refuses the role society imposes on mothers. This would require the denial of his egotistical desires, for motherhood requires self-abnegation and service. In appearing to appropriate the power of nature he has, in fact, to the extent that he has "mothered" the creature, taken on culture's demand that he do what "natural" mothers should: nurture. His suffering is thus the result of his rejection of the cultural, the feminine, as

well as his invasion of the natural.

The monster reminds him of "what the duties of a creator towards his creature" are, and briefly he recognises these (147). But Frankenstein has to choose between the race to which he belongs and the new one he has created, between his masculine identity within cultural law - which allows the man to go about his egotistical existence after fathering a child - and the requirement that the creator, as mother, should also nurture. He is briefly torn between the two:

I created a rational creature and was bound towards him to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention.... (259)

It is predictable that Frankenstein should choose his own race and, implicitly, his duty to his own gender. He has stolen the natural power of procreation, an ability usually associated with the female, but when the product of the theft proves different to the legitimate offspring of conventional reproduction, he rejects it. His ambitious creative imagination fails. Victor is afraid that, rather than being blessed by the new race he has made, he will be cursed by the future people of his own race as the "pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race" (211). It is paradoxical that, had he treated his creature even slightly differently (had he, for instance, put him in a cage and exhibited him at a museum or a carnival freak show), he might have been hailed as a

scientific genius for taking to its logical end his culture's ethic of masculine ambition. But in the face of the power that he has uncovered, he can only retreat into complete denial of what he has done and a desperate return to conventionality.

This choice leads to Frankenstein's punishment. His own perception of transgression is what lies at the root of his suffering: his rejection of what he has done - the act as well as its issue - is what causes his pain. As I have pointed out, he associates his suffering with Zeus's mode of punishment: "I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul," overtly linking the source of his theft with his suffering (205). Shelley also seems to draw parallels between Frankenstein and Satan: he is "like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, ... chained in an eternal hell" (254). He goes on to describe his position:

I trod heaven in my thoughts ... but how am I sunk!... a high destiny seemed to bear me on, until I fell, never, never again to rise. (254)

This echoes the end of Prometheus Bound when the Titan is flung from his mediating position down into Tartarus. Frankenstein uses even more Aeschylean terms: "for an instant I dared shake off my chains and look around me with a free and lofty spirit, but the iron had eaten into my flesh, and I sank again, trembling and hopeless, into my miserable self" (205).

This absorption in the self is an apt punishment for the sin of selfish presumption; Frankenstein is isolated within himself, the suffering imposed from within is self-disgust, remorse resulting from his own perception of his

guilt. This emphasises Shelley's ambiguous presentation of nature; it is both an implacable force, entirely external to culture, and at the same time closely connected with human morality (in the same way as Zeus's lightning has its source in nature). Shelley's use and simultaneous critique of the Romantic construction of nature is thus evident in Frankenstein's guilt. He has recognised that he is, despite the denial implicit in his creation of the monster, part of nature. Frankenstein cannot rebel against Mother Nature with impunity because she is part of himself. Unlike Prometheus, he does not perceive himself as having stolen from an external oppressor but from the maternal system which he has rejected: in "sinning" against her, he is forced to recognise her power. Connected with the mother's death, his act also affirms the fact that she can never be completely killed, or that as "dead", absent, she is even more threatening and powerful.

Victor tells Walton how at risk is "he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" and how his work made him untrue to himself; it "swallowed up every habit of my nature" (101, 103, emphases mine). Alienation from one's own nature emphasises the culturally defined rift between the feminine and the masculine. Mellor discusses the "mutual deprivation inherent in a family and social structure based on rigid and hierarchical gender divisions" (1988b:221). Frankenstein, in following the masculine ethic of independence and achievement within culture, has rejected the feminine ethic of care - and denied the implications concealed by this of the female, of undomesticated birth,

sex and death. It is to this that Mellor attributes his inability to love the product of his work (1988b:221). He is evidence of the agony caused by gender division within the individual, a division created by the definition of nature as feminine and as alienated from - and controllable by - the self.

There are moments when Frankenstein finds respite from his guilt. After Justine's execution, he goes into the mountains, where he is to encounter and listen to the monster. The mountains are significant in that they represent the sublime aspect of nature, the awesome and terrible rather than the simpler beauty earlier associated with the Wordsworthian love of nature. Here Frankenstein is confronted by nature's power:

The weight upon my spirit was sensibly lightened as I plunged yet deeper in the ravine of Arve. The immense mountains and precipices that overhung me on every side, the sound of the river raging among the rocks, and the dashing of the waterfalls around, spoke of a power mighty as Omnipotence - and I ceased to fear or bend before any being less almighty than that which had created and ruled the elements.... (140)

In Wordsworth's Prelude, the speaker recognises in the "huge and mighty Forms" (I:1.425, 385) of the mountains, which he finds troubling at first, a divinity, the "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe" (I:1.428, 385), who "intertwines":

The passions that build up our human Soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought....
(I:11.434-438, 386)

For the Romantic subject, the immensity of nature's power is inextricably connected with "our human Soul." By comparison,

Frankenstein apprehends in the mountains a power which seems entirely independent of the symbolic's reading of it. At the same time, he does not perceive nature as exclusively negative: Frankenstein's recognition of that power and his willingness to bend before it to the exclusion of all else prefigures the chance he is about to have of at least partial salvation, the opportunity to make peace with his creature.

Remembering the "tingling long-lost sense of pleasure" of his childhood, he briefly regains innocence, and is rewarded by a transformative re-perception of nature, a brief return to secure unity with the mother: the "very winds whispered in soothing accents, and maternal Nature bade me weep no more" (141).

In this "glorious presence-chamber of imperial nature," Frankenstein meets his creature (142). Before the "icy wall of [a] glacier," prefiguring the place of his death, he has his grief "subdued and tranquillized"; seeing "an eagle, soaring amidst the clouds," he is put "at peace" (142). The eagle, instrument of Prometheus's punishment, becomes a source of comfort to Frankenstein. This is associated with his recognition of nature's power and his return to a childlike state.

The moment is given greater significance by two other allusions to Prometheus's torture by the bird. The literal eagle is associated with redemption, with a return to symbiosis with the presymbolic maternal. But the bird appears twice more, figuratively, and is associated with suffering. After hearing the monster's tale, Frankenstein

sees him "descend the mountain with greater speed than the flight of an eagle" (193) - here, the creature is connected with both the potential for redemption and the instrument of punishment - and later, just before the death of Elizabeth, the image returns in an even more threatening form: a storm rises and the moon is dimmed by clouds sweeping "across it swifter than the flight of a vulture" (238). Not only is the image of the eagle transformed into the figure of a bird that traditionally haunts the dying, as Victor has lost all hope of forgiveness, but the vulture was the bird used to punish Prometheus in Hesiod's version of the myth (Aeschylus made it an eagle). There are implicit connections here between Shelley's rewriting and the earlier and more conservative version, in which Prometheus's suffering was presented as entirely justified.

Shelley does make Frankenstein, in his narrative to Walton, present himself as entirely deserving of punishment. The vision of the myth which identifies Frankenstein as Prometheus is a conservative one. He usurps the role of literal creator but refuses the responsibility which is the necessary consequence of such power. Percy Shelley's Prometheus defies dictatorial Jupiter/Jesus on behalf of the oppressed masses of mankind; Frankenstein defies Gaia on his own ambitious account. Mary Shelley, using the Romantic conception of nature, reveals the contradictions in idealised Romantic Titanism: apparent altruism does not conceal the dangerous egoism of the hero who rises above the mass, even if ostensibly to protect it. Shelley revises the myth of Prometheus to show that he, like Ouranos, Kronos and

Zeus before him, must have his power regulated by nature.

Frankenstein's "dissection" of nature reveals the immense and threatening power of the maternal, a power which, he learns, culture cannot control. But this power is not sufficient for the woman writer; it may be uncontrollably vast, but it is also easily subjected to Romantic interpretation which makes it the silent reflection of the greatness of man's mind. While Wordsworth's philosophy posits the active power of nature and rejects the "mean and vulgar works of man"; the implications of this are ambiguous. Natural power is seen as entwined with those works of man which are not mean and vulgar but immensely ambitious, or Promethean. Wordsworth still emphasises the creative power of men, which relegates women to the realm of the other and enforces that relegation by idealising it. Further, as Homans points out, there is "no discontinuity between imaginative sympathy with nature and death" (1980:21). Logically the feminine, like Frankenstein's mother and his wife, is most perfect when dead; like Wordsworth's Lucy, idealised because:

No motion has she now, no force;
 She neither hears nor sees,
 Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
 With rocks and stones and trees.
 ("A Slumber did my Spirit Seal" ll.5-8, 147)

The place in nature which Wordsworth gives to Lucy does not confront the implications of her other place as the corpse consumed by worms.

Frankenstein may be seen as an attack on the connections which culture, particularly Romanticism, makes between the feminine and nature, and between human creative

potential and the masculine. Shelley explores the idealising appropriation of nature into culture by the Romantic subject and his disregard and devaluation of what remains outside culture. The implications of her discoveries for the woman writer are mixed: she reveals the power of the literal, but her Promethean "hero" is destroyed by it. To what extent, then, is he a potential model for the "female Prometheus"? To what extent can Shelley have identified with him?

I have explored Frankenstein's attempt to combine cultural and literal creativity in an effort to compare his doing so with the similar project of women writers. Frankenstein is a man, and he creates a living creature, something virtually all women are capable of. The woman writer, made by nature to be a mother (as culture tells her), gives birth to a text. Both, then, seem to be monstrous, if Griswold's logic about "hermaphroditic disturbers of the peace" holds true. In this case, Shelley seems to say that to be a woman writer is to be as culpable as Frankenstein is. He is perhaps a reason for giving up the project of being a "female Prometheus." In the light of her later submission to nineteenth century expectations of feminine behaviour, and her 1831 alterations to the novel, this seems likely.¹⁴

But Frankenstein does not give birth to a human baby. His cultural creation gives rise to a new kind of creature, a hybrid. The replacement of natural with cultural creativity entails the distortion of the materials of nature; like the use of fire by Ovid's Prometheus, natural creative power is made figurative, removed from its

referents - from the literal - by culture's use of it. Like so many Romantic texts, the monster is the product of culture's reading of nature - and, Shelley seems to suggest, it is a misreading.

Frankenstein is rather more like Io than like a "female Prometheus"; where the cow-woman's monstrosity is a literalisation of her reproductive natural role, his is from trying to make cultural and so figurative the aspects of humanity which are inseparable from nature: procreation and death. In this way, he takes to its logical conclusion patriarchal culture's appropriation and objectification of nature and the female.

If there is a Pandora in the novel, she is destroyed by Frankenstein before she is given life, her "voice." He fears that the female creature will be evil, possibly "ten times more malignant than [her] mate," that she might "refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation" - she might refuse to keep promises, so distorting the truth of language as Pandora does - and he fears that she could be the mother of a new and evil race, causing "devils [to be] ... propagated on earth" (210). Her characteristics are remarkably close to those of Prometheus's first female counterpart. Frankenstein's destruction of her, then, places him firmly on the side of the patriarchal mythology which has always suppressed her part in the myth. Shelley has her version of Hesiod's Prometheus give in to Zeus and save men from the female "evil" his defiance might have unleashed. Frankenstein is a potential Prometheus, as Shelley is, but he is one whose courage fails. He loses the blind hope, the

overweening optimism, with which he began. After dismembering the female monster, he feels "as if a film had been taken from before my eyes and that I for the first time saw clearly" (215). What Shelley has him see is the same danger of the Promethean that she herself, after her first blind rush into freedom, had discovered.

Shelley's critique of Romantic heroism, then, is two-sided. Potentially a feminist revelation of the power of the female and of the danger of culture's attempts to delimit it, it becomes, to the extent that she has identified with the project of the Romantic writer, a conservative retraction criticising all exercise of power on behalf of individual aspirations. Hence Frankenstein's implicit association of himself with the monstrous: he is "half made" because of his failure to conform to the anti-heroic, anti-Titanic values of community and self-effacing altruism. This emphasises Shelley's identification with him, for these are the values culture imposes on women rather than men, the ones she has become monstrous by ignoring.

Frankenstein describes his suffering as unspeakable: "words cannot convey an idea of [my] heart-sickening despair" (132), and "remorse and the sense of guilt ... hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures such as no language can describe" (136). These echo Shelley's description in her journal of her own "misery beyond words." The implications of speechlessness and silence are important in her case: remorse is what makes her try to silence her past, Promethean self by rewriting her first brave theft of the myth, and remorse is what silences, in her later work,

all but her most conservative voice.

And yet, at the centre of her novel is a voice that she does not rewrite. Frankenstein, as both the masculine appropriator of literal creativity and the perpetrator of a transgression that ironically resembles the woman writer's attempt to bring the literal into culture, may be seen as a reflection, albeit inverted, of Shelley. The moment of clear vision that is his destruction becomes for her the chance to repent in time and avoid, as far as she can, his fate.

But it is too late. As the introduction to her 1831 edition reveals, she had already borne the monstrous product of her hybridism. The novel is her own "hideous progeny" (60). Frankenstein uses the metaphor of childbirth to describe the "painful labour" of his cultural creation (100), but he is male, and the metaphor serves to emphasise the difference between his work and the labour of parturition.¹⁵ Shelley's use of the metaphor is more effective in connecting her writing with the fact that she is also, literally, a mother. Although her progeny is hideous, she rather fondly wishes it well, and emphasises that she has "an affection for it" (60). Her relationship to her creature does not resemble Frankenstein's.

As the offspring of Frankenstein's cultural creation, the monster's birth echoes that of Athena, sprung from the head of Zeus. At the same time, the monster is the product of a female author, herself the monstrous offspring mothered by that other "half-man," Mary Wollstonecraft. To this extent, the monster, like the novel itself, resembles Gargantua, born of an indissoluble union between head and

body. It has the hybrid power of the grotesque.

In Shelley's second - and central - rewriting of the myth, Frankenstein, the creator who does not love his creature, resembles Zeus. The monster who rebels against him is Promethean.

THE VOICE OF THE UNSPEAKABLE: ANOTHER PROMETHEUS

I found a fire ... and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange ... that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!...

... I had obtained [fire] through accident and knew not how to reproduce it. (150)

I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes this miserable frame....

... I shall ascend ... triumphantly and exult in the agony of the torturing flames.

Shelley, Frankenstein (264-5)

By the end of the novel, the monster has learnt to reproduce fire. He learns its ambiguity early, and later he shows Walton that he has mastered its reproduction. To the extent that fire is a metaphor for language, Frankenstein's monster has acquired it "by accident," left behind by inhabitants of the wood: he learns to speak by overhearing the talk of the cottagers, picking up their linguistic leavings. His narrative, which forms the core of the novel, reveals his ability to reproduce language: as the epigraphs reveal, he has acquired the subjective "I" of the symbolic, and can

recount, in the past tense, what he has experienced in the words he has learnt.

His last speech, in the future tense, also reveals that he can do more than reproduce: like Pandora, he refers to what does not (yet - and need never) exist. In his promise of self-destruction by fire, he uses language to create.

This kind of figurative creation is speculative, signifying, as does Pandora's speech, non-existent referents. The monster is himself the product of such speculation (on the part of both Shelley and Frankenstein). He is nameless, and his speech at the end of the novel names things and states which do not exist. Rosemary Jackson discusses the subversive power of fantasy, which undercuts the assumption of a direct and necessary connection between language and reality and so "threatens to subvert ... rules and conventions taken to be normative" (1981:11). This threat to signification is carried out by the separation of "names" and "things": Frankenstein's monster is nameless because culture does not have a place, or a signifier, for him. His promises at the end of the novel are the reverse, a series of what Jackson calls "thingless names". Both "establish ... a disjunction of word and meaning" (1981:41). The monster's use of language to posit what does not exist is a function of his own monstrous identity. Shelley's own science-fiction/fantasy, her work of speculation, has the same potential. She, too, is a hybrid and unnameable, as I shall show, and hence more capable than Frankenstein of escaping the constraints of what culture is prepared to accept as real. Where Victor's imagination fails (he cannot

accept - or name - the creature because it is like nothing he has ever seen before), she and the monster are free to go beyond the realm of reliable signification. The monster, like Shelley - and like her ancestor Pandora - has the potential to find freedom by liberating language from conventional meaning.

If Victor Frankenstein is Shelley's revision of Hesiod and Ovid's versions of the Prometheus myth, of the Titan as both creator and as transgressor justly punished, then the monster is her rewriting of Aeschylus, her own "Prometheus Unbound."

The monster's Prometheanism lies less in theft than in rebellion, in his disruptive defiance of the authority of human and especially patriarchal culture, and particularly of the value of Romantic male egoism which allows his creator, his father-god, to abandon him.

The monster is the instrument of Frankenstein's punishment, reminder of the consequences of his ambitious presumption. He is not only the eagle or vulture which torments the trapped Titan, though, but also the Prometheus whom Gaia uses to unseat the excessively powerful Zeus. He is the offspring of Frankenstein's exploration of the literal and his use of it within the symbolic. Like the Titan, the monster is a giant, neither god nor human, immensely strong and capable of surviving what mortal man can not. There is a possibility that, like the Titan, he is immortal. Like the woman writer's text, he is born of an illicit union, and as such has the disruptive power of the grotesque, the potential to unsettle the binary system of

androcentric culture which disempowers the female by associating her with feminised nature.

The monster as a possible role model for women writers emphasises the power rather than the culpability of the Titan. Identification with the monster may prove a less pessimistic prospect for the "female Prometheus": where Frankenstein's suffering is what is "beyond words," it is the monster's very identity which exceeds definition by language. Where Frankenstein regains his fidelity to culture, learning to see clearly, as he puts it, the monster remains undefinable and so uncontrollable. This, as I shall show, also has connections with vision and, more importantly, with escaping the vision which results in Victor Frankenstein's final conservatism.

The monster is a grotesque creature born of Frankenstein's discovery of the fecund maternal body which underlies and undermines patriarchy's sanitised representations of death, nature and the female. Despite this, Shelley's presentation of the monster's perceptions of nature suggest that he is not the abomination which his maker considers him: his response to the "pleasant showers and genial warmth of spring" resembles Clerval's (161). He recognises in nature a "[h]appy, happy earth! Fit habitation for gods," and he finds solace here. His "spirits [are] elevated by the enchanting appearance of nature; the past was blotted from [his] memory, the present was tranquil, and the future gilded by bright rays of hope and anticipation of joy" (ibid.). The monster is not a reflection of his creator; his initial sympathy with nature suggests his

independence from the "sin" of his conception: he is abhorrent to man but, unlike Frankenstein, he is not alienated from nature. Shelley makes a significant distinction here between the monstrous and the immoral.

The monster is the first of a new race; by implication, if Frankenstein were more like Prometheus the creator, he would produce a mate for the creature and so institute a new species. It is finally the limits of his imagination, his assumption that the new creature's appearance will conform to the expectations of the old race, that make him fail, for Ovid's Prometheus did not simply create one ill-endowed misfit. The monster's dream is Edenic:

If you consent [to make a female], neither you nor any other human being shall ever see us again.... My companion will be of the same nature as myself and will be content with the same fare. We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man.... The picture I present to you is peaceful and human.... (191)

In fact, it is not a human picture, but the vision of the beginning of a new culture. The creature and his mate appear as a new Adam and Eve, taking with them both kinds of fire: the literal existence given to them by Frankenstein and the culture the monster has learnt. The problem, of course, is that this learnt culture has already made impossible the creation of a new one. The monster has already assumed the values of patriarchy. The language which enables him to reason with Frankenstein in the hope of escaping human society is the same which rejects him as monstrous. This paradox resembles that experienced by the woman writer: language is difficult to separate from its androcentric origins. The monster's dream cannot come true; the best he

can do is make use of the culture he has appropriated to disrupt it from within. This is precisely what the woman writer has to do. The hybridism of each leads to an ambiguous position in relation to the symbolic and, for each, monstrosity is the source of both their misery and their power.

The connections between the monster and "Mother Nature" are like those between Prometheus and Gaia; he is half hers, a hybrid, and as such is appalling to culture: Frankenstein is, after all, a horror story. The return of what culture banishes to its margins is what lies at the base of horror. Julia Kristeva's name for this is "abjection," "death infecting life," and the abject is that which "disturbs identity, system, order" and "draws attention to the fragility of the law" (1982:4).

Frankenstein's monster is created unnaturally - that is by culture's appropriation of nature's power - but he is significantly not made of synthetic, cultural materials: he is a resurrection of corpses, of the evidence of death. His monstrosity lies partly in his being a reminder of the abject, of the decay which is absolutely natural and as such is a threat to culture. Culture needs to reject reminders that Gaia finally is stronger than any human ambition. The humanity of man, then, depends on Prometheus's creation of him as looking up and away from the earth beneath his feet. The monster and the woman writer both embody the hybridisation of earth and sky, Gaia and Ouranos. Frankenstein uncovers the frightening reality of the presymbolic maternal, but the creation itself is a denial of

"earth."

