

Re-Visioning Frankenstein: The Keeper of the Isis Light as Theodicy

• Raymond E. Jones •

Résumé: Le roman de Monica Hughes, *The Keeper of the Isis Light*, partage de nombreuses affinités avec le chef-d'oeuvre de Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Notamment au plan de l'histoire: dans les deux cas, il s'agit des mésaventures d'un être créé par la science, qui recherche la compagnie de la société et subit un rejet universel pour finir dans l'isolement complet. Toutefois, si le récit de Mary Shelley sous-tend une "théodicée noire", soit un discours sur l'injustice universelle qui produit des souffrances injustes, donc la monstruosité, celui de M. Hughes débouche sur une "théodicée de la vie privée", où la souffrance aboutit à l'approfondissement de soi et au développement moral et psychologique.

Summary: As the story of a scientifically produced "creature" who longs for human society, suffers rejection, and then goes into isolation, *The Keeper of the Isis Light* is remarkably similar to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the novel generally credited as the first in the genre and the one that introduced the figure of the alien. Although both novels focus on the development of consciousness and on identity-formation, *The Keeper of the Isis Light* connects society, individual psychology, and morality in a profoundly different way. The creature's story in *Frankenstein* is a "black theodicy," a discourse on universal injustice in which unjust suffering makes Victor Frankenstein's creature a true monster. In *The Keeper of the Isis Light*, however, Hughes critically modifies Shelley's dark theodicy, rewriting its materials to create a "theodicy of the private life," in which suffering leads to psychological and moral growth.

In 1969, Sheila Egoff declared that "Science fiction for children is not literature; there is as yet no novel in the field that welds scientific fact and/or sociological speculation with strong literary qualities to give it universal appeal. Nothing yet matches the best in other genres, such as fantasy and the realistic or historical novel for children" ("Science Fiction" 384). Twelve years later, Egoff reasserted her opinion, saying that science fiction for children,

unlike that for adults, “has no such touchstones by which it may be measured and judged” (*Thursday’s Child* 132-33). Instead, Egoff claimed that children’s science fiction, lacking the ““shining successes”” evident in other genres, “tends to ape, in diminishing and diminutive detail, its adult counterpart” (133). Just a year earlier, however, Monica Hughes had published *The Keeper of the Isis Light* (1980), a science fiction novel for children that eventually forced Egoff to revise her position. Writing with Judith Saltman in *The New Republic of Childhood* (1990), Egoff thus praised Hughes for her “outstanding” achievement, declaring that “perhaps her greatest contribution has been to create — in *The Keeper of the Isis Light* — a shining touchstone for judging children’s science fiction” (283).

Ironically, in creating this touchstone, Hughes aped adult science fiction, employing one of its staple figures and critically rearranging the elements of the novel generally credited as the first in the genre, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818; revised 1831). John Rieder has noted that, since the publication of *Frankenstein*, science fiction has been “a genre fascinated with images of the fantastic alien” (26). He says that, as “a projection of the Other,” the science fiction alien is “usually an estranged or *alienated* figure” because social context, not radical difference of nature, makes the alien “an outsider” (26). In *The Keeper of the Isis Light*, Olwen Pendennis, the central character, is such an alien. Although she is green and has lizard-like features, she does not differ from humans in nature because she was born of parents from Earth. After her parents died in a cosmic storm on Isis, the robot Guardian genetically and surgically altered Olwen so that she could survive that planet’s intense radiation. Consequently, as Hughes wrote in “The Writer as Mask-Maker and Mask-Wearer,” “Olwen is no longer a typical Earth child. She is, to all intents and purposes, *alien*” (183). Years later, Olwen, who has never seen herself in a mirror, painfully discovers her identity as alien when settlers from Earth, horrified by her appearance, reject her.