As I have suggested, the Romantic association of women with nature denies them a voice in culture and so disempowers them, but also associates them with a source of power most threatening to patriarchy. Pandora is both mother and liar; her "evil" has its source in her ability to reproduce her own kind as well as to mis-produce language. When the abject is brought into the realm of culture, horror results. The threat of the monstrous, either as woman who writes, as her hybrid text, or as the creature made from corpses, is the unearthing and return of the banished maternal.

Barbara Creed, using Kristeva's theory of the abject, distinguishes between two different forms of the maternal. They may be likened to the two versions of the literal, the nonsymbolic language which exists entirely outside of culture, and the literal as perceived from within the symbolic. What Creed calls the "archaic mother" is completely external to culture. As "the mother who gives birth all by herself, the original parent, the godhead of all fertility and the origin of procreation" (1986:62), she is the mother of the presymbolic dyad, the source of life which calls into question the subsequent cultural myth of a male deity's creation with words (or fire). Because entry into the symbolic requires (at least for the boy) the rejection of the maternal, the archaic mother, as viewed from within the symbolic, is necessarily seen as threatening. Within

patriarchal signifying practices ..., she is reconstructed and represented as a negative

figure, one associated with the dread of the generative mother seen only as the abyss, the monstrous vagina, the origin of all life threatening to re-absorb what it once birthed. (Creed 1986:62)

The profound ambivalence associated with the maternal, as both the source of life and the reminder of death, results in the feminisation of the female, nature, and especially the mother, by culture. When this domestication fails and the threatening reality appears, the result is abjection, the monstrous. Frankenstein finds the female creature too horrible to complete. While the original monster is male, Frankenstein's dream on the night of its creation (in which his embrace transforms Elizabeth into the corpse of his dead mother) reveals that his horror is for the female. The dream is virtually a compendium of the "abominations" Creed lists as abject: "sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration; decay and death; ... the corpse; ... the feminine body and incest" (1986:46). Shelley's novel, then, despite being about a male monster, is particularly about the horror of the female. Frankenstein is threatened less as a human being than specifically as a man.

The function of "horror" as art, or fiction, is frequently to define and so delimit the power of the abject, in the same way as, according to Stallybrass and White, the carnival is the site of the construction as well as the deformation of "symbolic polarities" (1986:16). The presentation of the grotesque as freakish and abnormal can be used to domesticate the monstrous by labelling it as irrelevant, marginal to culture. Culture's ambivalent treatment of the monstrous leads to its potentially

subversive position on the boundary between the accepted and the repressed. The cultural definition of fire delimits its terror in a similar way. Frankenstein, like Ovid's Prometheus, takes fire/procreation from its place in nature and attempts to place it safely within the controlling realm of culture. The monster denies that realm by existing on the margins between culture and nature, refusing definition in culture at the same time as refusing to be silenced.

Creed describes the "central ideological project" of conventional, conservative horror as the "purification of the abject." Horror fiction confronts the abject "in order ... to eject [it] and re-draw the boundaries between the human and the non-human" (1986:53). The self is reconstituted, the threat removed, "by the conventional ending of the horror narrative in which the monster is usually 'named' and destroyed" (1986:65).

Naming the monster, that is, giving it a defining label which places it safely within the symbolic, destroys its monstrosity. Language, then, has a particular power in relation to the abject.

The only names Frankenstein's monster is given are expressions of horror and these, apprehending his monstrosity, emphasise rather than defuse his threat by connecting his grotesque appearance with evil. He is called "devil", "villain" (213), "fiend", "daemon" (145). He is, as I have suggested, a threat to signification. The power of the earth goddess in Prometheus Bound is connected with the unnameable in a similar way: Prometheus says of his mother "one form she hath but many names" (v.212). This

multiplicity of names has the same effect as being nameless: it undermines patriarchy's ability to delimit by labelling and emphasises maternal nature's independence of the laws of culture.

The monster is illegitimate, not positioned according to (human) law, in that he lacks a father's name. Jane Gallop discusses the "Name-of-the-Father" as the basis of a culture founded on the exchange of women (as Lévi-Strauss describes exogamy): the "system of the Name-of-the-Father implies authorized possession of the woman, who since possessed can be exchanged" (Gallop 1982:49). This ownership by naming is based on biological fatherhood, and the mother, while powerless to name, is capable of undermining the name's power:

[T]he patronym, patriarchal law, patrilineal identity, language as our inscription into patriarchy. The Name-of-the-Father is the fact of the attribution of paternity by law, by language. Paternity cannot be perceived, proven ...; it must be instituted by judgement of the mother's word. (1982:47)

Hence, a female monster with a nameless mate could produce a race of creatures who are illegitimate, not subject to legislation because independent of the naming on which patriarchal law is based, a "race of devils" as Frankenstein describes them (210).

That the monster's namelessness was deliberate and important to Shelley is borne out by a comment in a letter about the first theatrical adaptation of Frankenstein:

The play bill amused me extremely, for in the list of dramatis personae came, _____ by Mr T. Cooke [the actor playing the monster]: this nameless

mode of naming the unnameable [sic] is rather good.... (Shelley to Leigh Hunt, 9 September 1823, ed. Bennet 1980:378)

This escape from representation, coupled with the use of language as a means of undermining its source, is a strategy of the woman writer. The anonymous text, as Frankenstein was when first published, and the speculation to which it usually gives rise, tend to conceal the writer in the same way as the translator is concealed behind the "voice" of the original author.

The first edition of Frankenstein was criticised for its excess of "painful sensation" and its apparent lack of moral didacticism.¹⁶ Hindle suggests that the reason for this was its inscription to William Godwin, Shelley's father and "infamous philosophical radical of the anarchist Left" and so "most reviewers assumed the work's author to be Percy Shelley, Godwin's best-known literary disciple" (1985:8). Ironically, the preface to this edition was written by Percy.

Attributing the novel to its author would in any case have been very difficult in 1818. Not Mary Shelley, for she was not yet married, and to all intents and purposes no longer Mary Godwin, for her father disowned her when she eloped, she was herself - apart from the non-defining (if appropriately resonant) first name of her mother - nameless. The novel, like the children she bore during this period, and like the monster, is truly illegitimate.

In the same way as she and the creature are nameless, the female author of Frankenstein, like a translator, is technically voiceless. The narrative consists, apart from a

few letters written by Elizabeth, entirely of male voices. Instead of a female subject, there is at the centre of the novel the autobiographical narrative of the monster. It is significant that in most retellings of Shelley's myth (that is, in the many film versions of the novel), the monster's narrative is left out. The "horror story" of Frankenstein is far more easily told when the monster is looked on as unambiguously evil, the object of a familiar human subject's terror and hatred. By making the monster the subject of his own narrative, Shelley gives the "other" a voice, the stolen language.

James P. Carson suggests that Shelley's impersonation of the masculine supports her theory of "the value of sympathetic identification with the other" (1988:450). In giving the monster a voice (her own?), and having it heard, she does what Frankenstein cannot do for his creature, and what patriarchal culture usually refuses to do for the woman writer.

If he is given a voice, to what extent is the creature a "thief of language," or of fire? As the text which is Shelley's "hideous progeny," he is the recipient of Promethean fire, the monster mothered by a monster. Only at the end of the novel does he carry out a kind of theft.

Within his autobiographical narrative, the monster's experience is with the positive aspects of fire. He discovers it while "oppressed by cold" (149). It is as if nature makes a gift of fire to him, as Gaia did to Zeus when she wanted him to overthrow Kronos. His process of learning about fire suggests primitive man re-inventing culture. He

examines "the materials of fire" and discovers the use of dry wood for burning. He learns to "rouse the embers" and how to cook. Shelley thus presents an alternative cultural development; the monster's science is much simpler and more primitive than Frankenstein's. When he decides to move on, he does not take the fire with him: "I had obtained [it] through accident and knew not how to reproduce it" (150). Discovering how to reproduce is what makes him Promethean, even if it is, because of Frankenstein's rejection of him, fire and language that he reproduces, rather than himself. In asking for a companion, he tells Frankenstein of "the fire of love that burns my heart" (193). The monster is not permitted literal creativity, making him another kind of mirror image of the female, who is denied the figurative.

The monster uses what he does know of fire to help the cottagers, collecting firewood and leaving it outside their home each night. His use of fire and his learning of language are connected; he learns to speak by listening to the cottagers teach Safie their language, this "godlike science" which he desires to know so that he can achieve sympathetic communion with others (158).

His first attempts to speak echo Io's inarticulateness: he is a tormented creature who tries to express himself, but is "frightened into silence" by his own "uncouth and inarticulate sounds" (149). Gradually he learns words, and the first one is "fire" (158). Having discovered the use of literal fire, he gains the figurative fire of language. As fire, for the creature, is associated with nurturing, even with maternal care, so is language, at first: the second

word he learns is "milk" (158).

This benevolent use of fire is emphasised when the creature meets Frankenstein and tells him his story; it is cold on the mountain and, while the monster is strong enough to survive it, he recognises that the "temperature of this place is not fitting to [Frankenstein's] fine sensations." He invites his creator into his own hut, and keeps him warm. Victor sits "by the fire which my odious companion had lighted" (147).

The monster's rejection by those who have unwittingly become his foster parents precipitates his rebellion against human society. When the cottagers abandon him, he sets fire to their house and burns it down. He has learnt to reproduce fire, and uses it as the mode of his rebellion, in the symbolic destruction of a cultural structure.

His understanding of patriarchal society is based largely on what he has read "of men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species" (174), and of "peaceable lawgivers," whom he admires, his impressions affirmed by the "patriarchal lives of [his] protectors" (175). Shelley opposes the idea of patriarchy to the "glory and slaughter" desired by a young soldier, emphasising that patriarchy at this stage is associated by the monster with the peaceful - and abnormal - order of the De Lacey family; its patriarch is blind. Also, there is no mother.

Mellor suggests that this family can be contrasted with the "pattern of inequality and injustice" Shelley presents as the rest of society, calling them "a vision of a social group based on justice, equality and mutual affection"

(1988b:222). They are only this while viewed from outside, however. When the monster tries to make contact with them, he is attacked, beaten and fled from. The family's apparent enlightenment is based on blindness. The creature's few moments of hope are experienced in the company of De Lacey, who lacks the faculty on which cultural differentiation, the discrimination between binary opposites, is based.

Ideas of blindness and darkness are significant in the monster's narrative. Jane Gallop analyses the role of oculo-centrism, the privileging of sight, in phallogocentric culture; the visibility of the male genitalia emphasises the lack of any visible female equivalent. Masculine power, then, is based on seeing. The subject's entry into the symbolic is usually dependent on the visual recognition of one's (mirrored) image and representation is based on naming what is absent, what cannot be seen, on figuring (in the "mind's eye") the literal that, if visibly present, would not need to be named. Carson discusses the blinding of the father as "mutilation", as a metaphorical castration which, his phallo/oculo-centrism disrupted, "permits daughters, monstrous sons and their doctrine of sympathy to be heard" (1988:435). He points out that

[t]he blinded father both arouses sympathy and is himself capable of greater sympathy than a man who is entire, seamless, and potent.... (1988:442)

De Lacey is not the only character who does not see the monster who, like the Gorgon, is so ugly - so unsightly - that even those who are able to see have to blind themselves temporarily in order to remain in his presence. No-one can listen sympathetically and look at him at the same time.

Walton describes seeing the creature:

Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome yet appalling hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily.... (261)

The creature is described by Frankenstein as "too horrible for human eyes" (146). Like the abject maternal, the monster must be unseen - by implication, absent - for signification to take place. His literal, visible presence disrupts the symbolic which is based on seeing.

If the monster is not looked at, he can be heard. When asked to listen to his story, Frankenstein at first refuses, saying "Relieve me from the sight of your detested form" (147). The creature responds by placing his hands over his maker's eyes, saying that he should still listen, and be compassionate. He temporarily blinds Frankenstein. Appropriately, the tale is finally heard in the creature's dark hut, where the only light comes from the fire he has made to keep his parent warm.

Carson implies that writing can be a means of blinding which permits the monstrous woman writer's voice to be heard; Shelley's editing of her husband's work by the paradoxically silent intrusion of her own voice, was called "mutilation," and Carson associates this with both blinding and castration (1988:435). Rewriting the voice of an author, by translation of whatever kind, is then one way to "blind" the eye of patriarchy, the gaze which defines the female and natural as either silent and beautiful or monstrous and evil. Carson points out that there are "scenes of daughters caring for their blind fathers" in three of Shelley's novels, Frankenstein, Valperga, and The Last Man (1988:442):

Shelley literalises the effect of her writing, particularly her rewriting of the myths of patriarchy, on oculo-centric culture. Disrupting the visual discrimination underlying the symbolic makes possible the non-gendered writing of the monstrous and the presymbolic.

The clarity of vision Frankenstein describes when he destroys the female monster is the reverse of this sympathetic blindness. There is a sense that if he had retained the "blind hope" with which he began his project, he might have brought it to a less desolate conclusion. The candle that is extinguished at the moment of the monster's birth is perhaps the flame which Frankenstein will now, seeing the danger of what he is doing, never attain. Again the ambiguity of the moth's blind flight into the flame is emphasised: Shelley, as a potential Prometheus like Frankenstein, has to choose between remaining blinded by the light of her ambition and seeing - by the same light - that it will burn her.

The creature describes his state before learning language as "blind vacancy" (167), and his first experience of light is that of the moon, all that he can distinguish out of a "strange multiplicity of sensations" (148). He learns to identify objects by seeing them, but he does not see himself until after he has acquired language. His identity is based first on the pejorative words used to describe him, and on the image of himself reflected in the eyes of man, who sees him as a monster. In a reversal of the Lacanian formation of the subject, the monster's acquisition of language precedes his vision of his own image: by the

time he sees himself mirrored in a pool of water, he has already been evaluated in what should be the reliable sight of his parent, and has learnt the culture of men. In a parody of narcissism, he encounters his visible image; his double in the mirror becomes his self, seen through eyes already trained in human cultural values. "I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am" (159). (This explicitly recalls the confessor's ability to convince Justine that she is monstrous.) The creature's "I am" and "reality" are inseparable from the epithet "monstrous," based on the judgement of sight. He has already entered the symbolic - the agonising moment of seeing and recoiling from his reflection is not his rejection of the mother, but of himself.

This reversal of the formation of the subject, and the fact that those listening to the monster's discourse never see him at the same time, suggest that he uses language without becoming fully a part of the symbolic. Language and seeing remain separate for him, his subjecthood constituted differently to the conventional relationship between representation and subject.

The monster's hybridism, then, extends beyond his origins and his physical structure to his linguistic ability. Like the woman writer, he is capable of a grotesque transgression of language, a shift of the terms that try to silence the nameless. The creature is given a voice, not by the failed Prometheus who made him, but by the potentially successful one, his author. A measure of Shelley's success is his final escape even from her: in her conservative

rewriting of the novel, his voice remains untouched.

The monster, after Frankenstein has died, speaks to Walton of the future. Once before he has done this, telling his creator the dream of a new Eden. This hope destroyed, he says he has a new one: oblivion. He tells Walton that he plans to kill himself, saying that he longs "for the moment when these hands will meet my eyes" (264) in a final rejection of oculo-centric culture; when he can no longer see, or be seen, he will be free.

The creature has the power of using language, a power which almost succeeds in attaining for him the companion which will facilitate the institution of a new culture. At the same time he remains free from the implications of being a part of the symbolic: unseen and unnamed, he retains the freedom of being excluded from culture. Of course this freedom is ambiguous; like the woman identified with nature, to escape culture by returning to what Shelley herself called "Nature & solitude" is to be silenced. But the monster's rejection of culture, because juxtaposed with his appropriation of language, is more complex than this.

He acquires the "fire" of culture, but his use of it is associated with its opposite, ice. He tells his story to Frankenstein in the Alps under the wall of a glacier, both frozen and moving, so hard yet so unstable that "speaking ... [is] sufficient to draw destruction upon the head of the speaker" (143).

Gallop discusses the parallels between representation and freezing: to be seen, culturally, is to be pinned down, made immobile, or frozen. Kristeva relates the visual

representation of the subject to this paralysis: she calls the milk of the mother "la glace," both "ice" and "mirror," presenting the maternal in the condition Homans describes as "frozen by androcentric culture into the objectified form of a still and silent mirror" (1986:21). To release the mother - and thus the child, too - from the trammels of figuration, the ice must be melted and moved. Gallop points out the female voice's potential to carry out a double discourse which can both retain subjectivity and disrupt the representation which can "freeze ... the nameless flow":

... without representation there is only infantile passivity, powerlessness, anxiety. The only way to move is to exercise power and criticize it, not let it gel into a rigid representation. (Gallop 1982:121)

The monster's story, the narrative of the unnameable, spoken unseen, is the only speech which can be made in the presence of the glacier, an unstable and potentially dangerous wall of shifting ice. It exercises figurative language at the same time as revealing its flaws. The hybrid and grotesque noise of literal and symbolic language speaking together might shift this ice; the stolen fire might melt it just enough to set it - and the mother - free.

The final part of the monster's narrative takes place in the frozen Arctic wasteland. He has chosen to lead Frankenstein there, to "the everlasting ices of the North" (248) because of his own abnormal ability to withstand the cold. His final speech to Walton is a promise which provides a figure for the ending of the novel - his suicide and a restoration of order - but does not enact it. He says, in the language which he has no cultural right to, that he will

destroy himself by burning, using the literal fire to destroy both stolen figurative forms: the life he has been given and the culture he has taken. It can never be told whether he does burn himself (simultaneously melting the "ice" of representation - and so silencing himself completely - once and for all?) or whether he continues to live in the Arctic, free. Finally, he escapes the narratives of his authors, both Frankenstein and Shelley.

To the extent that Shelley identified with her "hideous progeny," it (both as novel and as monster) is a figure for the ambivalent and double rewriting of the woman writer. Literal and figurative creativity are combined in the writing mother as they are in the speaking monster: both are "half-men" and each achieves a subversive theft of fire. The ambivalence remains: the monster's escape from the pain of isolation within culture seems to imply either suicide or silence, in the "darkness and distance" (265) of the Arctic.

Frankenstein himself contemplates suicide: "I was tempted to plunge into the silent lake" (137). He calls on the stars either to kill him - "crush sensation and memory; let me become as nought" - or at least "leave me in darkness" (194). At the lake (modelled, by a curious phonetic coincidence, on the Swiss "Mer de Glace" [Hindle 1985:23]), he considers the "brute" without "superior sensibilities" as fortunate: "If our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might nearly be free" (143). This is the same freedom that Mitchell described as "pre-historic, pre-civilization" (1974:366), the only way in which women can be entirely free of patriarchy, but a

freedom which is also oblivion, a unity with nature that leaves only silence.

The creature similarly longs for an end to the pain of consciousness. He is not a mere brute, and he suffers according to the values of the same system he rebels against. He wishes he were that "brute": "Oh, that I had forever remained in my native wood, nor known nor felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst, and heat!" (166). He longs to see nothing, and to be returned to the passive cycle of nature, his ashes "swept into the sea by the winds" (265). The creature's desire to return to nature echoes the place of Wordsworth's dead Lucy in "earth's diurnal course," inanimate and silent. Even if he does not die, the monster, it seems, is alone in the darkness, outside of culture.

But, apart from the possibility that he will go on living when he has escaped perception, when patriarchy can no longer see whether or not he makes literal the death he has represented, Shelley implies that he will go on using language. While Frankenstein is pursuing him, the monster leaves him messages, "marks in writing on the barks of the trees or cut in stone" (248). He writes, as Homans puts it, "on the body of nature" (1986:110), joining inseparably the literal earth and the figuration of writing. What he writes both torments his pursuer - "my power is complete" - and helps him - "you will find near this place ... a dead hare; eat and be refreshed" (248). He thus exercises the ambiguity of the fire he has stolen. He has the potential to go on writing on the world after he has promised to die: his promise to Walton may be his first fiction, his first poem.

Shelley carried out Ostriker's "invasion of the treasuries of existing language" (1986:315) in two ways: she revised the myth of Prometheus in such a way as to subvert the patriarchal mythology that produced it, and she created a monstrous metaphor for the representation and potential resolution of women's position in relation to culture and language.