As the story of a scientifically produced “creature” who longs for human society, suffers rejection, and then goes into isolation, *The Keeper of the Isis Light* is remarkably similar to *Frankenstein*, the novel that introduced the figure of the alien into science fiction. Although both novels focus on the development of consciousness and on identity-formation, *The Keeper of the Isis Light* connects society, individual psychology, and morality in a profoundly different way. With its frequent allusions to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, a theodicy, or attempt to “justify the wayes of God to men” (*PL* 1.26), the creature’s story in *Frankenstein* is what Milton A. Mays calls a “black theodicy” (147), a discourse on universal injustice in which unjust suffering makes Victor Frankenstein’s creature a true monster. In *The Keeper of the Isis Light*, however, unjust suffering transforms Guardian’s creature, Olwen, into a mature, fully human woman. In an interview published in *Canadian Children’s Literature*, Hughes said that Olwen begins as “a very ordinary person” and that “her sense of self and her whole spirituality is not developed at all

because she's had no challenges" (Jones, "Technological Pastoralist" 11). Like William Wordsworth, who gave "Thanks to the means," the terrors, pains, and miseries that were "a needful part" in making up his existence "when I / Am worthy of myself" (1850 *Prelude* 1.351, 348-50), Hughes thus believes that personal suffering is necessary for maturation. Hughes dramatizes her belief through what M.H. Abrams, who traced a similar procedure in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, terms "a secular theodicy" (95). Abrams places this "Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life," as he also calls it, within "the distinctive Romantic genre of the *Bildungsgeschichte*," the novel of development that, he says,

translates the painful process of Christian conversion and redemption into a painful process of self-formation, crisis, and self-recognition, which culminates in a stage of self-coherence, self-awareness, and assured power that is its own reward. (96)

As an examination of their parallel elements shows, Hughes critically modifies Shelley's dark theodicy, rewriting its materials to create such a *Bildungsgeschichte*, or "theodicy of the private life," in which suffering leads to psychological and moral growth.

The parallels to *Frankenstein* are muted in the beginning of *The Keeper of the Isis Light* because Olwen, having never seen herself or other humans, is unaware of her difference and thus her status as alien. Although the narrator hints about Olwen's physical condition, the reader is basically as unconscious of her appearance as she herself is. By allowing the reader first to experience Olwen's subjectivity independent of knowledge of her physical appearance, Hughes accomplishes the same thing that Shelley achieved through first-person narration. As Chris Baldick says in *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, "The decision to give the monster an articulate voice is Mary Shelley's most important subversion of the category of monstrosity" (45). Hughes's third-person limited viewpoint similarly engenders sympathy for Olwen while it conditions the reader to reject the equation of different appearance with monstrosity, an equation that governs the perceptions of the colonists who arrive from Earth.

The initial scenes also subvert the idea that Olwen is alien. Hughes presents Olwen as a happy Romantic child. Like the youthful Wordsworth, who "had a world about me — 'twas my own" (1805-6 *Prelude* 3.142), Olwen has a proprietary feeling as she looks over and meditates on the landscape of "her world" (2). Having named both its living things and its places, she is a female Adam (Kertzer 25) in an Eden that she thinks is "perfect" (8). This role as Adam is a subtle link to characters in Shelley's novel. In her solitary and sheltered innocence, Olwen first resembles Victor Frankenstein, who enjoyed what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar show was a sheltered "Edenic childhood" (230). Later, when she becomes aware of her social difference,

Olwen resembles Frankenstein's disillusioned monster, who also compares himself to Adam. Olwen begins with an understandable but naive desire to preserve her prelapsarian world: "I wish that everything will go on being perfect, just the way it is now" (8-9). Guardian underlines the impossibility of her desire, however, pointing out that just as nature changes, so must Olwen: "Stasis is death" (9). Lacking a sense of change, an appreciation of all facets of nature, and an understanding of the subjectivity of others, Olwen must fall from innocence into painful experience in order to achieve emotional and spiritual maturity.