Shelley suffered for being monstrous, and finally she gave in to her fear of the danger she, like Frankenstein, saw in the theft of fire. Her ideas about the education of her only surviving biological child reveal what she had learnt:

There is a poetic, if not historic, truth in the story that when she was reproached for sending her son to Harrow rather than some school where he would learn to think for himself, Mary said: 'For heaven's sake, let him learn to think like everybody else!' (Grylls 1938:xiii)

Her misery, "beyond words," finally silenced her. Her novel, as the mirror in which she represented and then recognised the consequences of her own defiance, may be seen both as the burning flame which she had briefly seized and as its light, the source of vision which destroyed the blind hope Prometheus recognised as so essential to any mortal aspiration.

In her 1831 introduction, she writes a retrospective description of the monster's origin: in her dream, the sleeper awakes, opens his eyes, and is confronted by the monster's "yellow, watery, but speculative eyes" (59). They are speculative in that they question and in that they, like his use of language, posit infinite possibilities. But

"speculative" has its source in the word for mirror. The woman writer awakes and sees in her creature's eyes the reflection of her own monstrosity. As Shelley's introduction and her subsequent writing attests, the sight warns her not to go on.

"Monster" comes from the Latin, possibly monstrare, to show; probably monere, to warn (Chambers 1989). Shelley, unwarned and unseeing, created a monster and then, by the light of the fire she had stolen, saw and repented. Elizabeth Barrett Browning read Frankenstein. Her career as a "female Prometheus" is an inverted mirror image of Shelley's. What Barrett had to do was take on the "blind hopes" and act, heroically, in the knowledge of the danger she had seen.

CHAPTER THREE

APPREHENSION AND ESCAPE: ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Did you ever see a tree after it has been struck by lightning? The whole trunk of that tree was bare and peeled - and up that new whiteness of it, ran the finger-mark of the lightning in a bright beautiful rose-colour ... the fever-sign of the certain death.... When my father came into the room to-day and found me hiding my eyes from the lightning, he was quite angry and called it 'disgraceful to anybody who had ever learnt the alphabet'; - to which I answered humbly that 'I knew it was' - but if I had been impertinent, I might have added that wisdom does not come by the alphabet but in spite of it?

Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning,
12 July 1845. (1:123-4)

Elizabeth Barrett was afraid of lightning's fire, but her words suggest that she found it desirable as well as dangerous. The ambivalence in this passage echoes that which seems to characterise much of her work. Any attempt to determine whether her work on the Prometheus myth can be considered an enactment of a feminist theft of language requires an examination of this ambivalence. The act of linguistic rebellion is both appealing and frightening: Barrett knew that the Promethean theft of fire is carried out in defiance of Zeus and his thunderbolts. She could have answered her father that his language is not necessarily the source of wisdom, thereby appropriating his words about the

alphabet to express her own concern about language, but that would have been "impertinent"; instead she agrees with him, later expressing her ambivalence in a letter to the man with whom she is soon to commit the real impertinence against her father: her escape from him.

Barrett's writing reveals the certainty that language is hers, but to maintain this assurance as a writer, there is much she denies. It took her forty years to accept fully the implications of her potential to be a "female Prometheus," and the presence of the myth in her work throughout this time plays a significant part in her development.

Mary Shelley, in her revision of the Prometheus myth, explores the desirability of appropriating patriarchal culture while simultaneously criticising it. There are dangers inherent in such a project: the woman writer, like the monster, is both freed from some cultural constraints by her marginalised position and possibly silenced by her exclusion. She can "steal language" but, like Frankenstein, will always be punished in some way for transgressing. The ambiguous ending of Frankenstein suggests this: the monster is free, but he is also alone. Barrett learnt this.

In age there were only nine years between Shelley and Barrett, who was born on 6 March 1806. Both women rebelled by eloping to Europe with poets. Significantly, though, Mary Shelley ran away in 1814 at the age of seventeen and wrote Frankenstein two years later. Elizabeth Barrett, already having produced her work dealing most explicitly with the Prometheus myth, her two translations of Prometheus Bound,

escaped in 1846: she was forty. Barrett was the product of a Victorian rather than a Romantic upbringing; if Shelley's work evinces a shift from audacious Romantic individualism to remorseful Victorian conformity, then Barrett's reveals a gradual development from ambition, limited by the apprehension of danger, to a virtual reconciliation of Romantic and Victorian values, and of figurative and literal creativity.

The status of the figure of Prometheus changed in the Victorian period. A conflict was perceived between Christianity and paganism which for the Romantics, removed as they were from orthodox religion, was insignificant. Prometheus became associated with an "alliance between aggressive humanism, self-reliance, and Satanism" as opposed to "God-reliance, total commitment to Absolutes, and consequent self-immolation" (Bush 1937:266). Closely related to this was the perception of women: as Mary Poovey shows, the ideal Victorian woman, the "proper lady" was not far from the female characters Shelley presented in Frankenstein, pure and angelic, epitomizing self-abnegation (Poovey 1984). The Victorian woman was expected never to be proud, insolent, self-willed or rebellious.

It was inevitable, then, that Barrett's fascination with the Prometheus myth would lead to conflict: attempts to reconcile the Promethean and the Christian, the Romantic and the Victorian, and the feminist and the feminine, play a crucial part in her work. The myth became bound up with her need to make sense of her dual identity as woman and writer.

Barrett was seen by many as the ideal of the

conservative Victorian "poetess." Dormer Creston's 1943 biography is entitled Andromeda in Wimpole Street: in Greek myth, Andromeda, like Prometheus, is bound to a rock. In her case, however, the reason for her suffering is not her own transgression, but that of her parents, and she escapes not by any action of her own but because she is rescued and married by the hero, Perseus. Creston's book presents Barrett as the heroine of a Victorian romance. The conflicting mythical images seem to sum up the writer's ambivalence: can she be seen, finally, as the passive Andromeda, or as the figure who fascinated her, the rebellious Prometheus?

At first glance, Barrett's work seems to conform to the expectations of the kind of lady's writing Griswold did not find "hermaphroditic." Her lyrics and romance-ballads made her immensely popular and beloved. Stedman, in his 1904 survey of Victorian poets calls her the "apotheosis of womanhood" and describes her "delicate genius" as "purely feminine" (147). But this, it seems, was not how she perceived herself.

Barrett, having produced an epic poem, "The Battle of Marathon," at the age of eleven and published an imitation of Pope, "An Essay on Mind," at seventeen, sought the intellectual eminence of the male poet, making her what Griswold would have attacked as possessed of both genders, and so monstrous. She had to decide, as Shelley did, whether she could accept this identity and its implications.

Like Prometheus, Barrett took possession of the fire of language. She tried to avoid punishment by isolating

herself. In solitude she could deny her own monstrosity: just as Frankenstein's creature had to be invisible to be accepted, so Barrett's exclusion from society enabled her deny her own difference.

Unlike the monster's, though, her rebellion against her father/creator was what ended her isolation. Her translations of Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound, it seems, affirmed her identity as a poet as the same time as raising questions about the implications of this identity. She would have to negotiate the difficulties of exercising the cultural power bestowed by her use of language, for as a woman she remained marginalised by that culture. As long as she went unseen, deliberately excluding herself, she could, as Frankenstein did, deny her own monstrosity and continue writing as she pleased. At the same time, as her letters to Robert Browning reveal, she recognized her loss in giving up the "normal" life of a woman within society. Her ambivalence was based on the necessity to decide whether or not she dared to take on the role of Prometheus, with its implications of transgression and punishment, as well as heroism and liberation.

Barrett's description of the thunderstorm does not only present the destruction of a tree; it contains a warning she could identify with more closely, a literalisation of Zeus's punishment:

[I]n that same storm, two young women belonging to a festive party were killed on the Malvern Hills - each sealed to death in a moment with a sign on the chest which a common seal would cover - only the sign on them was not rose coloured as on our tree, but black as charred wood. So I get 'possessed' sometimes with the effects of these

impressions.... (EB to RB, 12 July 1845, 1:123-4)
 Women enjoying themselves are struck down by a thunderbolt. Barrett's retelling (she does not say whether she saw the corpses herself, but Malvern was not far from Hope End) suggests that the women have been branded with fire, marked "on the chest" (on heart or breast?); the mark is not meaningless, but "a sign," small but mortal, and their destruction lacks even the beauty she sees in the dead tree. The signs resemble "charred wood": dead, the female flesh is like that of the tree, echoing Frankenstein's description of the oak reduced to a "blasted stump" (89).

In Barrett's diary there are suggestions that reading Frankenstein had affected her in some way: commenting on The Last Man, she compares the two, saying that the beginning of the latter had disappointed her: "I ... fancied that all [Shelley's] genius had exhaled in Frankenstein" (9 August 1831, 132).¹ To speculate, perhaps Barrett remembered Frankenstein's burnt tree, and his own reduction to a similar state. Perhaps the monster was a warning to her, and perhaps she feared the "exhalation" of her own genius. In any case, she knew the role of lightning in the Prometheus myth, and the danger of incurring the wrath of Zeus.

CREATING ZEUS, OR THE MONSTER'S FATHER

But how canst thou disobey
 The father? Doth not this affright thee ...?
Prometheus Bound vv.40-1. (Trans. EB 1833:18)²

Is disobedience to the Father's word
 A possible thing? Dost quail not ...?
 (Trans. EB 1850:141)³

Any reading of the character of Prometheus requires careful interpretation of the character of Zeus. Is he just, and so justified in punishing the rebellious Titan, as Hesiod suggests? Is he the cruel tyrant Aeschylus makes him? Or is he somewhere between the two, ambiguous? If what is at issue here is whether Elizabeth Barrett's writing about Prometheus amounts to a successful enactment of the myth itself, perhaps the first ambiguity to be examined should be the nature of her personal Zeus, a powerful influence on her writing: her father. In a letter to Robert Browning she calls him by another name for Zeus, "Jupiter Tonans," the thunderer (12 July 1845, 1:122).

According to popular legend, reinforced by Rudolph Besier's popular play The Barretts of Wimpole Street (1931) and its subsequent film version, Edward Barrett was the epitome of the harsh Victorian patriarch, an oppressive tyrant.⁴ Yet his daughter's letters and diary suggest that he was also the loving and beloved father who opened his library to her, published her childhood writing and made it possible for her, although a girl, to become a poet. It is this ambivalence about the father that is perhaps at the root of much female and feminist uncertainty: that the one

who loves is also the one who entraps is difficult to recognise and even more difficult to change. In her essay "Wicked Fathers: A Family Romance," Cora Kaplan analyses this ambivalence:

If wicked fathers and their surrogates were not, often, also loved and living figures; if their female children bore them only the just measure of hatred due to abstract tyranny then they would not pose the kinds of problems that they do for feminism. (1986:193)

Aeschylus's Zeus, the tyrant, would be relatively easy to rebel against: the biological father of the family in patriarchal culture is far more powerful because he is nearer to a Christian conception of god, controlling with love and so confounding the clarity of mind so necessary in effective rebellion. Aeschylus's Zeus could have Prometheus staked to a rock and eaten alive by a vulture, but he could not make him torture himself with remorse.

Margaret Forster examines Barrett's relationship with her father, finding that she was deeply dependent on and possessive of him, suggesting that it was this and her illness which made him so protective of her (1988:53,94,117). Forster suggests that Barrett, once she found herself romantically interested in Robert Browning, needed to evaluate her father and find him, like Zeus, a tyrant and so easier to defy without regret. Only this would remove the paralysing dependence standing in the way of her freedom, a freedom based not so much on escaping from her father as on entering the dangerous world of experience, of learning the wisdom that does not come from the alphabet. She could not afford to be ambivalent, so it is possible

that she actively made her father a tyrant. She can be seen to do this in her letters, presenting him to her friend, Mary Russell Mitford, as "an endearing eccentric" but at the same time to Browning as "a cold, unfeeling monster" (Forster 1988:161). In order to rebel against her father, she had to believe in Aeschylus's reading of Zeus. It is Robert Browning who, about two weeks before their secret marriage, makes the connection explicit, calling Mr Barrett "father Zeus with his paternal epistles, and peggings to the rock" (RB to EB, 31 August 1846, 2:499). Browning goes on to quote in Greek the lines from Aeschylus which Barrett had translated as

Think no more
That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's mind,
Will supplicate him, loathed as he is,
With feminine upliftings of my hands,
To break these chains. Far from me be the thought!
(vv.1002-6, trans. EB 1850:159)

The lines are appropriate: Barrett's rebellion is seen by her not as a feminist act against a patriarch, but as a complete rejection of what she perceives as natural feminine submissiveness. She refuses to use "feminine upliftings" of her hands which, as feminine, can be used not for breaking chains, but only for supplication. She determines to break those chains herself as a man, a hero like Prometheus, would.

This rejection of femininity points to the real ambivalence: the one thing it seems Barrett never doubted was her vocation as a poet, but maintaining this emphasised the conflict between the dual image of herself as woman and writer. Neither of Barrett's parents was a writer: she had

no close models of the necessary conflict between her work, and her gender. Her father had not treated her like a daughter, and she did not think like one. Shelley's mother was dead and so absent, and yet figuratively, pervasively present through what she wrote and what was written about her. Barrett's mother was physically present throughout her childhood, but as a far less ambiguous model of how not to be. What Barrett understood, scorned and rejected about women was, it appears, based largely on the example of a mother who gave birth to twelve children and died young.

Forster points out that Barrett read Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman at the age of twelve (1988:29). It appears that Barrett's recognition of women's lack of rights did not impel her to want to fight for those rights; her response seems rather to have been determination to distance herself from what she must have considered the normal lot of her gender, rejecting the fact of her own femaleness.

Her childhood writing reveals a precocious certainty of her intelligence and her future as a writer, something her father was clearly instrumental in fostering. She was allowed to study the classics with her brother's tutor, her father arranged the publication of her first epic poem, "The Battle of Marathon" when she was fourteen, and even earlier, at the age of six, gave her ten shillings as a prize for writing a poem about virtue, calling her Poet Laureate: it was he who first gave her the name of poet.

She writes about this at fourteen, in her "Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character," the early

autobiography of the "Poet Laureat [sic] of Hope End," who at "nine...felt much pleasure from the effusions of [her] imagination in the adorned drapery of imagination" and at eleven, "wished to be considered an authoress" (in Moers 1978:5-6). To be a writer was, for Barrett, to be "determined," "inflexible," "self-loving," "passionate," "independent" and even potentially "violent": she describes herself, proudly, as all of these (ibid.). Her idea of the character of an "authoress" is a far cry from the conventional view of self-effacing Victorian womanhood. Her early development as a writer, then, suggests that she created for herself an essentially masculine poetic identity. Instead of suffering the anxiety of being both woman and writer, and so the site of conflict, she rejected the half of the dualism which she valued less. This was a solution which could be made with ease only temporarily.

In her "autobiography," Barrett rejects femininity explicitly: "My mind is naturally independent and spurns the subserviency of opinion which is generally considered necessary to feminine softness" (in Moers 1978:6). She sees herself as "naturally," even biologically, different from most women. As Kaplan points out, her fourteen-year-old writing reveals "a self almost wholly at odds with contemporary ideologies of the feminine, an 'I' modelled on a full-blooded male romanticism" (1986:198).

But when Barrett was fourteen, her brother was sent away to school and she had to stay at home, denied access to his tutor. Suddenly she could not ignore that fact that she was a girl and as such, disadvantaged. Not long after this,

the illnesses that were to isolate and disable her for much of her life made their first appearance, removing her from normal social involvement and expectations and freeing her, as an invalid, to pursue without distraction her role as poet. Ironically, this weakness made her seem typical of the delicate Victorian "lady," dependent and cosseted. It is also likely that much of her father's seeming tyranny was a result of her apparent need to be protected. Her "Jupiter Tonans" and the myths that have attached to him may well have been as much a result of her mythmaking as of his own disposition.

Barrett's mind continued to rebel against the ideology of the Victorian feminine: when she was twenty-one she met the scholar Hugh Boyd who was to become her tutor and mentor. With him she went on reading the classics. In her diary she writes that she and Boyd "talked comparatively about Homer, Aeschylus and Shakespeare: and positively about Aeschylus's Prometheus" (4 July 1831:97). Seven months later she wrote her first translation of Prometheus Bound.

Boyd was the first and, before Browning, the only man outside of her immediate family with whom Barrett became closely acquainted: although he was married, some of her diary entries suggest a passionate but confused infatuation on Barrett's part. Also, Hugh Boyd was blind.

CONCEALING THE MONSTROUS

sisters three,
 The Gorgons, serpent-haired and man-abhorr'd,
 Whom mortals cannot look upon and live;
 I warn thee against such.

Prometheus Bound (vv.798-801, trans. EB 1833:45)

the Gorgon sisters three,...
 With twisted snakes for ringlets, man-abhorred -
 There is no mortal gazes in their face,
 And gazing can breathe on. I speak of such
 To guard thee from their horror.

(Trans. EB 1850:155)

Elizabeth Barrett was afraid to be seen. There is consistent evidence in her correspondence that she vehemently avoided immediate, and so visual, social contact. Forster discusses this:

On paper, she was extremely sociable; face to face, she felt constrained and ill at ease. This paradox fascinated her: she never tired of trying to analyse precisely why, on the one hand, she loved people and was fascinated by the minutiae of their lives and yet, on the other, could not bear to meet them. (1988:33)

She could communicate best indirectly, in writing: when she was invisible, her voice was separated from its source. Her letters to Browning reveal her prolonged postponement of any direct encounter between them: she did not want him to see her.

There is nothing to see in me.... If my poetry is worth anything to any eye, it is the flower of me.... the rest of me is nothing but a root, fit for the ground and the dark (EB to RB, 16 May 1845, 1:65)⁵

Karlin attributes Barrett's fear of being seen to the connection between seeing and evaluation: she "focuses on appearance: the eye becomes a metaphor for the mind which judges and values her poetry"; she is concerned that he

would find her to be "anonymous, a let-down," failing to live up to the image he has of her poetry (1985:71). Her writing can be looked at because it is removed from her body.

Browning loves her verses with all his heart, as he declares in his first letter, and for him this is the same as loving her. He believes he sees her clearly in her poems: "You speak out, you, - I only make men and women speak" (RB to EB, 13 January 1845, 1:6). He believed that her poetry and her self were indistinguishable, that her writing seemed to purify language until it became transparent, containing and simultaneously revealing its writer. But the writer did not want to be seen, and she believed that what Browning saw was an illusion.

Barrett seemed afraid that in seeing her, Browning would encounter something far more dangerous (both for him in seeing, and for her in being seen) than just a disappointment: "anonymous," perhaps, not in Karlin's sense as nondescript or insignificant, but rather as something nameless and unnameable. A woman who went to see her once described her in a letter as follows:

The poetess was everything I did not like. She had great cavernous eyes, glowering out under two big bushes of black ringlets.... She never laughed, or even smiled, ... and through all the gloom of the shuttered room I could see that her face was hollow and ghastly pale. (in Hayter 1962:236)

Seeing her as a "poetess," as both writer and a woman, she sees something horrifying. Barrett is shut away in the dark, visited to be viewed and reported on by normal women as some kind of freak.

It seems the "root" she was afraid to let Browning see was her physical person, her body. What was best kept concealed by darkness (or blindness) was her identity as a woman, potentially capable of desire and of bearing children - of literal creativity - rather than as idealized poetic subject or a cripple, the invalid female. To hide her womanhood was to deny her possible monstrousness.⁶

Their first meeting proved disastrous because Browning immediately made a declaration of love based on his new perception of her as a woman rather than as poet. Once their mutual love had been confirmed and she was well on the way to becoming his wife, she was convinced he did not really see her, but was luckily blinded by his love:

I stand by a miracle in your love, and because I stand in it and it covers me, just for that, you cannot see me! May God grant that you never see me - for then we two shall be 'happy' as you say, and I, in the only possible manner, be very sure. (EB to RB, 2 May 1846, 2:119)

Her happiness, she warns him, is dependent on his not seeing her for what she really is. Maintaining the separation between writing and author, poetic subject and female body, meant that Elizabeth Barrett managed for a while to avoid the disruptive ambivalence of being a woman and a writer. Her early productivity and certainty of voice is perhaps evidence of her avoidance of the paradox, her careful splitting of writing from body. Shelley's early writing, by comparison, reveals immersion in the chaos of this dislocation; as both literal and figurative mother, she had no choice but to go about welding the two aspects of the maternal into her "hideous progeny." It seems, then, that

Barrett's writing could never have been hideous. Its apparent lucidity and purity was a result of her invisibility: she did not want Robert Browning to see her, because his seeing would force her to see too. When this did happen, she had to choose between trying to remain hidden, a pure and disembodied voice concealing an illusory and perfect body, and confronting and accepting her implicit monstrosity.