Once the narrative makes clear the fact of Olwen's appearance (in an episode best examined later), connections to *Frankenstein* become obvious and meaningful. Both Frankenstein's nameless "daemon" and Olwen are manufactured in laboratories, but the factors shaping their destinies are different because Frankenstein occupies the position of a callous deity, whereas Guardian is a benevolent creator. The initial difference is between a scientific endeavour that is an arrogant masculine usurpation of the female role of creation¹ and one that extends the female role and thus is ethically sounder. Victor Frankenstein creates his monster because of patriarchal hubris, declaring that "A new species would bless me as its creator and source.... No father could claim the gratitude of his children so completely as I should deserve theirs" (54). In contrast, Guardian obeys a loving, matriarchal command from Olwen's dying mother and reshapes her to protect her. Like Victor, Guardian defines himself by his relationship to his "offspring," but Guardian is subservient, telling Olwen, "you are my reason" (82). The two creators thus differ in their relation to nature and to the way they exercise their talents. Frankenstein bends nature to his will, opposing death by forming his monster from corpses, but Guardian adapts his creature to nature, making her one with her environment. For the selfish reason that minute parts would interfere with the speed of creation, Victor makes his creature physically superior to ordinary humans: the monster is gigantic, and he possesses greater speed, agility, and tolerance for extremes in temperature. Guardian, in contrast, considers Olwen's well-being; he makes her superior to ordinary humans and alters both her features and her metabolism to enable her to withstand the intense radiation of Isis and to breathe unaided in its oxygen-thin upper regions. The "daemon" therefore differs from ordinary humans and becomes an alien because his creator is self-absorbed, but Olwen differs because her creator is considerate of her need to fit into the natural world, a natural world that is, unfortunately for Olwen, alien and hostile to the settlers.

The degree to which each creator realizes his plans also affects the future of his creature. Victor selects features as beautiful, but he botches his task, producing a being so hideous that he himself flees in disgust. By judging his creature on the basis of appearance and then effectively orphaning him, Frankenstein abuses him, forcing him to live alone, to suffer, and to

educate himself. Although the settlers eventually find Olwen's features as horrifying as Victor found those of his creature, Guardian succeeds magnificently in realizing a practical aesthetics: "You are not ugly at all. Form and function should be as one. You function perfectly. You are beautiful" (82-83). Each creator's attitude thus shapes his creature's subsequent destiny. By giving birth to a monster and then abandoning patriarchal responsibility for it, Frankenstein violates the family bonds in which Shelley grounds moral virtue (Mellor, "Possessing Nature" 230). In contrast, Guardian fulfils both parental roles perfectly, telling Olwen, "I am your father and mother" (6). Frankenstein's creature, who suffers neglect and unwarranted misery, plunges into murderous anger, but Olwen, who experiences security and joy, later acts charitably. Both novels therefore emphasize the psychological and moral consequences of nurture.

Before we compare their reactions to rejection, however, one further difference, that of gender, warrants comment. That Frankenstein's creature is male and Olwen is female may suggest differences in their social relationships and psychological reactions. Some feminist critics have argued, however, that Frankenstein's monster embodies significant female anxieties. Mary Poovey, for example, says that the monster "is doubly like a woman in patriarchal society — forced to be a symbol of (and vehicle for) someone else's desire, yet exposed (and exiled) as the deadly essence of passion itself" (128). Gilbert and Gubar go even further, claiming that "Victor Frankenstein's male monster may really be a female in disguise" (237). They explain that "women have seen themselves (because they have been seen) as monstrous, vile, degraded creatures, second-comers, and emblems of filthy materiality..." (240). For such critics, Frankenstein's monster enacts a symbolic critique of the patriarchal treatment of the female Other.

Although it is clear that "*Keeper* is a complex myth about the development of female identity" (Jones, "True Myth" 170), Hughes has explained on numerous occasions that the novel had its genesis in a newspaper item about a boy named David, who was kept apart from all other humans because he suffered from a deficient immune system. David's situation provided her with the thematic material for a novel exploring "the difference between being alone and being lonely," one that would answer the question, "Is loneliness an essential part of being human?" (Jones, "Technological Pastoralist" 10). Hughes does not explain what prompted her to change her protagonist's gender, but this change is inspired: because of it Hughes can explore both the social and the sexual components of appearance-based relationships far more directly than Shelley does.²

Once people see them, both aliens suffer. Seeing is, of course, a common epistemological symbol, a signification of intellectual understanding found in the expression "I see what you mean." In both novels, however, seeing does not indicate understanding of the true nature of the object of

perception but, rather, a projection of meaning on to it. Because males have historically judged females by appearance, the emphasis on seeing suggests a patriarchal value system in which physical beauty signals human value.³ Frankenstein's monster suffers acutely from such judgments because, as Anne K. Mellor points out in *Mary Shelley*, "Not only Frankenstein but all the other people the creature encounters immediately see his physiognomy as evil" (129). Thus, a shepherd flees in horror, and a group of villagers attack him. To emphasize the superficiality of such judgments, Shelley has the creature find refuge in a lean-to next to the house of an old blind man named De Lacey. The creature eventually tells De Lacey his story, and the blind man sympathizes. However, when De Lacey's son, Felix, sees the monster, the hegemony of the visual again asserts itself: the frightened Felix attacks the creature. Later, in a scene emphasizing even more emphatically the injustice of judgments based on vision, the creature rescues a young girl from drowning, only to be shot by a rustic who sees him near the girl. The rustic equates a monstrous appearance with monstrous acts; seeing the ugly surface, he is blind to the heroic benevolence within.

The scenes in which people reject Olwen are not as dramatic as those in *Frankenstein*, but they too conclude in unwarranted suffering. Olwen does not suffer immediate rejection because the settlers do not initially see her true appearance. To protect her until she and the settlers get used to one another, Guardian makes her wear a suit and mask that give her the appearance of a beautiful Earth girl. The mask attracts a young settler named Mark London, who establishes the shallowness of visual perception when he considers his feelings for Olwen: "Love? That was crazy, completely absolutely off. I've never even really *seen* her he told himself angrily. Just talked to her ... shared some thoughts ... felt ... felt what?" (54; emphasis in original). Mark is like the blind De Lacey with Frankenstein's creature: unable to see her true appearance, he develops sympathy for Olwen because her conversations make him appreciate her character. One day, however, he climbs a mesa and finds her with her back turned to him. He regards her as "the most lovely, the most graceful, the most desirable woman he would ever see in his whole life" (58). When she turns around, though, Mark sees that she is not wearing her mask, and her alien face fills him with such horror that he falls from the mesa. Afterwards he rejects Olwen as a "'disgusting creature'" (110), a phrase that echoes people's judgments of Frankenstein's creature and also "represents the rejection of the Female Other, who will not or cannot conform to conventional patterns of behavior and of beauty" (Jones, "True Myth" 172). Mark's physical fall thus represents a psychological fall into painful experience for both him and Olwen. Olwen's pain is compounded afterwards because Mark's society also rejects her. While she is playing with Hobbit, her pet hairy dragon, a group of settlers frightened by the fearsome appearance of her pet kill it and then, in a scene reminiscent of the rustic's encounter with the daemon, point a gun at the unmasked Olwen.

Their emotional reactions to such unfair judgments further link the creature and Olwen, both of whom come to hate the very society they once desired. After the De Lacey family departs, Frankenstein's creature declares that "feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom" and that "I bent my mind towards injury and death" (138); he then performs his first act as a true monster, burning their dwelling. Olwen, enraged by the death of Hobbit, storms into the village, where the fearful settlers are hiding, throws a boulder through a window, and screams, "'I hate you!'" (74). Although she is not as destructive as Frankenstein's creature, this outburst represents a change in attitude as dramatic as his because it shows that she is no longer the Romantic child of the opening scene, in which she stretched out her arms in a gesture suggesting a loving desire to embrace the world (3).

In addition to being similar in their feelings of resentment, both alien figures are remarkably similar in the way they develop consciousness of themselves. Both are in a sense born free of personal history.⁴ Thinking back on his earliest days, Frankenstein's monster has "considerable difficulty" remembering "the original era of my being" because "all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct" (102).⁵ Because Guardian erased her memory after her parents died so that she would not suffer grief or loneliness, Olwen, thinking about her life before her fourth birthday, encounters "Just emptiness. Non-existence" (6). The monster learns about his construction when he finds Victor's journal in the coat he took from the laboratory. Reading it, he is filled with disgust and with hatred for the "'Accursed creator'" (130) who was so sickened by his own creation that he abandoned him. If the monster's situation symbolizes a universe in which the deity is callous, Olwen's represents one in which the creator cares for his creatures. When Guardian helps Olwen to recover her personal past by showing her movies of herself with her parents and by explaining how and why he altered her, she recognizes the unselfishness of her creator and expresses gratitude: "'Why should I be angry? You gave me freedom. You gave me happiness. You gave me Isis. I love you for it, Guardian'" (82). Olwen thus gives to her creator the very blessing that Victor Frankenstein desired from his creature.