Eventually, Barrett chose the second option and this necessitated her rejection of her father, her creator. For in encouraging his daughter to write, Edward Barrett had created a kind of monster, a woman writer who read the classics and dared to translate Aeschylus. Once forced to recognize that she was "hermaphroditic," as Griswold put it, she had to disturb the peace, to prove herself powerful and disruptive, to seize the freedom of the marginalised "half-man." She no longer needed to be concealed and protected by her father; rather, she needed to rebel against him because he was, as father, symbol and representative of the patriarchal culture which had made it so monstrous and dangerous for her to be a writer as well as a woman. That her father, unusually, seemed to want her to be a writer rather than a woman did not reduce her need to escape his power.

At one point in her correspondence, Elizabeth Barrett uses the word "monstrous" to describe a woman writer. Writing to Robert Browning, she haltingly presents what she would have him see as her views on female intelligence:

masculine and feminine. Her desire is that Sand should become pure enough that "child and maiden press...to thine embrace, / To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame." This stainless fame is what Barrett has maintained in her own life, by scrupulously denying her own lack of "purity."

In the second sonnet, "A Recognition," Barrett expresses even more clearly the distress which comes from her desire to transcend what is so undeniable:

True genius, but true woman! dost deny
 Thy woman's nature with a manly scorn,
 And break away the gauds and armlets worn
 By weaker women in captivity?
 Ah, vain denial! that revolted cry
 Is sobbed in by a woman's voice forlorn!-
 Thy woman's hair, my sister, all unshorn,
 Floats back dishevelled strength in agony,
 Disproving thy man's name! and while before
 The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,
 We see thy woman-heart beat evermore
 Through the large flame. Beat purer, heart, and higher,
 Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore,
 Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire.
 (335)

In this "recognition" of Sand's womanhood, Barrett might as well be describing herself, with her "manly scorn" for the thralldom of "weaker women," and then confronting, perhaps for the first time, the impossibility of pretending not to be a woman. Sand's method, the wearing of a man's clothes and name and her promiscuous denial of standards of feminine sexual purity, is exactly the opposite of Barrett's and yet there are suggestions, other than in the sonnets, that Barrett desired the same. Falk quotes from one of Barrett's letters to Mary Russell Mitford:

[T]hrough the whole course of my childhood, I had a steady indignation against Nature who made me a woman, & a determinate resolution to dress up in men's clothes as soon as ever I was free of the

nursery.... (1988:71)

As it turned out, she found another way of disguising her femininity, in her isolated writing, but later, in Aurora Leigh, she would explicitly connect the two: Aurora's father, in teaching her the classics, "wrapt his little daughter in his large / Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no" (Aurora Leigh I:727-8).⁹

"A Recognition" is spoken by a plural voice, separating itself from "the world," which ~~sees only~~ Sand's "burn[ing]...in a poet-fire", both powerful and implicitly destructive. The speaking voice, "we," can see, "through the large flame," the Promethean, heroic and masculine act of writing poetry, and recognizes the truth, her "woman-heart," which withstands the burning. Barrett takes on what seems to be the voice of all women, emphasised by her call to Sand as "my sister," setting up the possibility of a powerful confrontation between the abstract flame of masculine writing and the beating physical reality of the female heart.

Sand's femaleness is revealed by her "woman's voice" and by the long hair which, while unshorn and associated with strength (bringing Samson to mind), is also disordered and "in agony." Both voice and hair belie the apparently secure disguise of a man's name. Her voice is not, as it could be, exultant, giving a triumphant cry of revolution (Barrett's ambiguous use of the form "revolted" is significant; it implies the repulsive as well as the rebellious), but is "forlorn," and "sobbing," failed

because, as far as Barrett is concerned, the voice issuing from a woman's body can never be a poetic voice as well.

The solution Barrett offers is a complete avoidance of the monstrous, praying for the heart, and the voice, to be purified of their femaleness, to become "unincarnate," disembodied. Rather than considering having the woman poet steal the fire of language for herself, she sees the only solution as the complete denial of gender: she longs for Sand and, implicitly, for herself, to be "unsexed."

There is, however, a palpable echo here of Lady Macbeth's call, "spirits, ... unsex me here" (Macbeth I.5.36-7), with its suggestion that to be unsexed is not to become angelic and pure, but to be freed from the restrictions of traditionally feminine morality, and so made capable of dangerous, immoral and implicitly masculine acts in a rebellion against patriarchal culture's interpretation of nature. Ironically too, the word echoes the title of Polwhele's book, The Unsex'd Females (1798), an attack on women intellectuals who were monstrous precisely because they were "unsex'd", as his opinion of Wollstonecraft's death indicated (see 54 above).

This ambiguity, along with the rather desperate tone of her final prayer, undermines to some extent the apparent certainty of Barrett's solution. Even the idealised purification from gender leads to ambivalence.

Because George Sand is "true genius, but true woman!", she is a hybrid. She appears to deny her femininity, but the sonnets imply that the source of her creative power is in

her double identity. It is necessary for the woman writer to recognize the conflict patriarchal culture has set up between figurative and literal creativity in order to find herself a language that is not a borrowed and false male voice, sterilised of the body, but is also not simply and weakly "sobbed," "a woman's voice forlorn." Barrett had to confront her double identity, had to see monstrosity not as a warning but as an opportunity to rebel. She had to learn not to fear being found "revolting." It seems that allowing Robert Browning to see her as female facilitated her creation of a voice that revealed not the ephemeral "personality," the idealised image of the poet, but the body of the woman writer.

Having survived this confrontation, she produced work which surpasses the pristine romances which Stedman considered so perfectly feminine, the conservative products of the Victorian "poetess." She revised the traditionally masculine subjecthood of the love poem, addressing to Browning the Sonnets from the Portuguese. These, as Ellen Moers suggests, influenced the works of other nineteenth century female poets, particularly Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson (1978:164-72). But Barrett's major work is Aurora Leigh, which she completed in 1856. It is a confrontation of the opposites which made up her ambivalence, a fertile bringing together of the elements of her monstrosity. It is a truly hybrid work, a novel written in verse, a "novel-poem," echoing both Wordsworth's The Prelude, which traces the development of the Romantic male

poetic subject, and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, the Bildungsroman of a Victorian woman. It is the fictionalised autobiography of a protagonist who is both a woman and a writer.

She had planned it for a long time. Having just finished her second translation of Prometheus Bound, in 1845, she tells Browning that she is planning a "completely modern" novel-poem, which is to go

running into the midst of our conventions, and rushing into drawing-rooms and the like ..., speaking the truth as I conceive of it out plainly. That is my intention. It is not mature enough yet to be called a plan. I am waiting for a story, and I won't take one, because I want to make one, and I like to make my own stories, because then I can take liberties with them in the treatment. (EB to RB, 27 February 1845, 1:32)

The story Barrett was waiting for was her own and, until she had confronted the central paradox of its plot, she could not write it or take the liberty to rewrite it. She first had to accept the monstrousness associated with being a writer and with not being "unsex'd." Her translations of Prometheus Bound play a crucial role in this. I believe that her work with the myth emphasised both the potential danger and the necessity of rebellion, making possible both her escape from her father/creator and her confrontation in Aurora Leigh with the ambivalence of the woman writer.

TRANSLATING PROMETHEUS: SIN AND EXPIATION

Some years ago, ... I translated or rather undid into English, the 'Prometheus' of Aeschylus.... it is the most miserable of all miserable versions of the class.... the comfort is, that the little book was unadvertised and unknown, and that most of the copies (through the entreaty of my father) are shut up in the wardrobe of his bedroom.... the recollection of this sin of mine has been my nightmare.... And so I resolved to wash away the transgression, and translate the tragedy over again. (EB to RB, 27 February 1845, 1:31)

Why should a translation be a transgression, a sin that needs to be expiated? And why should the translator's father entreat her to hide her work in his wardrobe? What did Elizabeth Barrett produce, that it should need to be kept such a shameful secret?

The first translation was written in thirteen days in February 1832, a month before Elizabeth's twenty-sixth birthday. She carried it out with confidence, writing in her diary:

I have finished my translation. 1075 lines of Aeschylus translated in a fortnight. And I think I am satisfied - tolerably satisfied. But the original is too magnificent for translation. (15 February 1832, 245-6)

This satisfaction, even if qualified, does not hint at the profound remorse she was later to express. It is unclear exactly how the change happened. Elizabeth reports that her father had suggested she submit the manuscript to a publisher, Valpy, but that she insisted on consulting Boyd first. The following day's entry remarks cryptically on his reply:

A letter from Mr Boyd! How it surprised me. He

does not like the Valpy plan. If the translation is good enough to be creditable to me, it shd. be published separately.... His letter is cool enough. I answered it by a note of explanation on Valpy's work; by rating very humbly my translation - & by telling him how little inclined I feel to publishing, & how I wished that I had never done so. The real truth! - If I never had, I never shd. have been exposed to the pain which has been & is oppressing me. (19 February 1832, 246)

The contradiction between defending her right to publish despite her mentor's misgivings (the basis of which is unspecified) and her ardent wish that she had never published at all are strongly ambivalent. What is the nature of the pain, so closely related to publishing her work, which she confesses to be "the real truth"?

Two days later she receives Boyd's reply, in which he appears to encourage her to publish after all. Her record of it betrays distress and confusion. She comments that his letter is "cool enough still ... I wonder he shd. have thought it worth while to write it at all" (21 February 1832, 247). He has asked for some of the translation, which she sends, "begging him not to read what I sent," saying "Would I not a thousand ... times rather have his work attended to than mine?" (ibid.). Nonetheless, she begins writing a preface to the translation, and there is no further mention of it in her diary. As will be shown, though, this preface reveals her growing anxiety about the implications of her translation which, on 11 May 1833, was published as Prometheus Bound, Translated from the Greek of Aeschylus. And Miscellaneous Poems, attributed namelessly to "the author of An Essay on Mind."

Her reliance on Boyd's opinion, her ambivalence about

publishing, and the mysterious "pain" she describes all suggest some kind of crisis. Critical reception of the translation was negative, but it is unlikely that criticism like that in The Athenaeum should have been enough to cause her complete rejection of it: the reviewer advised "those who adventure in the hazardous lists of poetic translation to touch anyone rather than Aeschylus; and they may take warning by the author before us" (in Forster 1988:76).

A later review may be slightly more revealing. As Alice Falk points out, a Quarterly Review critic unknowingly discovers the connection between Prometheus and the translator:

Her early enthusiasm for Aeschylus has sensibly aggravated the tendency to the overstrained and violent, which seems natural to her mind, and irretrievably precluded, we fear, that discipline of art and sense of beauty which a warmer study of Sophocles might have imparted. The [authadia] of her hero, Prometheus, communicates itself to Miss Barrett's preface and notes; she is something too dogmatic in her criticism, and a world too positive in her philosophy. (in Falk 1988:74)

The translator has become too much like her subject, her hero. Authadia means "the Promethean characteristic of insolent, self-pleasing self-will" (Falk 1988:74). This is an accurate description of the temperament revealed in Elizabeth's early autobiography, the passionate and rebellious philosophy which is the hallmark not of the acceptable Victorian poetess but of the writers Griswold called hermaphrodites.

If Barrett perceived these connections between herself and Prometheus, her shame and fear may to some extent be explained: for the first time she was faced with public

recognition of the ambition of her writing in connection not with unambiguous success, but with transgression and so with the danger of punishment.

There is no explanation, or proof, of her father's insistence on hiding the unsold copies of the translation, but this would also reveal an intriguing change of heart; after all, he was the first to suggest that she publish it. Did her Titanic aspirations place him, her "Jupiter Tonans," uncomfortably in the position of Zeus?

The translation is not mentioned again until her letter to Browning. In almost all later collections of her poetry, it is the 1850 version which is published, although often the 1833 preface is retained. In one edition, The Earlier Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning 1826-1833, the editor sees fit to replace the first translation, which opened the original volume, with the 1850 version, saying he had "not thought it wise or desirable to re-produce the earlier crude attempt or the girlish preface that accompanied it" (1878:vii). But, as will be shown, the preface is far from "girlish."

As a translator, Barrett was able to appropriate the voice of Aeschylus as well as transmit it, and have her words published under his name, a form of linguistic "theft" which was apparently the reproduction of the male author's creation. The translation also permitted her to conceal herself behind Aeschylus and, like Frankenstein's monster, speak both nameless and unseen.

SPEAKING UNSEEN: THE FEMALE TRANSLATOR

Dost thou not fear, such daring words ejecting?
Prometheus Bound (v.932, trans. EB 1833:50)

How art thou not afraid to utter such words?
 (Trans. EB 1850:157)

As I have suggested, the idea of translation as a feminist project is less paradoxical than it may seem. It is apparently a valid argument that if the feminist appropriation of language is a battle against the perceived silencing of women in patriarchal society, it must be counterproductive to carry out the diligent transferring of the words of an author from one language to another, where the translator can say nothing for herself, effacing herself behind another text, silently and invisibly reproducing the creation of the original author. But the translator remains a writer. Bringing literal reproduction into the realm of figurative creativity by making use of the common metaphoric figuring of translation as literal and female, allows her a duplicitous position: she can re-create rather than reproduce, engendering a grotesque hybrid, a shifting of the structures of the reproduction of texts, and of language. As Walter Benjamin implies, translation has the potential to liberate language (1970:80).

In the preface to her first translation, Elizabeth Barrett begs the reader to "forgive my English for not being Greek, and myself for not being Aeschylus" (1896:11).¹⁰ On the face of it, this apology seems to conform to the self-

deprecating stance expected of a translator, but at the same time it emphasises the fact that the translator is not Aeschylus and that the language of the text is her own. The liberation of language from paternal authority is as possible in a poetic translation as the liberation from meaning is in a perfectly literal one.

The silence of the translator is potentially different from the muteness of those who have been silenced: it is a possible source of power because it can be deceptive. This silence appears, and can be, acquiescent, reverent and faithful to the original, but it can also be a site of deliberate misrepresentation, of subversion and infidelity.

There are echoes here of the silence of Prometheus in Aeschylus's drama. He knows the secret of Zeus's possible downfall, but he refuses to reveal his knowledge. His silence is the source of his power, revealing not inarticulateness but the possession and deliberate (dis)use of language.

The translator can either be the silent, natural reproducer, faithfully mothering the text which will take its father/author's name, or she can make her apparent silence powerful. Christopher Norris differentiates between speaking and writing in a way which clarifies the source of this power. The speaker has his or her visible presence to evince the truth of the meanings produced in speech, and the writer's name is at least affixed to the written text to identify the voice's source despite its invisibility. By comparison, the translator is not heard directly not only

because not seen, but because apparently speaking another's voice. His or her name is secondary, usually forgotten, if ever noticed; the translator is like the monster, speaking only when invisible, free, finally, to construct fictions.

Translation, even more powerfully than writing, then,

obtrudes an alien depersonalized medium, a deceiving shadow which falls between intent and meaning, between utterance and understanding. It occupies a promiscuous public realm where authority is sacrificed to the vagaries and whims of textual 'dissemination.' Writing, in short, is a threat to the deeply traditional view that associates truth with self-presence and the 'natural' language wherein it finds expression.
(Norris 1982:28)

The anonymity and invisibility of the translator are potentially subversive. In terms of the above, translation facilitates an escape from the natural through promiscuity: the translator/mother has the capacity and the opportunity to lie (about much/with many); she need not reproduce the father/author's work faithfully.

The connections between translation and biological reproduction are not coincidental: Lori Chamberlain reveals a long tradition of describing the production of texts and, even more overtly, the reproduction of translations, in sexual and gendered terms (1988:454-72). The childbirth metaphor, in relation to the accurate translation, can suggest faithful - and mindless - reproduction.

Nevertheless, the metaphor provides a useful framework for considering the role of translation as a form of writing by women. As I have said, Chamberlain calls translation an "archetypal female activity" because of its secondariness to the act of original authorship (1988:467). Barrett's

translation of Prometheus Bound may have provided the first opportunity for her to discover the disruptive potential of concealing her figurative creating behind an act of apparent reproduction.

The unfaithful translation threatens the entire structure of the production of texts and meanings just as the unfaithful woman threatens the woman-exchanging kinship system on which patriarchal society rests: the offspring is not the product of the father/author whose name is attached to it, for its mother has been unfaithful. It is illegitimate.

The attribution of an author's name is significant: like the 1818 edition of Frankenstein, the first translation was published anonymously, Barrett's writing marked only with the name of Aeschylus, despite her apology for not being him. Her concealment behind his name is a potential source of power. Her anonymity, though, emphasises the woman's lack of a name of her own, the condition of being labelled with the father's name and then exchanging it for the husband's father's name. The anonymous woman writer, like the unnameable monster, is excluded from the power structures of patriarchal culture. This can become an advantage: the woman who writes is usurping the authority of fathers, the ability to make and name which has its justifying source in the bestowal on Adam of God's ability, in being and using the originary Logos, to create by naming.¹¹ But because the woman has no name of her own to bestow, her creature, if illegitimate, be it child or

translation, is potentially unnameable, unspeakable.

Shelley was delighted with the emphasis the programme of the theatrical adaptation of Frankenstein gave this by referring to the monster as "___" (see 94 above). The register of the St. Marylebone Parish Church for the 12 September 1846 records the marriage of the following:

Robert Browning (Condition: Bachelor; Rank or Profession: Gentleman ...) and Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett (Condition: Spinster; Rank or Profession: ---). (in Karlin 1985:15)

At this time, Elizabeth Barrett's reputation as a poet was well established, far more so than that of her husband. Nonetheless, she defied classification; she could not be named.

This attests to the difficulty society has in positioning the woman writer. The wordless signifier reveals Barrett's ambiguous position in relation to patriarchal culture, echoing the potentially liberating namelessness of Frankenstein's monster. The hybrid bearer of literal and figurative confounds patriarchal culture's attempts to name and so destroy the monstrous.

The unfaithful translation can no longer be attributed to the original author; the father's name is removed. It is illegitimate, and so outside of patriarchal legislature: wrongly named, or not at all, it is not positioned within the patronymic structures of culture which would control it, as they aim to control all natural reproduction. Rejected by, and so liberated from, the restraining structure, it has the freedom of the monster: it has the power to subvert the structure, carrying off, as Frankenstein's monster does, the

fire of culture whose light keeps at bay the darkness beyond the security of man's society. The illegitimate steals for itself the language which man uses to name and so control what is marginal, what disturbs his security and reminds him of the darkness: mothers and monsters.

In subverting the Name-of-the-Father by writing, the unfaithful translator, like the creator of monsters and like the silent Prometheus, can enact the dual exercising and criticising of power necessary in a feminist appropriation of language (Gallop 1982:121). Conventionally, the unfaithful translation is seen as a deficient reproduction, an abortion, a failure to trans-late, to carry across: a miscarriage. But in fact, such a work is the carrying to term and bringing to birth of a new and unnatural creature, the monstrous offspring of an illegitimate union.

Of course, such an act identifies the translator not with the monster but with its creator, with Frankenstein, who is guilty of a crime against nature, and who suffers for his ambition. The unfaithful translation, as a form of linguistic theft, is inseparably linked with the fear of retribution. Ambivalence is inevitable.

To what extent was Elizabeth Barrett's first translation of the Prometheus Bound unfaithful? Stedman describes it as:

at the time a unique effort for a young lady, and good practice; but [it] abounded in grotesque peculiarities, and in fidelity did not approach the modern standard.... Her other translations were executed for her own pleasure, and it was rarely her pleasure to be faithful to her text.
(1904:121-2)

What was "grotesque" about the translation? What Stedman objects to is not weakness; it is transgression, the committing of an infidelity, and the pleasure which she seems to have taken in transgressing. When a "young lady" commits the unholy act of pleasurable infidelity, her illegitimate offspring is bound to be "grotesque," to be monstrous. The first translation, which Elizabeth hid so ashamedly and with the willing help of her father, was perhaps her own "hideous progeny," the offspring of the "half-man," the woman writer and, as such, characterized by profound ambivalence.

In Prometheus Bound, Hermes, Zeus's messenger and henchman, threatens Prometheus by saying that the god always carries out the punishment he promises. The "literal" translation is "the mouth of Zeus knoweth not how to utter falsehood, but will bring to pass every word" (vv.1030-1033). Barrett's translations of these lines are revealing:

The lips of Jove are impotent to lie,
And consummation waiteth on the word.
(1833:53)

and

King Zeus's mouth is impotent to lie,
Consummating the utterance by the act....
(1850:159)

The two versions are uncharacteristically similar. Barrett seems to suggest a closer connection between Zeus's words and their results, hinting at a parallel between him and the Christian God who creates with the Word, making word and act inseparable, and implicitly connecting the God's creative and Zeus's punitive uses of fire/language. At the same time,

though, she calls Zeus's inability to lie "impotence," implying that lies and deception, the breaking of faith are a source of power which the tyrant lacks. As well as alluding to Prometheus's only power over Zeus, his ability to withhold the truth, Barrett subverts the suggestion of immense linguistic power found in the second line. It is this kind of subversion which empowers the translator.¹²

But is Barrett deliberately subversive, or even intentionally unfaithful to Aeschylus? Is there any evidence that she perceives infidelity to the original writer as desirable? Telling Robert Browning about the second translation, she writes that at least if "Aeschylus stands at the foot of my bed now, I shall have a little breath to front him" (EBB to RB, 27 February 1845, 1:32). Her first translation would, she believes, have been offensive to the creator of the original, and she does not desire to offend him.