The greatest and most meaningful difference between these aliens comes, however, in strikingly similar scenes of self-discovery involving reflections. When the monster first sees himself in a pool near the De Lacey home, he is "unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror." Already aware of "the perfect forms of my cottagers," he finds himself "fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am" (114). The monster, in other words, accepts society's vision, even though he continues to long for acceptance based on the inward nobility that no one will permit him to demonstrate. Olwen, who has grown up without mirrors, also sees her reflection for the first time after she suffers rejection. Like the monster, she initially sees her image as alien, snapping "'Who are you?'" and then realiz-

ing that "The Other, the intruder, was herself" (84). The monster, comparing himself to humans, sees himself as a "miserable deformity" (114), and he answers only with groans the question "What was I?" (121). Olwen has a stronger sense of personal worth. Comparing herself to the settlers, she decides that "I'm better" (82) because she can move about her dangerous planet without the need for an awkward breathing apparatus and radiation suits. Guardian previously warned her: "A mirror can only show you what *you* see as yourself. It cannot tell you what another person sees" (39). Rejection has taught Olwen what others see, but, unlike Frankenstein's creature, she repudiates society's vision and its value system by again expressing gratitude and by accepting herself: "Dear Guardian, thank you for my body. It's beautiful!" (85).⁶

Because their perceptions differ, these aliens continue to respond to suffering in significantly different ways. The monster persists in seeing himself as a victim and articulates the argument of his black theodicy: "I am malicious because I am miserable" (145). Feeling himself to be "miserably alone" (100), he seeks a social/sexual solution to his difficulty, and demands a mate because "the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes ..." (147). After Victor destroys the woman he had promised to make, however, the monster knows that he will forever be denied the satisfaction of companionship and therefore surrenders himself to "inextinguishable hatred" (145). Olwen also feels victimized at first. Mark's fall, which is parallel to Victor's destruction of the female monster because it destroys her hopes for companionship, becomes for her a sign of cosmic injustice: "Guardian had never told her about a God who could do a thing like that to Mark. It was not fair... How could she pray to that kind of God?" (67). Like the monster, she also puts herself in opposition to society, declaring that she is now an adult who must "put up defences so as not to get hurt": "Why should I leave myself open to hate and fear and ... and disgust?" (88). Olwen temporarily toys with a social solution to her isolation, one that rings an ironic change on the monster's demand that Victor create a mate: instead of seeking the creation of a mate who looks like her, she contemplates undergoing a painful operation that would make her look more like Mark London. She rejects this operation, though, just as she also rejects a simplistic psychological solution, the loss of conscious awareness of her condition that would follow if she asked Guardian to erase all memory of her unhappy experiences. Both procedures would rob Olwen of her developing identity.

Another reason that Frankenstein's creature and Olwen have significantly different fates is that they embody different experiences with and interpretations of nature. Both are connected to sublime landscapes, landscapes of immense size and threatening power.⁷ Frankenstein's creature inhabits such sublime landscapes as "desert mountains and dreary glaciers" and "caves of ice" (100), in which he suffers physical privation and emotional loneliness. Furthermore, as Mellor notes, his appearances "are simul-

taneous with revelations of the sublime," such as a violent storm (*Mary Shelley* 131). Consequently, the creature repeatedly signifies a destructive power beyond human control. Olwen also inhabits a terrifying landscape, the upper regions of Isis, which are low in oxygen and high in radiation. This landscape represents "the green world of female freedom" (Jones, "True Myth" 171), so Olwen does not share the settlers' perception of it as hostile; happy in her freedom and her idyllic life with Guardian, she sees only its romantic beauty. She thus embodies an idyllic union with nature. After Mark and the settlers reject her, however, Olwen plunges into despair, a dark night of the soul, in which she loses her emotional connection to nature because her favourite places have "lost their savour" (89).

Although Olwen's loss of pleasure in nature is similar to the monster's and conveys a similar sense of moral upheaval or cosmic disorder, her reaction is significantly different.⁸ The embittered monster embarks on a journey of revenge, murdering all close to Victor and luring his creator towards the Arctic, a cold, desolate landscape symbolically appropriate for two beings whose hearts are devoid of compassion. Olwen also undertakes a journey, but she goes alone into nature, where, as images and symbols suggest, she has a redemptive, spiritual experience. On the third day, an archetypal day for rebirth, Olwen thus discovers a valley whose river mirrors that of her own childhood valley. The wind, a conventional symbol of spirit or godhood, moves among the bamboo, making "a solemn music" (90).⁹ Although attracted by the "peace and beauty" (90) of the valley, Olwen feels restless and ascends the next day to higher ground, where she discovers that a "tremendous wind" (91) is blowing from the north. The increase in the force of the wind marks a movement from an experience of the "beautiful" to an experience of the "sublime," and Olwen's recognition of the difference marks a profound change of consciousness. Whereas storms in *Frankenstein* reflect the monster's unbridled fury and hatred, this storm leads to restoration. Olwen seeks refuge in "a deep crevice, almost a cave" (91), a symbolic womb in which she is reborn. When a hairy dragon shelters with her in the cave, she even gets a replacement for the pet that the settlers killed.

More importantly, Olwen undergoes spiritual restoration, abandoning the bitterness and alienation that characterized her fall into experience. Her change comes in a patently religious interaction with nature. After "a day of unusual wonders," she watches, "As if she were keeping vigil," while the night-time aurora becomes "great cathedral pillars and arches carved from translucent jade," and she hears "the faint crackling music of it, like singing ice" (92). This scene is quintessentially Romantic, presenting Olwen with a union of the contraries of light and dark (the midnight aurora is likened to dawn) and of tumult and peace (a cosmic storm rages in the heavens while the land below is still and peaceful).¹⁰ Her religious experience here culminates in an act of devotional charity: Olwen, who could not pray when she discovered the presence of evil in the world, now prays to God to

keep Mark and the settlers safe. Olwen thus succeeds where the monster fails. The monster took to hiding in "a womblike hovel, as if it could be born again into culture by aping the motions of the family it spies upon" (Poovey 129). After being rejected, he thinks only of his own suffering and therefore heaps curses on his creator, whereas the truly reborn Olwen considers the well-being of others.

Although the novel mentions God, it does not, as conventional theodicies do, emphasize the role of the deity and the rewards of heaven. Rather, by focusing on Olwen's acute awareness of her own responses to nature, it follows Wordsworth's secular emphasis on personal feelings and rewards in this life. As Guardian notes, Olwen's ability to sense the coming of storms with her body indicates that she is "becoming more and more one with the planet" (113). In essence, Olwen has achieved the union of mind and nature that Abrams posits as the aim of the Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life (27 ff). The moral significance of this merging with nature becomes apparent when the next storm strikes. After learning that one of the settler children is lost, Olwen sets out to find him. A positive sense of her difference creates moral duty: "I have to go. I'm the only one who can" (116). Therefore, Olwen violates her own bitter vow never again to descend to the valley, and performs a heroic deed rich in symbolism: by braving the storm, she braves the violent and wilful elements of her own nature; by pulling the child from a sink hole, she symbolically gives birth to the future. In contrast, the monster maintains his vow of vengeance and destroys the future in the forms of Victor's little brother and his bride. Because he accepts the logic of male justice, which demands equality of treatment, the monster inflicts pain as recompense for the pain he feels. He thus supports the black theodicy's image of a universe of evil and unjustified suffering. Olwen's actions, in contrast, support a female ethic of caring and non-violence, supporting the secular theodicy's concept that suffering leads to moral maturation.¹¹