In her preface to Prometheus Bound, written after completing the first translation, Barrett reveals much about her perceptions of both Aeschylus and Prometheus, as well as articulating her ideas about translation. These ideas do not form a consistent and unambiguous theory.

She distinguishes between the "literal version" of the original and the "transfusion of poetical spirit," which she calls respectively the "dead" and the "living letter" (3). Implicitly, it is the poetic which embodies the idiosyncratic interpretation of the living translator, of necessity not "faithful" to the original, but rather re-

animating what has reached completion, resuscitating it with new life, or re-creating it.

But Barrett does not present this poetic freedom as overtly transgressive, for she does not appear to consider fidelity an essential characteristic of a good translation. She likens the translation to a mirror, its reflection of a single image varying according to how it is held. The image cannot be expected to resemble the object exactly:

We do not blame Pope and Cowper for not having faithfully represented Homer: we do not blame Pope and Cowper for being Pope and Cowper. It is the nature of the human mind to communicate its own character to whatever substance it conveys.... (3)

In this way, she seems to have exculpated herself of any accusations of infidelity. In the light of this, her request at the end of the preface for her reader to "forgive my English for not being Greek, and myself for not being Aeschylus" (11), is somewhat contradictory. Her apparent modesty may be deceptive. The apology follows a statement of her intention, clearly privileging the poetic above the literal: to "the literal sense I have endeavoured to bend myself as closely as was poetically possible" (11). She distinguishes between the "sense" which must be translated literally, and the poetic or formal aspects which can be revised and changed by translators who, in all the examples she gives, are also poets. She does not promise to have been successful in her endeavours, and her apology for possible infidelities (which implies ambivalence about whether her failure to be Aeschylus is really forgivable or not), is strongly undermined by her philosophical acceptance that the

reader will find much changed.

In one of her notes to the first translation Barrett discusses the existence of many interpretations of the myth. She interrupts herself, overtly limiting her own work to a faithful translation rather than a subjective interpretation. The refusal is ambiguous, though: "a great many ... saw a great deal [under the mask of Prometheus] besides. But a translator is not, or at least need not be, a speculator" (57,n.1, my emphasis).

The qualification undermines Barrett's assertion, suggesting that speculation, conjectural reflection, is indeed possible for the translator. If the "living" translation is a mirror (or speculum), it follows logically that the translator can be a speculator, seeing new images, re-visions of the original object. Like Shelley and her monster, even the apparently conventional translator has the potential to construct alternative possibilities that disrupt, as Pandora's speech does, the relationship between the sign and the absent referent.

Barrett refuses to define explicitly what she does, creating instead an ambiguous space for herself where speculation is not only possible but, because covert, is potentially subversive. In refusing to state clearly the truth about what she is doing, Barrett, like Prometheus, has the power which Zeus lacks.

Connections between herself and Prometheus are implicit in the rest of the preface too. She goes on to present a defence of the Greeks and especially Aeschylus to the

Victorian age, which she describes as preferring "undreamt of dreams" and "unearthly frenzy" (4) - in short, originality to the classical, "cold and polished and imitative poetry." She defends herself doubly, and again ambiguously: she warns against the possible dangers of lack of control and unguided originality, and yet goes on to extol similar qualities in the ancient Greeks, who "wrote antecedently to rules: they felt passionately, and thought daringly" (5). Translating Aeschylus's Prometheus carries the possibility of taking on the passionate and daring defiance of norms which characterize the hero. As the critic in the Quarterly Review pointed out, the wilful authadia of Prometheus seemed to characterize the translator as well.

The terms in which Barrett discusses Aeschylus's style also suggests a connection between the dramatist and his hero:

[Aeschylus] is a fearless and impetuous, not a cautious and accomplished poet. His excellences could not be acquired by art, nor could his defects exist separately from genius.... [S]ometimes his fancy rushes in, where his judgement fears to tread, and language ... writhes beneath its impetuosity.... (6)

Barrett's own writing has been described in remarkably similar terms. For instance:

The stretching and twisting and shaking which Mrs Browning gave to English poetic diction shows its effect in Rossetti and Morris, Meredith and Hopkins, and through them in most poets of the twentieth century. (Hayter 1962:233)

Frequently, this stylistic impetuosity was seen as a defect. Stedman states that elements of her writing "justly were held to be an outrage upon the beauty and dignity of

metrical art", that her "taste never seemed quite developed, but through life [was] subordinate to her excess of feeling" and that "she showed a lack of the genuine artist's reverence, and not without egotism followed her wilful way" (1904:126-7).

This fearlessness is what Barrett praises in Aeschylus. The connection she sees between him and Prometheus is made more explicit in a letter to Browning about the second translation, in which she discusses an idea which never came to fruition:

... I have in my head to associate with the [second translation], a monodrama of my own, - not a long poem, but a monologue of Aeschylus as he sate a blind exile on the flats of Sicily and recounted the past to his own soul, just before the eagle cracked his great massy skull with a stone. (EBB to RB, 27 February 1845, 1:32)

There is a story, probably apocryphal, that Aeschylus was killed when an eagle dropped a tortoise on his head. Here, the destructive role of the eagle and Barrett's replacement of the rather undignified tortoise with a stone, along with her intention to juxtapose the poem with the translation, suggests a recognition by Barrett of similarities between Aeschylus and Prometheus.¹³

The fact of Aeschylus's exile and Barrett's apparently original invention of his blindness which, as has been suggested and will be further examined, was a revealing preoccupation of hers, are also significant. The preface emphasises that both Aeschylus and Prometheus were made to suffer unjustly for their audacity. Barrett discusses the lack of appreciation shown for Aeschylus by the Athenians,

which led to his final exile from the city "on whom he conferred the immortality of his name and works" (9). Aeschylus suffers "the ingratitude and changefulness of man" (10) in the same way that Prometheus suffers at the hand of Zeus, despite having helped him to victory. This emphasises how unjust the suffering of both can be made to seem. If Barrett identified what she had done in the first translation with Promethean authadia, with a bold seizure of poetic power, the importance of this analysis is clear. The evasive ambiguities in her preface and notes are not surprising. The Prometheus Bound is a tragedy, presenting the suffering which inevitably results from the hubris of its hero. As well as trying to show that the unfaithful translation is not necessarily a transgression, Barrett establishes the unfairness of punishing the kind of ambition it might reveal.

Her detailed discussion of the character of Prometheus centres not on his heroism and ambition, but qualifies the connection she herself introduces between him and Milton's Satan:

That conception [of Prometheus] sank deeply into the soul of Milton, and, as has been observed, rose from thence in the likeness of his Satan. But the Satan of Milton and the Prometheus of Aeschylus stand upon ground as unequal, as do the sublime of sin and the sublime of virtue. Satan suffered from his ambition; Prometheus from his humanity: Satan for himself; Prometheus for mankind: Satan dared perils which he had not weighed; Prometheus devoted himself to sorrows which he had foreknown. (8)

This opposition of Satan and Prometheus denies the rebelliousness of the Titan. She presents him as virtuous, altruistic and self-denying, a distinct contradiction of the

qualities her earlier writing would have predicted she should admire in him.

Alice Falk points out that this suggests an identification of Prometheus with Christ, reflecting a shift in Victorian perceptions towards reducing Prometheus's rebelliousness and emphasizing that his suffering is on behalf of mankind, in short making him more a martyr than a rebel (1988:76).¹⁴ She also observes that, despite the connections with Christ implicit in the preface, Barrett does not seem to reevaluate the hero in the 1833 translation itself. It seems, as I have suggested, that the preface, written after the completion of the translation, does not so much give an account of what Barrett has done, as try simultaneously to conceal and diminish its enormity. Her reading of the Titan is evasive, revealing ambivalence about her own identification with the character, an uncertainty based on her fear of the punishment authadia seemed to provoke. To identify not only with the great Aeschylus, and his creation the Titan, but then to connect these with Satan, may have seemed altogether too hubristic for Elizabeth Barrett. Perhaps her apology for not being Aeschylus carries in it a declaration of innocence too: she would like to remind her reader that she is after all, only the translator, not the creator.

Barrett's ambivalence as a writer, then, is evident in her preface. On one hand she implicitly defends the daring and audacity of her work, asserting her right to re-create the original and implying that it is possible for her to

speculate and revise as well as reproduce. On the other hand, she qualifies that boldness at its source, in the nature of Prometheus himself.

The choice she must make between a literal reproduction of the text and a potentially transgressive speculative translation echoes the contradiction existing between the woman's literal reproduction and the writer's figurative recreation. The subject of the translations, the myth itself, is applicable to both cases: it forms a comprehensive warning of the danger to any writer who appropriates what is denied her, either specifically as the creative voice of the author in her translation, or as the language of patriarchal culture in all her writing.

The last words of the preface, though, defy that warning. Barrett discusses the "unequal union" of her own poetry with the work of Aeschylus (11). She asks how she can defend or justify what she has done and answers her question by quoting, in Greek, the chorus of Prometheus Bound: this is "a war against which there is no warring" (v.904). She will not even try to defend herself. But the context of the quotation is the chorus's prayer that they will never be desired by Zeus, as Io was; the onslaught against which they (and, by implication, Barrett) are helpless is the "unequal union" desired by Zeus himself, the uniting of god and mortal, heaven and earth, figurative and literal. Barrett will not defend herself against the possibility of the monstrous.

The two translations of Prometheus Bound differ vastly,

but not uniformly. On the face of it, it is difficult to tell why Elizabeth Barrett should have so entirely rejected her first translation, or why the second should have been a satisfactory "expiation" of her "sin."

Perhaps part of the reason lies in her perception of the first translation as sinful, as a transgression for which she had to atone. The contradiction between the Promethean and the Christian surely plays a part in this. Falk has discovered what appears to be the addition of Christian resonances in the second translation, and suggests that it is more consistent with the preface than the first is. The second translation, she says, reinterprets Prometheus as a Christ-figure, one in whom the ambition and audacity of the hero are tempered with humanitarian motives and selfless suffering (1988:78-82).

There is some support for this assertion in Barrett's discussion, with Browning, of the second translation. After her mention of the monologue about Aeschylus, he suggests that she write a revision, along the lines of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, of the other missing play in the trilogy, Prometheus Pyrophoros (the fire-bearer). Barrett refuses, contradicting her statement in the preface about the importance of the Greeks to Victorian art:

The old gods are dethroned. Why should we go back to the antique moulds...? Let us all aspire rather to Life, ... For there is poetry everywhere.... And then Christianity is a worthy myth, and poetically acceptable. (EB to RB, 20 March 1845, 1:45-6)

This suggests that the second translation contains a shift away from, even an exorcism of, the passion and daring

Barrett had attributed to the ancient Greeks. The change is not so simple, though, as continuing allusions to Prometheus in Barrett's later work, especially Aurora Leigh, will reveal. Similarly, Barrett's addition of Christian resonances to Aeschylus is not unproblematic.

Falk compares Barrett's two translations of the first speech in the drama - that of the character Strength (vv.1-11) - and finds three major changes: Zeus, from being "the father," is called "our Father," Prometheus becomes "guilty" rather than "audacious," and his punishment is for him to "expiate" his "sin" rather than to "pay exacted vengeance" for his "offence" (1988:79). There are numerous other examples of this kind of modification, but the changes are not absolutely consistent.

For instance, in Prometheus's first speech, Barrett translates the Greek word for "offence" as "sin" in both translations (v.112, 1833:21; 1850:143) and later what is translated as "sin" in the first appears as "crime" in the second (v.388, 1833:30; 1850:147). Further, there are discrepancies in references to Zeus which may connect him with the Christian God: in the first translation Oceanus uses the italicized "him" to refer to Zeus and Prometheus replies using "Him"(v.392); in the second, Oceanus uses "Him" and Prometheus now simply uses "him," reversing the connection Falk finds earlier.

More interestingly, Barrett introduces the idea of "hell" in both her translations. Prometheus states that he has rescued man from being "blasted utterly, unto the house

of Death" (v.238). Barrett first translates this as a rescue "from sinking into hell exterminate" (1833:25), then, in the second translation, as from "meditated ruin deep as hell" (1850:145). Man is redeemed from the literal hell in the first version whereas the second uses hell only as a metaphor for a less specifically Christian kind of ruin.

A final example suggests that even where Christian resonance is added in the second translation, its use is more ambiguous than Falk suggests. Io, longing to escape her torment, contemplates suicide. In the first translation, she cries that in so doing she may "be freed / From all mine anguish" (vv.749-50, 1833:43). In the second this becomes the hope that "I may redeem / My soul from sorrow" (1850:154). Apart from an unlikely connection of suicide with Christian redemption, there is no sense of Io's having sinned at all: this is inconsistent with the expiation implicitly connected with Prometheus's punishment.

Barrett's use of Christian resonance, then, seems less consistent than Falk suggests. The changes are perhaps more an indication of her ambivalence about the nature of the hero than the result of a deliberate identification of him with Christ.

Further, reading Prometheus as a Christ figure raises significant problems for the interpretation of Zeus's character. Should he then be seen as God, as "our Father" would suggest? Aeschylus is unambiguous in his presentation of Zeus as tyrannical and in direct opposition to Prometheus, despite hints of a reconciliation in the lost final part of the trilogy. Prometheus has deliberately

defied Zeus, even if it is on humanity's behalf. He continues to do so, with increasing fervour, throughout the drama.

Barrett moderates Aeschylus's characterisation of Zeus in both translations (for instance reading his "tyranny" as "kingship" or "royalty" [v.226, 1833:25]), but in the second she also tempers Prometheus's active opposition to Zeus. In classical Greek, antipathy or enmity is necessarily a mutual thing: the verb for hatred assumes neither the active nor the passive voice. The translator must thus choose the subject of the verb in English. Prometheus is a "god who hateth the gods" (v.37, 1833:18) in the first translation; he becomes "a god the gods hate" in the second (1850:141); similarly, from being "the foe of Jove [Zeus]" (v.120, 1833:21), he becomes "the god, Zeus hateth sore" (1850:143).

The second translation, then, reveals an attempted reduction of the magnitude of Prometheus's rebellion. Is there any link between this and Barrett's "expiation" of the first version? An examination of the language and form of the two translations reveals significant differences.

The ode examined appears just after Prometheus has described the exact nature of his gift to mankind (see Appendix 1 for full texts). He enumerates the developments and advantages of culture, including language, which rescued them from their confusion, for before the gift of "fire," humans "seeing, saw in vain, and did not hear, / Hearing" (vv.447-8. Trans. EB 1833:33). The Chorus points out that Prometheus seems to have neglected himself in helping mortals, and prays never to be punished by Zeus. In the

second strophe it implies that the gift was worthless, and Prometheus's suffering needless, for man remains weak and blind.

The most immediately obvious differences between Barrett's two versions are formal. She translated the Greek iambics into blank verse in both versions, whereas her translations of the odes are deliberately irregular. As Barrett states in her preface, she considers "[i]rregularity ... to be indispensable to the conveyance of any part of the effect of the original measure" (11). Again, this is somewhat ambiguous, suggesting that the more irregular the translation is, the more faithful it will be to the style of Aeschylus. The second version is clearly more irregular than the first, which retains a regular meter, simply changing from the iambic pentameter of blank verse to a lyrical iambic tetrameter and, while the 'abbacdd' rhyme scheme is not consistent throughout the ode, it is more regular than the 'aabcbcddeeff' of the second. This would suggest that the latter is more faithful to Aeschylus's form. However, the first is closer in length to the original than the substantially longer second version, which in most other ways seems the looser of the two.

In fact, the second introduces a number of changes not found in the first. These are hinted at by the less harshly despondent rhythm and tone of the second. But it is in subtle changes to the sense of the words themselves that Barrett most effectively revises the original. The idea that Prometheus's gift has been of no benefit to its giver, which is central to the original, is removed from the second,

which begins by questioning the worth (and so affirming the existence of) the "beauty" of humanity, by playing on the meaning of "fair": is mankind so attractive as to be worth suffering for, and is the punishment thus fair, or just?

The first translation questions what help Prometheus can expect from such weak "men who last a day." In the second, Barrett plays with the line, calling them "dying livers - living one day long." The pun on "livers" emphasises the etymological connection between "life" and the name of the organ which is central to the punishment of Prometheus: his liver is eaten daily by an eagle. The significance is that the liver regenerates itself each night, and can never be consumed entirely. It is possible then that Barrett is subverting the hopelessness implied by man's mortality.

This is further supported by the addition of "hope" in the second: "what help" becomes "what hope." This addition connects with the description of man's blindness, which is found in all three translations, questioning whether the gift of fire has actually enlightened man and taught him to see. In Weir Smyth and in Barrett's first translation, man is "shackled" or "bound" to his weakness, which is related to dreaming, "slow" and "vision-like," men being "hoodwink'd," blindfolded and deceived. In the second, however, "poor blind manhood" is not fettered, like Prometheus, but "drifted from its end." While this aimlessness does not seem significantly different from the bondage of the original, Barrett has again introduced an important ambiguity. While "end" could denote function or

purpose, it also means destiny or fate, and so recalls the particular "end" Zeus had planned for man: only Prometheus's gift of fire prevented Zeus from destroying all of humanity after his victory over the Titans. Hence, while not appearing to change the passage to any significant degree, Barrett makes small alterations which, on close reading, do reveal a shift in emphasis. It is of course in her interest, exploring as she is her own capacity for the Promethean, to modify any suggestion in Aeschylus's version that the Titan's gift was wasted on its recipients.

The second translation also hints that man's blindness is now different from the "seeing vainly" that preceded the gift of fire: he could see, but his sight was useless. His new "blindness" is connected by Barrett in the second translation with the idea of hope, and this recalls the gift Prometheus has said he gave first, distinguishing it from fire:

PROMETHEUS:
I did restrain besides
My mortals from premeditating death.

CHORUS:
How didst thou medicine the plague-fear of death?

PROMETHEUS:
I set blind Hopes to inhabit in their house.

CHORUS:
By that gift, thou didst help thy mortals well.
(vv.250-253, Trans.EB 1850:145)

The gift of blind hope is what enabled mortals to make use of fire, for in preventing them from foreseeing death it freed them from the ambiguous power of Prometheus's foresight, the knowledge of future suffering which makes his

act of rebellion so doubly heroic. In her second translation of the ode, Barrett reminds the chorus, who are trying to make Prometheus see the hopelessness of his position, of their earlier approval of man's blindness. In so doing, she emphasises that their present despair is contradictory, and that humans, because of their gifts, can indeed, with "mortal wranglings[,]...confuse / The [restricting and oppressive] harmony of Zeus."

The subtle "wranglings" Barrett seems to carry out in her second translation seem evidence of this ability. In it, overtly the atonement for a sin, the moderation of the audacity of her hero, she takes far greater liberties with the words of Aeschylus than she ever did in the first.

In a letter to her, Robert Browning discusses the gift of blind hope, using it to remonstrate with her for her despair, and her thinly disguised threats to commit suicide by jumping from her window. This, and her reply, extend the symbolic significance of blindness beyond her desire not to be seen as a woman and writer. It can also be advantageous not to see, and her apparent romantic interest in the blind Hugh Boyd may have contained an awareness of this, as would her apparently deliberate invention of the blindness of Aeschylus. She is the moth who knows she can only fly into the light if she wilfully closes her eyes to the danger.

Yes! I am satisfied to 'take up' with the blind hopes again, and have them in the house with me, for all that I sit by the window.... It is well to fly towards the light, even where there may be some fluttering and bruising of wings against the windowpanes, is it not? (EB to RB, 5 March 1845, 1:35)

Her awareness of the likelihood of "bruising," though, reveals that her hope is not completely blind, but rather a deliberate refusal to foresee - and be discouraged by - the knowledge of future pain.

In her preface, Barrett had distinguished between Satan, who "dared perils which he had not weighed," and Prometheus, who "devoted himself to sorrows which he had foreknown" (8). Her active decision to hope, and ignore her apprehension of danger, collapses her distinction between the two Titanic figures.