Olwen subsequently enters the final stage of the theodicy of the private life, the one that Abrams calls the "stage of self-coherence, self-awareness, and assured power that is its own reward." Olwen demonstrates her self-coherence when she refuses Captain Tryon's offer of surgery because it would entail a loss of communion with the beauties of upper Isis. When the Captain suggests that she nevertheless make her home among them to avoid loneliness, Olwen makes a discovery central to the conclusion of Hughes's theodicy. After Olwen responds that she won't be alone because she has Guardian, the exasperated Captain Tryon explodes, "He's only a damned robot, after all!" (131). Understanding for the first time that Guardian is not human, Olwen feels "abandoned, alone" (131). This feeling signals achievement of mature self-awareness, a knowledge of self and others impossible in self-centred childhood. Having lost her parent figure, Olwen must now assume responsibility for herself. Olwen further demonstrates her maturity

with Mark. She tries to relieve him of guilt he may feel for rejecting her by indicating that they cannot share a life together because they differ in appearance and because they cannot share vital experiences: "Isis is mine, from the valleys to the mountain peaks, summer and winter and cosmic storm" (135). Her language suggests a mature synthesis of contraries, an acceptance of the richness of experience. Finally, Olwen demonstrates an assured sense of her own power, deciding that she will move to the remote valley, from where she will transmit warnings to the settlers about the storms her body detects. Although she will be remote from the settlers, Olwen believes that she will "be a part of them, just a little" (136), a belief demonstrating another mature unifying of the contraries of experience.

Both *Frankenstein* and *The Keeper of the Isis Light* conclude with the alien figure leaving society. Sickened by what he has become, the monster departs for the arctic wasteland to seek oblivion in death. The novel ends with the monster "lost in darkness and distance" (223), a phrase suggesting both that he is a lost soul and that he has departed from the realm of visual perception, the realm of injustice in his black theodicy. Although she too journeys to a remote region and therefore leaves the painful realm of visual judgments, Olwen offers society a chance to arrive at a fairer estimate of her worth by maintaining verbal contact, the kind of contact that enabled Mark to appreciate her true nature.

More important, however, is what this journey represents for Olwen. Although it is a linear physical journey, it is symbolically more like a spiral, conforming to what Abrams calls "the typical Romantic pattern." In this pattern, "development consists of a gradual curve back to an earlier stage, but on a higher level incorporating that which has intervened" (114). Olwen will live in a setting similar to that in which she lived before the settlers arrived; she will again have the landscape to herself; she will again have a pet and the companionship of Guardian. She will thus recover her perfect childhood paradise. Because she will also have the lessons she learned from the joyful and painful experiences that forced her to find this new home, she will exist in it on a higher psychological and spiritual level. Olwen's attainment of this level is evident in her final statement. Informed that a robot can never feel lonely, Olwen whispers, "Poor Guardian" (136). Olwen realizes, that is, that Guardian, who previously seemed perfect, is actually deficient because he cannot suffer. Olwen's recognition thus constitutes the conclusion of the theodicy of the private life because it justifies evil and pain as necessary if we are to be fully human. Olwen's loss of innocence, her plunge into division and chaos, and her recovery of a sense of self-worth suggest that suffering enables us to know our mature selves, providing a spiritual reward we earn in this world, and that self-knowledge enables us to create our own Eden here. Without evil and pain, we would be locked into the merely intellectual, as is the rational Guardian, or into self-indulgent emotionalism, as the childish Olwen once was.

Hughes has said that “one of the functions of a good writer for children besides, obviously, being entertaining,” is to help them find acceptable answers to such “Big Questions” as “What’s life about?” and “What is it to be human?” (“The Writer’s Quest” 20-21). She insists that the questions “demand truthful answers” but that “always there must come hope” (21). *The Keeper of the Isis Light* offers the truth that suffering is an inevitable part of life and the hope that suffering humanizes and brings psychological or spiritual rewards. By advancing these ideas, Hughes enters into dialogue with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the fountainhead of much modern science fiction. Although Hughes echoes many of the situations in *Frankenstein*, she rejects its idea that both the universe and society are unjust. She therefore offers a new view, or “re-vision,” of it. That is, she critically modifies its materials, imposing on Shelley’s dark theodicy the more optimistic pattern of the Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life. Young readers can grasp Hughes’s central point without knowing either *Frankenstein* or *The Prelude*. Nevertheless, the fact that our understanding of the novel increases when we place it in the context of such discourses about the meaning of suffering and evil indicates that it is not only a “shining touchstone” for juvenile science fiction but also a genuine work of literature, one of the most stimulating and satisfying books for young people ever written in Canada.

Notes

- 1 Gilbert and Gubar (232-33) and Anne K. Mellor, in “Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*” (220), discuss Victor Frankenstein’s usurpation of female biology.
- 2 The novel can also be read as a discourse on colonialism and the racial Other, but in her interview with Jones, Hughes says that the prejudice theme “arose totally by accident in the course of making the plot work” (11). In “The Writer as Mask-Maker and Mask-Wearer,” Hughes claims that she was not even aware of this racial theme until she went into schools and talked to teachers, librarians, and students, for whom her own “theme of loneliness” proved “unimportant” (185).
- 3 Kertzer discusses what she calls the “theme of perspective” and concludes that “Hughes is not suggesting any superiority of female perception over male” (25), but in “True Myth,” Jones shows that Hughes uses the seeing motif to present “the opposition between masculine and feminine perceptions” (172).
- 4 Gilbert and Gubar cite James Reiger’s observation that Shelley’s monster has “a unique knowledge of what it is like to be born free of history” (238).
- 5 Mays convincingly argues that “The Monster’s description of his dawning consciousness might almost parody Adam’s in Book 8 of *Paradise Lost*” (148).
- 6 Gilbert and Gubar connect the scene in which Frankenstein’s monster sees himself in the pool to that in *Paradise Lost*, Book 4, in which Eve sees herself. They argue, on the one hand, that the scene is a “corrective” to Milton because it implies that women, created second, must see themselves as monstrous. On the other, they claim that it “supplements Milton’s description of Eve’s introduction to herself” in *PL* 4.465-68 because “the self-absorption that Eve’s confessed passion for her own image signals

is plainly meant by Milton to seem morally ugly" (240). For Gilbert and Gubar, the monster's physical ugliness represents both the moral deformity Milton assigns to Eve and the physical monstrosity patriarchal culture forces women to see as characteristic of their sex (240-41). In many ways, Hughes revises both Milton and Shelley. Olwen's acceptance of herself clearly contrasts with the monster's reaction to his own image and therefore suggests an acceptance of female functionality as beautiful. Furthermore, Hughes does not, like Milton, present self-admiration as a moral defect; rather, she clearly sees it as a sign of psychological maturity. In "The Writer as Mask-Maker and Mask-Wearer," Hughes praises such self-acceptance, saying that "personal growth consists, metaphorically, in recognizing the masks we hide behind, removing them, and accepting and being at ease with our naked faces and personalities" (184).

- 7 For a discussion of this key Romantic concept as it applies to *Frankenstein*, see Mellor's *Mary Shelley*, 131-33. In *Natural Supernaturalism*, Abrams shows the importance of the sublime to the Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life, especially in his discussion of "The Theodicy of the Landscape," 97-117.
- 8 Mays notes that "A bitter sense of exclusion for all pleasure, and in particular the sensuous beauties of nature characterizes both the Monster and Milton's Satan" (150). Mays refers to the words of the monster, who, after the rustic shoots him, declares that his sufferings "were not alleviated by the bright sun or gentle breezes of spring; all joy was but a mockery ... I was not made for the enjoyment of pleasure" (*Frankenstein* 141-42). Discussing further "this interesting Romantic theme of the 'enjoying power,'" Mays concludes that "this 'loss of pleasure,' the sense of being excluded from the healthy range of sensuous response is the counterpart of some 'cosmic' disorder" that the Monster perceives (151).
- 9 The wind here recalls the gentle breezes that Wordsworth describes in the 1805-6 version of *The Prelude* as the "breath of Paradise" that finds its way to "the recesses of the soul" (11.11-12) and, according to Abrams, assists "in restoring the paradise within" (109).
- 10 See Abrams (97 ff) for a discussion of the importance of contrary states in developing Wordsworth's mature spiritual understanding in *The Prelude*, and Mellor's *Mary Shelley* (79-80) for an analysis of Shelley's rejection of the romantic dream of fusing contraries.
- 11 In her discussion of Mary Shelley's moral vision in *Frankenstein*, Mellor quotes from Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1982) distinguishing between the male ethic of justice, based on equality of treatment, and the female ethic of care, based on "the premise of nonviolence — that no one should be hurt" ("Possessing Nature" 229). In "True Myth," Jones briefly discusses Olwen in terms of Gilligan's concept of an ethic of self-sacrifice that is characteristic of one phase of female development (173).

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