In the same letter, Barrett immediately goes on to ask Browning about the Titan's ability to predict his own punishment. She is concerned that, while Prometheus had "with full knowledge of the penalty reserved for him, ... sinned of free will and choice," it appears that he had not foreseen, had been blind to, the full "extent and detail of the torment" (1:35). She suggests that Aeschylus might have wanted to emphasise the Titan's "martyrdom," but feels that "the heroism of the martyr diminishes in proportion - and there appears to be a contradiction, and oversight" (36). This implies a distinction between the martyr and the hero, based on the courage of the hero who acts with full knowledge of coming retribution.

This difference is apparent in the second passage for comparison, part of the dialogue between Prometheus and Hermes, the messenger of Zeus, just before the Titan is flung down to Tartarus for refusing to reveal his secret (Appendix 2). There are no major metrical differences between Barrett's translations here, as she translates the

iambics of the original Greek into blank verse. But again, the second version is longer.

Prometheus reveals that he knows the extent, if not the detail, of the punishment he is to receive for not telling Zeus the name of his potential enemy, and remains defiant. Nothing will "force [his] utterance," or "bend [his] sturdy will, and make [him] speak." There is a greater emphasis on language, on the act of speaking, in the second version, and this is contrasted with Zeus's ability to create universal disorder. Hermes tries to persuade Prometheus to give in. His terms are made ambiguous by Barrett. In Herbert Weir Smyth's translation, he tells the Titan to "bend thy will" and be wise; in Barrett's first translation this becomes "endure," which seems to advocate the bearing of suffering rather than acquiescence. In the second, Hermes tells Prometheus to "take righteous courage" and "dare for once / To apprehend and front thine agonies / With a just prudence." Courage is associated with surrender rather than endurance. Even more important is Barrett's addition of the word "apprehend"; Hermes wants Prometheus to discard his heroic ability to act despite the known consequences and confront the fact of his suffering. The double meaning of the word undermines this advice, for the apprehension of agony means not only recognising it, but also fearfully anticipating it. Prometheus does foresee his suffering, but ignores his fear; he refuses to be "prudent."

Aeschylus presents femininity as the epitome of the weakness rejected by Prometheus. While Barrett retains the connection between femininity and fearful supplication, the

derogatory connotations are modified. Instead of the pejorative adjective "womanish," Barrett uses "shall prove a woman" in the first and "struck...to a woman's mind" in her second translation and, in both versions, "feminine upliftings of mine hands." The sense of "aping" women is removed entirely. Further, what Weir Smyth translates as "terror" of Zeus is "loath[ing]" in both of Barrett's translations, connoting a scorn and disgust as well as fear, and reducing the sense of cowardliness connected with women. The same occurs earlier in the drama where Strength criticises Vulcan for his compassion, for "play[ing] the woman," as Weir Smyth has it (v.79). In fact, Barrett's translations are more accurate, avoiding the Greek's possible (but not necessary) connotations of effeminacy: "Be soft and tender" (1833:20) and "Be thou gentle and tender" (1850:142).

The consistencies which do exist between the two translations, particularly in relation to Aeschylus's presentation of the feminine, suggest that Barrett had not rejected the ideas of her early work. As her letters reveal, she continues to be concerned that Prometheus is more a hero than a martyr. It is important to Barrett that Prometheus sinned knowingly, rather than being the innocent victim of Zeus's cruelty.

There is a character in the drama who suffers undeservedly, and her treatment in the translations reveals more about Barrett's perception of women in relation to heroism; it is not quite as simple as Prometheus's refusal to be like a woman suggests. This character is Io.

In the preface, Barrett remarks that readers of Aeschylus are "impatient at Io's long narrations" (8), only wanting to hear Prometheus speak. Nonetheless, some of the changes she makes to the presentation of the character suggest that Barrett sees Io as more than a tedious digression. Io is both the helpless and innocent victim of divine tyranny, and the source of its downfall. She is a feminised reflection of Prometheus, but a conventionally feminised one (if Pandora is a "female" one): Io's power is unwitting, her suffering martyrdom rather than heroism.

As I have suggested, Io's transformation into a cow is significant: Zeus desires her female body and she becomes a creature that seems to epitomise female reproduction. This is important in relation to fire as language and culture, for her transformation does not affect only her body. While she does not become an inarticulate animal, Aeschylus emphasises that the change is not just physical. Her restoration to normality is described as returning her to her "senses" (v.849), and Barrett translates this in both versions as Zeus's giving back to Io her "perfect mind." Zeus's view of Io as an object of desire has been instrumental in the loss of that mind. Her final speech expands on the effect of her punishment (Appendix 3).

The speech begins with a cry of anguish, translated by Barrett at first as "Ah me," then as "Eleleu," which is a direct transliteration from the Greek and in English is less recognizable as being coherently verbal. Io first bemoans her pain, which is as much mental as physical. In her first translation, Barrett differentiates between these as

"gangrene and insanity," drawing them together in the second by using the idea of burning found in the original, calling the "insanity" "fire on the brain." The connection of fire with her suffering seems to be emphasised by Barrett. Further, the gad-fly's sting is in Weir Smyth's translation "unforged by fire" (the Greek word means "fireless"), whereas Barrett reads it as "fiery sting" in the first and the "sting of the curse, all aflame as it flew" in the second, not only connecting the pain with Zeus's punitive use of fire, but expanding the sense of "sting" from the literal, that of the fly, to all the suffering caused by the curse. (Significantly, the word that means "gad-fly" in Greek can also have the figurative meaning of insane and tragic passion or desire.)

Io then describes the effect of the pain: her beating heart, rolling eyes and staggering steps, which are translated similarly in both of Barrett's versions, and she tells of loss of mastery over language, how her words have become violent, disordered and useless. The effect of Zeus's punishment is the collapse, implicitly brought about by his use of fire, of the rational use of language given to mortals by Prometheus.

The descriptions of Io's physical changes are also revealing. In the first translation, Barrett has her tell of "the corruption of my human form" by Zeus's "tempesteing" (v.640). This is expanded in the second to

speaking of the storm-curse sent from Zeus,
And of my beauty, from which height it took
Its swoop on me, poor wretch! left thus deformed
And monstrous to your eyes. (v.642ff. 1850:152)

The idea is introduced of Io's prior beauty, her deformity is associated with monstrosity, and Barrett mentions the eyes which are necessary to distinguish both: seeing is that which recognizes the beautiful or the monstrous. This creates explicit connections between Io and the monsters mentioned by Prometheus in his description of her travels, in particular the Phorcides and the Gorgons. There are three of each, and all are female and appallingly ugly. The Phorcides are

ancient maidens...with shape of swan,
One tooth between them, and one common eye,
On whom the sun doth never look at all
With all his rays, nor evermore the moon,
When she looks through the night.
(vv.794-6, trans. EB 1850:155)

The Gorgons have snakes for hair and looking at them is deadly: "no mortal gazes in their face, / And gazing can breathe on" (ibid.).

In a note to this speech in her first translation, Barrett discusses the Greek use of the word "dogs" to refer to monsters, listing a number of examples. The list reveals her awareness of an ironic connection between women and monsters:

In this place griffins are called dogs; a little further on ... eagles are called dogs; ... in Apollonius Rhodius, the Harpies are called dogs; in the Andromache of Euripides, (what a climax!) a woman is called a dog; and Synesius goes a step higher, and calls the Devil a dog. (62 n.21)

Barrett herself chooses to include the woman in her list of monsters, and selects its position, only "a step" below "the Devil."

As Io's description of her transformation reveals, the other side of the female is also emphasised in the second

translation: Barrett uses the word "beauty" a number of times. In his foretelling of Io's future, Prometheus describes fifty women, Io's descendents, who murder the cousins who marry them against their will. The men are destroyed by what Barrett calls, in the second translation, a "curse betwixt that beauty and their desire"; they are "overcome / In murtherous woman-war, by fierce red hands / Kept savage by the night" (v.853ff, 1850:156). The use of "beauty" suggests comparisons between Io and the women; unlike her they succeed in destroying those who lust violently after them. At the same time, though, one of the fifty spares her husband and it is she, the one who acquiesces out of love, who is the ancestor of Herakles. The murdering women are "savage" and have unnaturally red bloody hands; their beauty, or more specifically, masculine desire for it, as in Io's case, leads to a kind of monstrosity. This echoes Barrett's own fear of being seen as desirable: for her, the recognition of female sexuality is what reduces all women to objects of masculine desire, and makes women writers into monsters.

It is paradoxical then that despite the ambivalence she connects with female beauty in the second translation, and despite her stated greater interest in the male protagonist rather than in the implications of the female, Barrett does show some evidence that she is translating not as an "unsex'd," neutral writer, but with the consciousness of being a woman. In a number of places, especially in the second translation, she introduces terms referring to the female body which are not found in the original. A

particularly vivid example is the description of the Colchian maidens, translated quite faithfully to the Greek, in the first, as those "who untrembling stand / In war" (vv.415-6, 1833:32). This is expanded into "the maids... Who with white, calm bosoms, stand / In the battle's roar" (1850:148).¹⁵

Further, precious metals are described in the first translation as being found under the "bosom of the earth" (1833:34). This description is significant in that it emphasises the relationship of Prometheus with Themis, the earth goddess, his mother: the source of most of his power is female. These additions are not limited to either one of the translations; in the second, "all-fost'ring earth" (1833:20) becomes "Earth, mother of us all" (1850:142).

Barrett's presentation of the female, particularly in the second translation, typifies the ambivalence which characterises so much of her work, an ambivalence revealed clearly by a comparison of her two translations. The second does appear to reduce slightly the defiance and rebelliousness of Prometheus, particularly by adding Christian connotations, supporting, to this extent, Barrett's intention, presaged by ambiguities in the preface, to move away from the daring of the Greeks who "wrote antecedently to rules" and towards the inspiration of Victorian life and values. But the language of the second translation contradicts this apparent rejection of the bold and audacious poet she aspires to be even as early as her autobiography. Despite its "Victorian" appearance, with increased use of archaisms and censoring of implicitly

sexual references, for instance, the second translation is also characterised, as the above comparisons reveal, by a far more adventurous use of language.¹⁶ At times in the second translation, Barrett makes changes which appear to contradict Aeschylus's text; she takes liberties with his language, playing with it. In faithfully reproducing the irregularities of Aeschylus's writing, she creates new irregularities which take this fidelity to its logical conclusion: she finds power over his voice and "makes it writhe" (preface, 6).

In the second translation, Barrett makes use of the space she had left for herself in her note to the first: the translator need not be a speculator, but she can be one. Her ambivalence about defiance and her possible fear of punishment do not lead her to produce a timid and faithful reproduction of Aeschylus, in "expiation of her sin," but rather a deceptive re-creation.

Perhaps her dismissal of Io, in the preface, as less interesting than Prometheus is connected with her refusal to admit to her own womanhood: of course she would rather identify with the hero than with the innocent feminine creature cursed not for her courage and ambition but for her physiology. In the "speculum" of her second translation, the introduction of the links between masculine desire and feminine beauty/monstrosity supports this: the connections between Io's bovineness and the unsightly grotesqueness of the Gorgons were made just before the long period in her correspondence with Browning when she would not allow him to see her.

Over the period of this correspondence, the issues of sight and blindness become increasingly complex. Not only does Barrett want to remain unseen, but she also chooses not to see. She must take on the "blind hope" which enabled mortals to use culture and create in the face of their own mortality. Her resolve fails at times, as the ambivalence of both works attest.

But there is one more significant reference to sight in Barrett's letters to Browning, one which reveals the changes which followed the second translation. Both versions were written while she lived at home, unseen, as the poet who could pretend not to be a woman. Until she left her father, she could dismiss Io as less interesting than Prometheus; before the woman is seen, she is neither beautiful nor monstrous.

Prometheus was not blind, but acted in the knowledge of retribution, "sinning willingly." To be a true "female Prometheus" she had to do the same, actively "taking up" that blindness and risking bruising herself on the window, as she puts it in her letter to Browning. Her fear of doing so blinds her in another way:

You seem to have drunken of the cup of life full, with the sun shining on it. I have lived only inwardly.... I turned to thinking ... that I had stood blind in this temple I was about to leave.... Why, if I live on and yet do not escape from this seclusion, do you not perceive that I labour under signal disadvantages - that I am, in a manner, as a blind poet? (EB to RB, 20 March 1845, 1:43-4, her emphasis)

This blindness is not courageous determination to be unmoved by the anticipation of punishment, but a weakness, which is connected as much with not being seen as with not seeing.

serious and isolated artist, and finally a woman who is married, and writing. Barrett Browning identifies Aurora with Prometheus and, in doing so, rewrites both the myth and herself. Aurora Leigh, as a "female Prometheus," is both the subject and the progeny of Barrett Browning's re-creation of her own life.

After completing her second translation of Prometheus Bound, Barrett told Robert Browning that she planned a new work, but did not yet have a story for it, wanting to make her own story so that she could "take liberties with [it] in the treatment" (EB to RB, 27 February 1845, 1:32). She did not realise that she had been working on one part of the story, which was Aeschylus's, and that she had already twice "taken liberties" with it in the process of making it her own. The other was the story of her own life, and she was about to enact its climactic escape and resolution. Aurora Leigh is the product of both forms of re-creation, the figurative translation of the myth and the transformation of Barrett Browning's own life in her writing.

In the above lines, Aurora describes "the heart" of her poetry at the moment she decides to change her writing, to start producing work that is not the writing expected of conventional women poets, which she calls "play[ing] at art" (III:240). This "play" produces lifeless poems which, if ripped up, would leave "no blood upon the rapier's point" (III:246).

By contrast, she perceives the art she wants to produce as the result of serious and agonised labour; it burns and bleeds. Her description of it as "fire-seeds of creation"

conflates the most significant aspects of Promethean fire. The tenor of her metaphor is poetry, the cultural fire given by Prometheus to mortals in Aeschylus's version of the myth, figurative creativity. The vehicle is fire, specifically as the source of life, in this case given by Jove, but echoing Prometheus's use of it in Ovid, the figuration of fire as the source of literal creativity. The trope thus draws together the uses of fire which culture sets in conflict, the literal component of the metaphor refers to figurative creativity, and vice versa. But Aurora does not at first seem to recognise the implications of this union.

The two points of similarity used to connect fire and writing here are power and pain. Aurora Leigh describes herself as weaker than the god - and the god's wife - but paradoxically makes this weakness, her "woman's ill," the source of her ability to hold the fire. She says she does not have the strength to open her fist, clenched like that of Zeus, containing within it the seeds of both figurative and literal creation. Her metaphor is ambiguous: likening her ability to hold fire to that of Zeus, she nonetheless attributes that ability to feminine weakness. She holds in her weak hand the power and the seemingly inseparable pain of fire that creates both art and life. Emphasising her inability to let go suggests a desire to escape the responsibility of grasping fire.

Her words also suggest complete acceptance of the pain; where before she had "yearned to loose a finger," she now says her hand may never haply open - with luck, she will be able to hold onto the fire forever. At the same time, there

is a danger that doing so will put the fire out as well as burn her hand. Further, the contrast between the god's "clenched palm" and a woman's hand opened "large" casts ambivalence on the metaphor. The fist is that of Zeus, the enemy of Prometheus. The pain comes from holding fire too tightly, keeping its power to oneself, as Frankenstein had tried to do. Prometheus gave his stolen fire away; his hands were open. The metaphor, then, reveals flaws in Aurora's perception of her identity as a writer.

Aurora has discarded "playing" at writing for work, even if she must be a martyr to her art. Barrett Browning had done the same, denying herself an existence beyond her written one, and had learnt the limitations of vision such egotism leads to. (Aurora's voluntary isolation echoes Barrett's concealment, and seems to exculpate, at least to some extent, Edward Barrett from imprisoning his daughter. As I shall show, Aurora Leigh significantly reviews the poet's parents.) Barrett Browning undermines the apparently Promethean determination of her heroine by implying its limitations. The poem traces Aurora's growth: her determination to be a writer makes her deny the female altogether, and blinds her to the fertile possibilities her woman's hand can give the fire. Barrett Browning makes Aurora learn what she herself had had to discover.

Elizabeth Barrett left the seclusion of her father's home and married Robert Browning, irreversibly confronting her identity as a woman. Forster describes the enormous changes in the conditions of her life (1988:197-8). Suddenly she was no longer "blind," but experiencing what in her

earlier letter to Browning she had not even been able to find the words for. Forster tells how once, "at a very cold inn near Bologna, she was triumphant because she managed to lay and light a fire" (1988:247). In 1849, after two miscarriages, she gave birth to a child (becoming what her husband termed "offensively maternal" [Forster 1988:240]). She was forty-three and married, yet her position nonetheless echoes that of Shelley at the time of producing her own children and most hybrid writing. For in these circumstances Barrett Browning wrote the audacious new work she had been planning for so long.

Aurora Leigh is not a faithful reproduction of Barrett Browning's life. She rewrites the story of her childhood: both Aurora's parents die early, her mother when she is four, her father, the poem implies, at the moment of menarche, as her body asserts itself for the first time as that of a woman. Kaplan calls the death of Aurora's father the "providential" removal of the "potent and potentially taboo love object" (1986:202). Barrett Browning saves Aurora the ambivalence she herself appears to have experienced about her parents, for Aurora does not watch her mother become what she does not want to be, and she does not have to escape her father's love. Identification with the mother and desire for the father are both circumvented. Aurora emerges as "the most successful and self-contained orphan in Victorian fiction" (Kaplan 1986:209). The success of her self-containment, however, is not unambiguous.

Aurora's father introduces her to the classics and initiates her writing, while her mother embodies and

expresses the literal language which Aurora turns away from at an early age. It is the loss of this devalued language that haunts her development. Barrett Browning's description of Aurora's mother includes a reference to the kind of speech Homans describes as the literal, the presymbolic language which the woman writer needs to rescue from its marginalised position in androcentric culture (Homans 1986:17-18). "Women know," says Aurora, of

...stringing pretty words that make no sense,
And kissing full sense into empty words. (I:51-2)

The "sense" of words which contain no symbolic meaning comes from the proximity of the mother's body. Aurora loses that connection early (as Shelley did), and much of the pain she suffers in association with her writing comes from an unacknowledged yearning for some return to that fulfilment. What Aurora has to do is reconcile the two languages, the figurative and the literal.

In the light of this, the terms in which Barrett Browning presents Zeus's punishment of her Prometheus are revealing. Aurora calls poetry

... my life,
My eagle, with both grappling feet still hot
From Zeus's thunder, who hast ravished me
Away from all the shepherds, sheep and dogs,
And set me in the Olympian roar and round
Of luminous faces for a cup-bearer,
To keep the mouths of all the godheads moist....
(I:915-924)

The myth is revised: writing is like the eagle, sent by Zeus to make the poet suffer, but whereas in the original myth it tears the liver from Prometheus's belly (in what has been seen as a cruel parody of childbirth, the Titan's punishment for inventing literal creation [Hughes 1979:83]), Barrett

Browning's female Prometheus is "ravished," connecting the Promethean and the Ionian. The poet is not physically tortured by Zeus, but is implicitly desired, and the eagle carries her off, away from the pastoral world of mortals and sets her on Olympus, to be a servant to the gods. While the poet is not tortured by the eagle, her ravishment is by no means unambiguously positive: Zeus's punishment is modified but not removed. In fact, her poetry is the punishment; her success and her suffering, power and pain, are inseparable. The pain is related to her separation from normality: she is elevated above her own kind, but is reduced to a servant. Her success is ambiguous.

Aurora's cousin, Romney Leigh, asks her to give up her poetry and marry him. The scene facilitates a detailed discussion about women and art. Misunderstanding her rejection of his proposal, Romney assumes she is simply being coquettish. He expresses conventional doubts about the value of women's writing. Barrett Browning uses Aurora's replies to defend women writers at the same time as exploring the flaws in her own past denial of womanhood. Aurora's assertions, while valid, are subtly undercut by their extremism:

You misconceive the question like a man,
 Who sees a woman as the complement
 Of his sex merely. You forget too much
 That every creature, female as the male,
 Stands single in responsible act and thought
 As also in birth and death. Whoever says
 To a loyal woman, 'Love and work with me,'
 Will get fair answers if the work and love,
 Being good themselves, are good for her - the best
 She was born for.

I too have my vocation, - work to do....
 (II:434-455)

Despite the confident feminist cast of the speech, Barrett Browning reveals that this philosophy is inadequate. Much of Aurora's suffering as a writer comes from her adherence to this belief without the recognition of its converse, that one need not "stand single" all the time. Like Frankenstein, she has to learn to temper her ambition with a sense of community and nurturing. At the same time, she must avoid being engulfed by the limitations which patriarchal culture attaches to those "feminine" values. She has to learn to share the fire given by Prometheus as a gift. To be a true "female Prometheus", the woman writer cannot work in neutral isolation.

Aurora, having rejected Romney, goes off alone and lives in her own Olympian roost, "a chamber up three flights of stairs / Not far from being as steep as some larks climb" (III:158-9). Her rejection of her sex is evinced by her poor opinion of other women. Romney later points this out to her:

... you sweep your sex
 With somewhat bitter gusts from where you live
 Above them, - whirling downward from your heights
 Your very own pine-cones, in a grand disdain....
 (VIII:202-205)

This disdain is evinced by the terms Aurora uses to express irritation with herself when depressed:

Why what a pettish, petty thing I grow, -
 A mere mere woman, a mere flaccid nerve,
 A kerchief left out all night in the rain,
 Turned soft so...! (III:36-9)

Aurora's rejection of womanhood is presented as the source of her blindness, not the "blind hope" of courage but a narrowness of vision. Her misreading of Lady Waldemar is a result of this: Aurora is incapable of empathy. Lady

Waldemar comes to tell Aurora of her love for Romney and ask for her help; she is harshly rejected. Aurora tells her: "I understand ... imperfectly.... how the strange confession of your love / Serves this, I have to learn - I cannot see" (III:669-675). Aurora refuses, or simply fails, to understand a woman's love. She cannot see.

Lady Waldemar reveals what it is that Aurora is blind to: "love's coarse, nature's coarse.... We fair fine ladies, ... we're natural still ... we have hearts within, / Warm, live, improvident, indecent hearts" (III:455-462). Aurora cannot accept this apparent tarnishing of the ideal love she professes. She dismisses Lady Waldemar's request for help, telling her to "go to the opera! your love's curable" (III:709). Aurora has to learn that love for a real object differs from the hypothetical ideal.

In her earnest attempts at masculine poetic achievement, Aurora, as Barrett Browning had, strives to be like a man. She describes her childhood education in Greek as putting on a "large / Man's doublet" (I:727-8), and a number of times refers to herself in masculine terms. Demanding honesty of Romney, she says

You face, to-day,
A man who wants instruction, mark me, not
A woman who wants protection. As to a man,
Show manhood, speak out plainly.... (II:1061-4)

She begins to sense, however, that she has lost something. Later she calls herself, as a woman who publishes, a

woman who has lost her place
(The sweet safe corner of the household fire
Behind the heads of children) (V:806-8),

saying that Lord Howe, whom she is addressing, must not

flatter or compliment her, "[a]s if she were a woman"
(V:809). She goes on,

We who have clipt
The curls before our eyes may see at least
As plain as men do. Speak out, man to man;
No compliments, beseech you. (V:809-12)

This combination of defiant pride with a bitter sense of loss reveals the ambivalence felt by the woman who still believes that to be a writer she must deny that she is a woman. The cut hair recalls Barrett's second sonnet to George Sand, whose womanhood, despite her man's name and clothes, was still evinced by her "woman's hair,...all unshorn" (Barrett 335). Shorter hair, Aurora suggests, gives her the clear-sightedness of the man, which relates to the poet's ability to see beyond what is safe, to look, perhaps, on monsters:

I would be bold and bear
To look into the swarthiest face of things,
For God's sake who has made them. (VI:147-9)

But this vision does not remedy her blindness. Telling herself to "be humble," she repeats the ideas of Barrett Browning's sonnets to George Sand, yearning for the

escapings [from nature] of ecstatic souls,
Who, in a rush of too long prisoned flame,
Their radiant faces upward, burn away
This dark of the body.... (V:20-3)

This longing for disembodiment, to be "unsex'd," is undercut by its juxtaposition with her description of the nature she would apparently like to escape. She uses the language of female desire, of the "indecent heart," of

spring's delicious trouble in the ground,
Tormented by the quickened blood of roots,
.
... with all that strain
Of sexual passion, which devours the flesh
In a sacrament of souls ... [and] mother's breasts

Which, round the new-made creatures hanging there,
Throb luminous and harmonious like pure spheres...
(V:8-18)

She struggles to separate "souls" and "purity" from the life of the body. Barrett Browning has her learn the dangers of being invisible and so blind, of denying her hybrid nature and the rich language that is connected with the devalued and denied part of her identity. She has to recognise that she is a woman as well as a writer. It is in observing Marian Erle with her child, in confronting her own desire for literal creation, that Aurora begins to see.

Barrett Browning uses the image of fire in relation to literal as well as figurative creativity; but the literal here is not the mediated spark used by Ovid's Prometheus, or, for that matter, the "fire-seeds" of poetry. It is natural motherhood, with its implications of the presymbolic, of meaning that transcends cultural signification. Aurora watches Marian with the baby,

drawing from his countenance to hers
A fainter red, as if she watched a flame
And stood in it a-glow. (VI:609-611)

Aurora does not understand motherhood. In her reproval of Marian - the baby is illegitimate, the product of rape - she takes the image of the child as warmth-giving fire and associates it instead with the cruelty of a punitive and patriarchal god.

"... I would rather lay my hand,
Were I [you], on God's brazen altar-bars
Red-hot with burning sacrificial lambs,
Than touch the sacred curls of such a child."

[Marian] plunged her fingers in his clustering
locks,
As one who would not be afraid of fire....
(VI:620-5)

Barrett Browning's ironic distance from her heroine, which reveals and even exaggerates her own past blindness, makes it difficult to sympathise with Aurora. This is necessary, though, for it emphasises the dangerous illusoriness of Aurora's apparent success; as an independent woman writer, she seems to have transcended the limitations placed on Victorian woman. If this were the final outcome of Aurora Leigh, it would be accepted as a rather unrealistic feminist poem. Instead, Barrett Browning demands more for her heroine. To avoid the limitations of femininity by rejecting womanhood is the early solution she had herself found, and ultimately rejected. When Aurora gives in and marries Romney, what appears to be a retraction is in fact a step forward. She does not, in recognising her sexual and maternal desires, have to relinquish her writing. What Barrett Browning suggests instead is that to realise her full potential as a woman writer, it is imperative for Aurora to learn Marian's fearlessness in grasping the fire of literal creativity.

Aurora's growing awareness of her lack culminates in a crisis on her return to Italy, her mother's country. Here, in the scorching light and heat of Tuscany, she admits her love for Romney and its implications. Significantly, her recognition is expressed in her association of herself with Io (VII:829-32). She likens the truth of her new book to the fly which tormented the cow-woman, and yearns for the end of her suffering, to be given peace by the impregnating "Hand" of the god (VII:830). Her longing is for the literal aspect of the "fire-seeds."

Aurora goes on to consider writing as a means of revealing the spiritual significance of creation, discussing art's power to make visible the wondrous (VII:837-863). For her, this perception is moral. Her logic leads her to see art as a way of making man (specifically) reverence and so purify what she herself perceives with a very jaundiced eye:

... his very body as a man -
Which now he counts so vile, that all the towns
Make offal of their daughters for its use....
(VII:864-6)

This, like her excessively moral view of Marian, is now at odds with her growing awareness of desire. She decides that writing is not creation at all, but the transmission of God's word, and expresses the longing to speak - and so create - for herself:

... if we say a true word, instantly
We feel 'tis God's, not ours, and pass it on
Like bread at sacrament,...

And I - my poem, - let my readers talk.
I'm closer to it - I can speak as well:

.
Let us go.
The end of woman (or of man, I think)
Is not a book. (VII:873-884)

Instead, she desires love, shifting her earlier metaphor so that art is now the kindling, and not the fire:

... Love strikes higher with his lambent flame
Than Art can pile the faggots. (VII:893-4)

Aurora concludes that the god's restoration of Io, making her at last "hushed and satisfied", is based not on "truth, but love" (VII:895-7).

There is a danger here that Aurora could reject her art completely in submitting to her female nature. She has not yet done so, though: what she imagines is what Barrett must

have, before she dared to marry Browning. Aurora sees for the first time the other risk the woman writer has to take if she is to fulfil the potential of her hybridism, the danger that she will be "hushed and satisfied," willingly silenced. There is a chance that, if she opens her hand, the fire will disappear.

The pain expressed in her words indicates the crisis of this moment, the recognition that in her mother's land, in embracing the literal, lies the danger of desiring her own silencing. The excess of light, like the blinding light which can be the death of the moth, is hypnotic:

...let drag your fiery fringes, heaven,
 And burn us up to quiet. Ah, we know
 Too much here, not to know what's best for peace;
 We have too much light here, not to want more fire
 To purify and end us. We talk, talk,

Whereat we take our own life up and ... pshaw!
 (VII:906-13, second ellipsis in original)

The fire has itself become dangerous: purity, either in the rejection of womanhood, or in complete identification with reproductive nature, is potentially suicidal.

But Aurora does not abandon language. She recovers from her despair and at once decides to write a letter to friends in England - to use her writing with an open hand, so to speak. She muses on her happiness in Florence, with its "native air and tongue" (VII:929); here, she is surrounded by the element and language of her mother. This recognition of an alternative language culminates in her use of the literal words of Marian's child in her writing. Her despondent rejection of art in favour of love has almost immediately been transformed into a means of carrying the

language of that love, of community and nurturing, and particularly of the maternal, into her writing:

The little creature almost loves me now,
And calls my name, "Alola," stripping off
The r's like thorns, to make it smooth enough
To take between his dainty, milk-fed lips....
(VII:953-6)

Her name has become an object, taken, like the mother's breast, into the child's mouth. She is learning about the literal, about the language inseparable from the body.¹⁷

Immediately after this, she admits that the only source of her unhappiness is her yearning for Romney. She repeats his name three times, tasting it, perhaps, as the child had tasted hers. From this point, it is only a matter of the complexities of plot before Aurora can, as Barrett Browning had done, actively join the literal to the figurative.

But Romney has to learn to let her write. He is the second Prometheus in Aurora Leigh, and he is punished for his ambition. His Promethean authadia is not in creation, but in championing mankind, yet he misreads and distorts the values of nurturing in the same way as Frankenstein had distorted literal motherhood. Romney is a philanthropist, and there are echoes of the Aeschylean Prometheus in his defiance of God on behalf of men: "I sympathise with man, not God" (54).

Romney is a follower of the French socialist Charles Fourier, whose utopian ideal was to reorganize society into small communities called phalanges. Romney is converting the ancestral home, Leigh Hall, into a phalanstery when it burns down. As well as destroying his work and the ambition which produced it, the fire blinds him.

He describes the fire to Aurora, recalling his change of heart as he tries to rescue the burning building:

The sudden revulsion in the blazing house
 The strain and struggle both of body and soul,
 Which left fire running in my veins for blood,
 Scarce lacked that thunderbolt of the falling beam
 Which nicked me on the forehead as I passed
 The gallery-door with a burden. (IX:543-8)

He then describes his new condition:

When the fever's heat
 Dropped from me, as the flame did from my house,
 And left me ruined like it,...

· · · · ·
 A mere bare blind stone in the blaze of day,
 A man, upon the outside of the earth,
 As dark as ten feet under.... (IX:566-572)

Not only is the fire described in terms which echo the thunderbolts of Zeus, but Romney is left in darkness which is likened to being buried under the earth. At the end of Prometheus Bound, the Titan is flung down into the darkness of Tartarus. Further, Romney's punishment bears even closer similarities to Zeus's punishment of Typhon, struck by the "headlong thunderbolt out-breathing fire" and left, "his strength / ... thunder-blasted from him ... / Compressed underneath Mount Aetna's roots" (vv.361-7. Trans. EB 1833:30).

The blinding of Romney is what makes possible Aurora's escape from blindness. As in Frankenstein, the blind man is not a threat to the monster, or to the woman writer. Romney, no longer using the gaze of oculo/phallogocentric culture, is able to recognise a kind of nurturing different from his egocentric and finally selfish altruism, and to correct his earlier dismissal of Aurora's writing. While he is recovering, Lady Waldemar reads Aurora's book to him. The

writer is invisible (because she is absent and he is blind); she is recognised as speaking/ writing subject, for she can never be the object of his gaze, and so becomes the object of a different kind of desire. Barrett Browning reflects and reverses Robert Browning's perception of herself: he had loved her writing, blind to her womanhood in any but the figurative sense, before meeting her. Romney indicates his new perception of Aurora in the way he names her, recognising both her independence and her vocation: she is "O poet" first, "O my love" second (IX:900, my emphasis).

For Aurora it is significant that she can be both "poet" and Romney's "love." Lady Waldemar is instrumental in Aurora's final recognition of her love for Romney. He brings Aurora a letter, in which Lady Waldemar responds to Aurora's misguided censure of her for preventing Romney's marriage to Marian. She corrects Aurora's misperceptions, her final "I hate, hate, hate you" exposing the pain which that self-righteous blindness had caused (IX:166).

It is interesting that Lady Waldemar, as the instrument of both Aurora and Romney's education in perception, is only partially redeemed at the end of the poem. There is no suggestion of a happy resolution to her sad story of unrequited love. She is revealed to have been less wicked than Aurora thought her but, her work done, she is forgotten. Visiting Aurora, Lady Waldemar calls Romney "a monster" (III:511). His "godlike virtues and heroic aims", she points out, are joined with "limping possibilities of mismade human nature" (III:521-3). This recognition of his hybridism, however, is not the basis of her love, and does

not suggest admiration for his deliberately Titanic attempts at helping the poor. She correctly predicts disaster (he "limps / So certainly, he'll fall into the pit" [III:531-2]), but attributes it not so much to Romney's ambition as to his interest in what she perceives as beneath him. The "pit" she warns against is not the punishment of a hero, but marriage to a working class girl ("of doubtful life, undoubtful birth, / ... [whose] coarse-grained hands / are whiter than her morals" [III:535-7]). This "unequal union," unlike that between Aeschylus's voice and her own discussed by Barrett in her translator's preface, is treated ambiguously. Lady Waldemar objects to this intended "tie / 'Twixt class and class" (III:661-2). Aurora supports it. Barrett Browning seems ambivalent: Marian, fortunately for Aurora, declines Romney's offer to marry her at the end of the poem. Lady Waldemar's aversion to the hybrid, then, is social. Perhaps this explains her abandonment at the end of the poem: she reveals the truth to Aurora, but she is a flawed teacher, representing a class pride that is as dangerous as Romney's arrogance.

There is another mention of the monstrous in Aurora Leigh. A woman is implicated in arranging the rape of Marian. She is described as the epitome of evil, a "Devil's daughter" (VI:1175). Her evil is carefully distinguished from the monstrous, though. Marian emphasises that she was:

A woman ... hear me, let me make it plain, ...
 A woman ... not a monster ... both her breasts
 Made right to suckle babes.... (VI:1182-4,
 ellipses in original)

For Marian, the woman's evil is increased by the fact that

she is natural and female, rather than abnormal. As a child, Marian had almost been sold to a man by her own mother; on running away, she had cried "God, free me from my mother" (III:1062). She describes the woman's involvement in her rape as a "motherly, right damnable good turn" (VII:10). What Barrett Browning seems to suggest is that the test of monstrosity is motherhood: the woman who does not devote her entire body, or being, to literal creativity is a monster. Natural mothers can be evil, however and, following logically from this, a monster need not be.

In accepting her identity as a woman and a writer, then, Aurora takes on a hybridism like that of Frankenstein's monster, the "half-man" who threatens the foundations of the structures which made it necessary for her to choose between writing and being a woman in the first place. Romney's punishment is a retrospective warning to her, symbolising her own isolated lack of vision. Romney expresses gratitude for his blindness: "Thank God, who made me blind, to make me see!" (IX:830). Both of them have learnt that there is more than one kind of blindness.

In accepting her dual role, Aurora has also learnt to be "seen" for what she is. Before her escape, Elizabeth Barrett prayed that Robert Browning would never see her clearly, would always be blinded by love for her. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she has Aurora say to her blind husband "I would that you could see me bare to the soul!" (IX.704). It is paradoxical that only the impossibility of being seen can make her want to be seen, but the paradox lies deeper than Barrett Browning's narrative: it is only in

first undermining the domination of the eye of patriarchal culture that the woman writer can work within it, combining the figurative with the literal which culture sees as inferior.

Aurora Leigh, then, is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's re-creation of her own life, the product of her final achievement, of seizing her potential for literal creation and discovering that she would not lose hold of the figurative.

Unlike Mary Shelley, Barrett began her Promethean venture with caution, apprehending the danger of heroism. The ambivalence of her translations reveal this. Finally, she was able to translate the Prometheus myth completely, carrying it into the realm of the female, creating and becoming a literalisation of what Alicia Ostriker calls the "female Prometheus."

At the end of the poem, Aurora and Romney dedicate themselves to a life of love and work. There is a sense in Aurora Leigh that part of the pain Aurora associates with her writing comes from her intensely serious view of having "work to do," of writing as something completely distinct from pleasure. Aurora learns, as Barrett had, that there is the potential for pleasure in accepting the physical dimension of embodied language, rather than maintaining the purity of "disincarnate spirits."

The transgressive power of the monstrous is connected with the inversions of the carnivalesque, and it is here that the ambivalence of the woman writer truly comes to light. She has the Aeschylean Prometheus's heroism in the

face of danger, but mixed with it is the earlier nature of the Titan: the trickster, the mischief-maker who delights in playing havoc with the staid order of Zeus. Danger is not the only implication of the phrase "playing with fire": this, too, can be taken literally. While the business of becoming "female Prometheuses" was, for the women writers of the nineteenth century, of mortal seriousness - and with good reason - the images and ideas that they carried, in open hands that nonetheless felt the scorching heat of both kinds of fire, were the "fire-seeds" that they passed on to future women writers, making it possible for them to take up fire and play with it.

CONCLUSION

PLAYING IN THE FLAMES

All translation is ludic, before it is ethical. It turns into "play" the moment one moves out of the language of the original - the most serious play imaginable, since all knowledge hangs in the balance, or waits in the wings: the play of language with language, and possibility with utterance.

Ben Belitt (1978:42)

There is another, reckless and joyful, side to the irrational and seemingly suicidal flight of the moth. Playing with fire is dangerous; it can also be pleasurable.

There is a sense in Aurora Leigh that, in incorporating the child's mispronunciation - re-creation - of her name, Barrett Browning touches on the possibility of play, not the insincere and shallow "playing at art" which characterises her early writing, but something closer to the sweet nonsense talk, the maternal word games, which Aurora remembers of her mother. Patricia Yaeger emphasises the necessity of pleasure in the project of women writers; her "honey- or language-mad" woman "consumes language playfully and with pleasure" (1988:75). The "works" she produces, and the work she does, her offspring and their effect, are ideally permeated with a sense of delight in the taste of the language, and with taking fearless pleasure in transgression. This pleasure does not suggest that such

writing is in any way trivial. Its implications make it "the most serious play imaginable."

Translation, the carrying across of languages, the shifting of structures, the potential re-creation of monsters, is a kind of play, in Belitt's terms. Rewriting Prometheus can take the form of carrying it over from myth to novel, from Greek to English, or from patriarchal culture into a re-created form of hybrid novel-poem bearing a hybrid woman-writer who in turn bears a literal-figurative child-language-fire. All of these bring together not just languages, or symbolic systems, but what Belitt calls "possibility" and "utterance"; all engender a freedom that, if words can be found for it, has the potential to be realised.

George Steiner writes usefully for the female translator (pronouns notwithstanding). When translation is more than faithful reproduction, there is a possibility of what he calls

'creative retransformation' [by which] the translator could propose, indeed enact an alternative development for his own language and culture.... (1975:339)

He continues:

Here the hermeneutic of appropriation is meant not only to enrich the translator's native inheritance but to change it radically. Translation is made metamorphosis All tongues and literatures [and mythologies] are treated as a common store of being from which we may draw at will in order to countermand the errors, the lacunae of reality. (1975:341)

In disregarding the rules with which patriarchal culture delimits the existence of both language and women, in carrying the fire of culture into the realm of the literal

language, the kind spoken with the body and understood by children - and forgotten by serious-minded grownups - the woman writer can begin to change language. The implications of such a change are vast. One might appropriate Steiner's words, and read his "our" as a feminine pronoun: "Ours is the ability, the need, to gainsay or 'un-say' the world, to image and speak it otherwise" (1975:218). Or, as Ostriker put it, women writers have the capacity to "subvert and transform the life and literature they inherit" and "redefin[e] ... both woman and culture" (1986:211).

Frankenstein's monster avoids his author's revisions by escaping from the narrative she had put him in. The circles of masculine narrative that enclose his voice finally fail to entrap him; at the end of the novel he - and the part of Shelley that is him - runs off into the darkness free from the limitations of patriarchal culture, bearing the potential to tell stories, to tell things as they are not - but could be.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning tells her own story. Translating Prometheus, she plays with the words of Aeschylus, shifting and altering them. From these seeds she creates a new story, which she both acts and writes. She gives birth to a child and creates Aurora Leigh. Fiction and biography, the figurative and the literal, become virtually inseparable.

Perhaps there is a moment in the moth's flight towards the fire when it is no longer blinded by the light, but sees the charred bodies of other moths in the flames. Mary Shelley finally backed away from what she saw, but not

before creating from the stolen Promethean fire a new myth which was to become as archetypal, in a future she could not even imagine, as the Titan was in her time. Elizabeth Barrett Browning apprehended the likelihood of punishment earlier than Shelley did, but realised that the vision of danger is itself blinding and potentially crippling. Eventually she seized the flames of writing and womanhood and, by all accounts, found herself happy.

Combining the figurative and the literal subverts the relationship between reality and language: the woman writer can rewrite the metaphor at the centre of the Promethean myth. She can say, if she likes, that fire need not burn. The human "female Prometheus," unlike Callosamia promethea, can choose to fly into the flame and, enlightened by its brightness, fly on, bearing it with her.

The words "translation" and "metaphor" have the same etymology: both mean to carry something to a new place.¹⁸ Mary Shelley and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, like Prometheus, carried the metaphor of fire. In translating one of the central myths of patriarchal culture, they bore language as Pandora bore her disruptive gifts - both figuratively in a cultural artefact, a jar or a poem, and literally in their female and maternal bodies - into a new place.

One of the missing parts of the Aeschylean trilogy is Prometheus Pyrophoros: the fire-bearer (Kerényi 1962:67). In rewriting the existing versions, Barrett Browning and Shelley re-created the absent one. They bore fire, as a metaphor which itself bears a complex of connotations - both

literal/natural and figurative/cultural - into a place where that "and," the one between literal and figurative, natural and cultural, feminine and masculine, no longer divides, but connects. In re-writing the myth they created the possibility of a "fire" that need not burn, one freed from connotations of punishment and pain, a "monster" that could signify a fecund potentiality rather than a loathsome aberration - and a returned mother. In carrying fire into a new place, they also brought the maternal back into play - of the most productive kind - within the symbolic. The woman writer can translate into culture the archaic mother whose embrace we have all lost, the living mothers who created and procreated before them, and their own capacity for being mothers of both kinds. The "female Prometheus" can make the union of "woman" and "writer" a joyous and doubly fertile one.¹⁹

In the 1970s, Margaret Atwood rewrote Shelley's myth in "Speeches for Dr Frankenstein" (1976:64-69). She revisits the monster and the fire that he had taken with him, revealing the ongoing influence of the courageous "female Prometheuses" of more than a century before. °

The sparkling monster
gambols there ahead,
his mane electric:
This is his true place.

He dances in spirals on the ice,
his clawed feet
kindling shaggy fires.

.

The creature, his arctic hackles
bristling, spreads
over the dark ceiling,
his paws on the horizons,

rolling the world like a snowball.
(ll.99-117)

The monster lights fires where his feet touch the ground, and he "glows" when he talks. He is incandescent, containing and radiating the heat and light of the stolen and liberated Promethean fire. Frankenstein considers "what equation" to "carve and seal in [his creature's] skull" (ll.42-3). The monster, speaking the last line of the poem, denies the simple equations and binary oppositions of man's culture, even while speaking its words. (S)he takes the name and the language and makes them say something defiant and new:

I will not come when you call.

NOTES

THE REWRITING OF FIRE

1. Ed. R.W.B. Browning, 1899. All references to the letters of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning will be to this edition, and will take the form: date of postmark, volume number: page number. In subsequent references, I shall abbreviate the writers' names as 'EB' and 'RB' respectively. I shall reproduce quotations, including any idiosyncratic punctuation and emphases, exactly. Unless otherwise indicated, emphases are as in original; ellipses are mine.

2. "Prometheus". The Oxford English Dictionary, vol.12. The dictionary specifies that the creature is called the promethea moth, using the feminine form of the titan's name.

3. To quote Ostriker in full, a "major theme in feminist theory on both sides of the Atlantic for the past decade has been the demand that women writers be, in Claudine Herrmann's phrase, voleuses de langue, thieves of language, female Prometheuses" (1986:210-1).

4. Margaret Homans enumerates the strategies women writers can use to "literalize" the figurative while retaining their place as speakers within the symbolic. She refers to these practices as instances of "bearing the word," overtly connecting writing, the creation of texts, with childbirth, the literal creation of children (1986:29-32).
 Jane Gallop's discussion of the "duplicity" of women's "double language" is useful in this context; she suggests that it is necessary for the woman both to "exercise power and criticize it," to draw the subversive literal into the sphere in which they continue to write (1982:121-22). This argument will be expanded on in my second chapter.

5. The problem of nomenclature serves to emphasise culture's construction around women's role as reproducers rather than creators. A woman has no name of her own; she bears those of her father and her husband. Using her married name, then, leads to confusing her with her husband, while her "maiden" name makes her indistinguishable from her father. The patronising use of her first name simply emphasises her cultural anonymity.
 Hence, I must refer to Shelley and Barrett Browning by the surnames under which their writing was published, as is the norm with all references to authorship. In my discussion of Barrett Browning's early work, most of which was published before her marriage, I will simply use

"Barrett." I shall identify their husbands by means of first names: Percy Shelley and Robert Browning.

6. Trans. Evelyn-White, 1914. All references to Works and Days are to this edition.

7. I am indebted here to Kirk, who discusses Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the role of fire in the parallel oppositions "nature/culture" and "raw/cooked" (1974:86).

8. In both the English translations I use (Evelyn-White 1914, Kirk 1974), the passage is syntactically ambiguous, with the possible meaning that mortals have speech taken from them. This would be a fitting parallel to Zeus's confiscation of fire. The original Greek, however, is less ambiguous; it is the "diseases," implicitly personified, which are silenced.

9. It is now generally accepted that Aeschylus may well not have been the author of Prometheus Bound (Griffith 1977, Conacher 1982:141-174). This adds an interesting dimension to the drama's "theft" from its already anonymous author. For the purposes of this study, however, it is expedient to retain the traditional assumption.

10. Trans. Weir Smyth, 1922. All references to Prometheus Bound, unless otherwise indicated, are to this edition.

11. Trans. Innes, 1955. All references to Metamorphoses will be to this edition.

12. Mary Poovey discusses the construction and implications of the difference between "The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer" (1984).

13. "monster". Chambers English Dictionary. 1989 ed.

14. Earlier remarks reveal a male revulsion for any blurring of the distinction between the feminine and the masculine, either physical or intellectual:

Even nature herself abhors to see a woman shorn
 ...; a woman with cut hair is a filthy spectacle,
 and much like a monster; ... for this is all
 one as if she should take upon her the form or
 person of a man ...

William Prynne 1600-1669
 (in Morgan 1989:134),

but

A woman with a beard is not so disgusting as a woman who acts a freethinker.

John Caspar Lavater 1741-1801
(in Morgan 1989:156)

15. Io's deification emphasises her innocence; as Isis, an Egyptian goddess, she became the deity of a cult of chastity which was widely adhered to. The Roman poet Propertius complains about her:

The rites are here again, the lover's blight:
Ten times has Cynthia worshipped night by night.
Down with the cults of sultry Nile, the pest
That Isis sent to women of the west,
To part devoted lovers - still the same
Ill-natured goddess, by whatever name.
At least as Io, loved with stealth by Jove,
She learned, way-weary, what it is to rove,
.....
But Jove stripped off your beast-mask, and thereby
Made you, maybe, so proud a deity.
To serve you, are the Nile's swart sons too few?
Why else was Rome, so distant, sought by you?
Girls sleep unpartnered - do you profit so?
Fierce one, be sure, your horns again will grow;
.....
But Cynthia! Since my suffering now has been
More than enough to mollify your spleen,
Having this many a night drawn blank perforce
Three times tonight let us complete the course.
(Propertius II.33a, Trans. Watts 1966:116)

Io remained, it seems, a source of (literal) power to women.

16. George Thomson defines Prometheus as the "patron saint of the proletariat" (in Kott 1974:35).

17. The source of "hybrid" is the "Latin hibrida, the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar; with associations of the Greek hybris" (Chambers English Dictionary 1989).

Although they do not make the point themselves, this porcine etymology is particularly apt for Stallybrass and White, who present the pig as a perfect example of transgressive hybridization (1986:44-59).

18. Ed. Hindle, 1985. All page references to Frankenstein are to this edition.

19. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse" (in Showalter, ed. 1989:73-100).

20. Mellor describes the influence of Wollstonecraft on her daughter's writing (1988:115,118,213) and, according to Forster, Barrett read Wollstonecraft at the age of twelve (1988:29).

CREATION AND REMORSE: MARY SHELLEY

1. Ellen Moers was probably the first to point out this aspect of the novel (1978:90-99). Waxman discusses Shelley's "recreat[ion] of the world of motherhood", closely comparing Frankenstein's experiences with those of the pregnant woman (1987:14-26).
2. According to Gilbert and Gubar, despite the "maelstrom of sexuality" in which Shelley was involved when she first wrote the novel, it is very much "about Romanticism, ... about books and ... about the writers of books" (1979:222).
3. See "The Masculine Tradition" in Homans (1980:12-40).
4. Anne K. Mellor quotes these entries, and others, to indicate the depth of Shelley's chronic depression (1988a:182-4).
5. Poovey points this out; the reasons I suggest for the fact that "the monster's history receives the least attention in the 1831 revisions" are not quite the same as hers (1984:137).
6. See Poovey (1984:133-142) and Mellor (1988a:170-176).
7. Mellor calls this, after Carol Gilligan, the "female 'ethic of care'", which subsumes the individual ego to the communal good (1988b:229).
8. The name of one of the female characters in a later novel of Shelley's, Valperga (1823), is Euthanasia. As Mellor points out, as an educated, revolutionary and yet loving woman, Euthanasia is a character who, in Shelley's experience, is doomed. Her drowning is "merciful" (Mellor 1988a:210). Her name also indicates that she submits, as a "proper lady" should, to a sweet, or easy, death.
9. "Travesty" seems to describe Frankenstein's creative act particularly well, to the extent that he may be seen as appropriating female power: ^{one of} its meanings is given as the "ridiculously inadequate representation" of "the opposite sex" and its etymology is virtually identical to that of "transvestite" (Chambers).

10. Poovey discusses Shelley's implicit criticism and transformation of "Percy's version of the Romantic aesthetic," exploring the reservations she must have had about his ideas even while she allowed him to make changes to her work (1984:130).
11. I am indebted to Margaret Homans for pointing out that Frankenstein only seems to notice the creature's ugliness once it is alive (1986:103).
12. Ed. Gill, 1984. All references to Wordsworth's poems are to this edition.
13. Throughout this study I follow Toril Moi's differentiation between "female" as a biological term and "feminine" as a cultural one (1985:65).
14. Poovey (1984:chapters 4 and 5) and Mellor (1988a:especially chapter 9), among others, explore this likelihood.
15. Friedman suggests, in her analysis of the childbirth metaphor, that Frankenstein's creation is used to "express [Shelley's] essential fear that the patriarchal separation of creativities is necessary" (1989:87). It also seems important to distinguish between Shelley's attribution of the metaphor to Frankenstein as the male speaker of his narrative, and her own use of it as a female writer.
16. According to the Quarterly Review, the reader of Frankenstein is left "after a struggle between laughter and loathing, in doubt whether the head or the heart of the author must be most diseased" (in Hindle 1985:7-8). The wording is unwittingly appropriate: the ambivalent response of hilarity and disgust echoes strongly the effect of the carnivalesque grotesque, while the ambiguity found in the novel's "diseased" source reveals Shelley's hybridising of "head" with "heart", mind with body, making both appear abnormal.

APPREHENSION AND ESCAPE: ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

1. Ed. Elizabeth Berridge, 1974. All references to the diary will be to this edition, and in the form: date of entry, page number.

2. Trans. Barrett 1833, Ed. Meynell 1896. References to Barrett's translations of Prometheus Bound will be indicated with her initials, the year of first publication and page references. Line references are to the Greek, in Weir Smyth's 1922 parallel translation.

3. Trans. Barrett 1850. Ed. Milford 1920.

4. Kaplan discusses Besier's play and the "post-Freudian twist" he gave the Barretts' story (1986:192-3).

5. I am indebted to Karlin for pointing out this, and the following quotation from Barrett's letters, in a similar context (1985:71).

6. Barrett's perceptions of her own body cannot even be guessed, but, as Stallybrass and White point out, the female body is frequently associated with the grotesque. They quote Schnyder's case study of a woman suffering from hysteria. She says:

When I looked at the shape of my body I was ashamed of being a woman.... I was humiliated being a woman and annoyed to feel anyone looking at me (1986:184).

While not suggesting that Barrett was pathological, this connection between shame and being seen, particularly as female, is revealing.

7. A number of critics have commented on these sonnets. Elaine Showalter discusses Sand as "a heroine" for Barrett, "not because she had transcended femininity, but because she was involved in the turbulence of womanly suffering" (1977:103).

Dierdre David criticises the "essentialism" that she finds in the sonnets for similar reasons, saying that the final "unsexing" suggests paradoxically that transcendence of gender polarities first requires "self-acknowledgement of one's essential being," in this case, femaleness (1987:149). It seems to me that Barrett was ambivalent about precisely this essentialism, as the simultaneous need for recognition and desire for transcendence suggests. The monstrosity Barrett associates with Sand has its source in this contradiction.

8. Ed. Milford 1920. All page references to Barrett's poems, other than to Aurora Leigh, will be to this edition.

9. All references to Aurora Leigh will be by book and line number.

10. Ed. Meynell 1896. All references to the preface and notes of Barrett's 1833 translation are to this edition.

11. Margaret Homans discusses the association of divine (and masculine) creativity with language, the figuration of literal creation, as found in Genesis and Milton's Paradise Lost (1980: 29-33).

12. Interestingly, Byron's version of the myth captures both the power of Prometheus's silence and, in a way, Zeus's "impotence to lie." The speaker addresses Prometheus:

... in thy silence was his sentence,
And in his soul a vain repentance,
And evil dread so ill dissembled,
That in his hand the lightnings trembled.
("Prometheus" ll.30-3, ed. Allison 1983:591)

13. In Aurora Leigh, the story is used for ironic and comic effect; forced by her aunt to do embroidery, the poet gives her cross-stitched shepherdess pink eyes, and a

...head uncrushed by that round weight of hat
So strangely similar to the tortoise-shell
Which slew the tragic poet. (I:453-5)

14. This is not unlike Shelley's tempering of Frankenstein's heroism in her 1831 revisions; as Mellor puts it, Shelley makes her rewritten Prometheus "more ... a victim of circumstances than ... the active author of evil" (1988a:174). Identifying with their Promethean characters, both Shelley and Barrett attempt to reduce their own culpability by questioning that of their heroes.

15. Falk observes this, referring to Barrett's "associative imagery, linking breasts with female power" (1988:78).

16. See Falk for examples of archaisms and Barrett's "censoring" of Aeschylus (1988:78).

17. The language used by Barrett Browning's own child (nicknamed "Pen"!) is curiously appropriate here. Forster describes the late onset of speech: he "used gestures and touch to indicate what he wanted," and records Barrett Browning's note to Mrs Ogilvy that "he won't talk a bit" (1988:244). When Pen did begin to speak, the child revealed a very unusual linguistic education:

[He had] added a smattering of French to his imperfect English and quaint Italian and the result was made even more bizarre because of the slight lisp which increased the puzzling effect of his peculiar mispronunciations in every language. Miss Mitford ... had been outraged that the child was being brought up ... in such linguistic confusion. Elizabeth was unperturbed. She thought it amusing that he dispensed with pronouns, as she herself had done as a child. It fascinated her to try and work out what Pen actually meant. (1988:259)

This seemingly deliberate disruption of conventional language use is particularly interesting when coupled with the fact that Barrett Browning refused to socialise her son into male roles, dressing him ambiguously and refusing to cut his hair (Forster 1988: 238, 248, inter alia).

18. Barbara Johnson makes use of this connection in "Gender and the Yale School" (in Showalter, ed. 1989:51). Johnson quotes Paul de Man's analysis of the words' parallel etymology: the German for "translation" is übersetzen, which in Greek is meta pherein: metaphor.

19. Writing in 1931, Virginia Woolf revises Griswold's term "hermaphroditic" in relation to women who write: "The androgynous mind is resonant and porous; ... it transmits emotion without impediment; ... it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (48, my emphasis). The mind that conflates the poles of a binary opposition is fiery and incandescent: it glows.

APPENDIX: PROMETHEUS BOUND

1.

CHORUS

- a. See now, my friend, how bootless was thy boon.
Tell me, what succour for thee is there, and
where, in creatures of a day? What aid? Didst
thou not behold the helpless infirmity, no better
than a dream, wherein the purblind generation of
men is shackled? Never shall the counsels of
mortal men transgress the ordering of Zeus.
(vv.545-551)
- b. Lo! all thy gifts gave nought to thee!
Where is thy help, beloved, say?
What help from men who last a day?
And dost thou not the weakness see,
Slow, vision-like, by which is found
The hood-wink'd race of mortals, bound?
Man's counsels ne'er can rise above
The purposed fixedness of Jove.
(Trans. EB 1833:36)
- c. Ah friend, behold and see!
What's all the beauty of humanity?
Can it be fair?
What's all the strength? - is it strong?
And what hope can they bear,
These dying livers - living one day long?
Ah, seest thou not, my friend,
How feeble and slow
And like a dream, doth go
This poor blind manhood, drifted from its end?
And how no mortal wranglings can confuse
The harmony of Zeus?
(Trans. EB 1850:150)

2.

a.

PROMETHEUS:

And art thou not a child and even more witless than a child if thou expectest to learn aught from me? There is no torment or device by which Zeus shall induce me to utter this until these injurious fetters be loosed. So then, let his blazing levin be hurled, and with the white wings of the snow and thunders of earthquake let him confound the reeling world. For naught of this shall bend my will even to tell at whose hands he is fated to be hurled from his sovereignty.

HERMES:

Look thee now whether this course seems to profit thee.

PROMETHEUS:

Long ago hath this my course been foreseen and resolved.

HERMES:

Bend thy will, perverse fool, oh bend thy will at last to wisdom in face of thy present sufferings.

PROMETHEUS:

In vain thou troublest me, as though it were a wave thou wouldst persuade. Never think that, through terror at the will of Zeus, I shall become womanish and, with hands upturned, aping woman's ways, shall importune my greatly hated foe to release me from these bonds. I am far, far from that.

(vv.987-1006)

b.

PROMETHEUS:

No child thou art, but weaker than a child, If thou expect to gather aught from me. Nor is there chast'ning, nor device, whereby Jove shall constrain me to reveal these things, Or ere he loosen my pernicious chains. Then let the torrid flame be headlong hurl'd: With white-wing'd snows and subterranean thunders, Let him commingle and astonish all. Nothing shall bend me, to declare by whom He will be hurled from dominion.

PROMETHEUS:

Vainly dost thou chafe
 My soul with exhortation, as yonder sea
 Goes beating on the rock. Oh! think no more
 That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's mind,
 Will supplicate him, loathed as he is,
 With feminine upliftings of my hands,
 To break these chains. Far from me be the
 thought!

(Trans. EB 1850:158-9)

3.

IO:

- a. Eleleu, Eleleu! Once again convulsive pain and
 frenzy, smiting my brain, inflame me. I am stung
 by the gad-fly's barb, unforged by fire. My heart
 in terror knocks at my ribs; my eyeballs roll
 wildly round and round. I am carried out of my
 course by a fierce blast of madness; over my
 tongue I've lost all mastery; and a stream of
 turbid words beats recklessly against the billows
 of dark destruction.
 (vv.877-886)

- b. Ah me! ah me!
 The gangrene and insanity
 Which striketh to my soul, are burning:
 The fiery sting is pricking me;
 My throbbing heart my breast is spurning,
 And round and round mine eyes are wheeling,
 And from their course my steps are reeling,
 By frenzy's blast impell'd to motion:
 My tongue is all without a chain,
 And beat my turbid words in vain
 'Gainst dreary Ate's ocean.
 (Trans. EB 1833:48)

- c. Eleleu, eleleu!
 How the spasm and the pain
 And the fire on the brain
 Strike, burning me through!
 How the sting of the curse, all aflame as it flew,
 Pricks me onward again!
 How my heart, in its terror, is spurning my breast,
 And my eyes, like the wheels of a chariot, roll round!
 I am whirled from my course, to the east, to the west,
 In the whirlwind of frenzy all madly inwound -
 And my mouth is unbridled for anguish and hate,
 And my words beat in vain, in wild storms of unrest,
 On the sea of my desolate fate.
 (Trans. EB 1850:156)

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1. I use the author-date system, which requires the date of publication to follow the author's name. In the case of translations and editions, this first date is that of original publication, while that of the edition I use concludes the entry. For classical texts, I omit the first date altogether.

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