



# Recycling Zoraida: The Muslim Heroine in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*\*

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"Everything must have a beginning, to speak in Sanchean phrase; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before."

Mary Shelley<sup>1</sup>



*Frankenstein* (1818) hardly seems a natural bedfellow for *Don Quixote*, if only because Cervantes' text presents itself as a corrective to the kind of fantasy fiction Mary Shelley would write two centuries later. Evidence suggests, however, that Cervantes' "puling child" (I, Prologue; 3)<sup>2</sup> is indeed an important subtext to Mary Shelley's "hideous progeny" (Author's Introduction 171). That the connection between *Don Quixote* and *Frankenstein* has so far remained unremarked—by

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<sup>1</sup> Author's Introduction to the third edicion, 171.

<sup>2</sup> Citations from *Don Quixote* are from the translation of Burton Raffel. Citations will be documented parenthetically in the text by part, chapter, and page number. In the cases of *Don Quixote*, *Cide Hamete*, and *Agi Morato*, I have opted for the traditional spellings over those in the Raffel translation.

either Golden Age Hispanists or English Romanticists—seems surprising given the structural and thematic resemblances binding the two. There is also a biographical connection: Mary Shelley's well-pawed journal records her almost nightly interactions with *Don Quixote* during a critical period of *Frankenstein's* composition. In addition, Charles E. Robinson's recent contribution to Mary Shelley scholarship, a meticulously compiled and researched facsimile edition of the 1816–17 manuscript, indicates that one of *Frankenstein's* most discussed features—the core Safie episode—was inserted into a nearly complete draft of the novel in the weeks immediately following the Shelleys' reading of *Don Quixote*.

While this essay invokes only a few of the startling parallels between *Frankenstein* and *Don Quixote*, my hope is to open a field for future inquiry. To that end, my discussion has two purposes. The first is to document Mary Shelley's knowledge of *Don Quixote*. The second is to argue that, by acknowledging *Don Quixote* as an important subtext to *Frankenstein*, readers may more easily unpack the later novel's enigmatic and perplexing representations of the East as part of a dynamic investigation of interrelated practices: reading and writing, translation and transcription, appropriation and acculturation. It has been a standard critical practice to puzzle Mary Shelley's first-born text through reference to her outside reading. In the case of the novel's Muslim heroine, the "Arabian" Safie, Mary Shelley's manipulation of Otherness bears, I would argue, visible traces of her Romantic engagement with Cervantes.

*Don Quixote* has a long history as a site of contest between antagonistic critical discourses. In the context of a struggle between intentionalism and positivism, Erich Auerbach, Anthony Close, and other like-minded scholars have pointed to the Romantics as originators in a line of violent misreadings which transformed *Don Quixote* from a funny book to a tragically serious one. There can be little doubt that the English Romantics were particularly susceptible to interpreting Cervantes' text as an allegory for the Imagination and as evidence for the transcendent poet-subject's estrangement from the everyday world. Evidence that Mary Shelley was not immune to the critical practices of her age can be found in her 1837 biography of Cervantes. There she seizes upon *Don Quixote* as proof of Cervantes' "bitter view of human affairs" and upon "The Captive's Tale" as a text pertinent to nineteenth-century discussions of the uses of autobiography (Shelley, *Lives* 149).

In Edward Saïd's study of nineteenth-century orientalist discourse, he wisely maintains that when dealing with Western ren-

derings of the East the “things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of representation” (21; Said’s emphasis). With this approach in mind, I would suggest that Mary Shelley’s Romantic reading of *Don Quixote* directly influenced her later rendering of the East in *Frankenstein*. A close reading of the texts indicates that Mary Shelley not only consciously appropriated, but also intentionally collapsed elements of Cervantes’ text which she judged most able to illustrate her misgivings regarding Romantic idealization of the individual and his or her will to power.<sup>3</sup> In *Frankenstein*, as in *Don Quixote*, a newly conceived individual can rupture, by a pure and controlled act of will, the socio-symbolic orders used to define his or her place inside or outside of a community. As one consequence, *Frankenstein* remains faithful to *Don Quixote* to the extent that it leaves interpretation up to the reader. This point becomes most clear through analysis of parallel Muslim heroines, *Don Quixote*’s Zoraida and *Frankenstein*’s Safie, who are both constructed by male narrators by different means but to similar ends. Ruy Pérez’s construction of Zoraida is informed by his own immersion in Algerian culture and intimate knowledge of both her and her history. The creature’s construction of Safie, by way of contrast, is dependent upon his identity as a nameless Other viewing a second Other who is detached from an alien culture of which he is ignorant. In both texts, the Islamic heroines have profound consequences on notions of interpretive authority.<sup>4</sup>

The five calf-skin notebooks comprising Mary Shelley’s journal bring to public view the private life of one of the nineteenth century’s most popular, most scandal-hounded, and most secretive women writers.<sup>5</sup> Notably reticent, in brief, cryptic notations Mary

<sup>3</sup>See Round’s “Toward a Typology of Quixotisms” for a treatment of influence in terms of “appropriation” versus “availability.” My understanding of *Don Quixote*’s influence on *Frankenstein* is akin to what Round designates as the second development of appropriation: instances where the prototype is integrated “in terms which become progressively more abstract” (20).

<sup>4</sup>I have opted in favor of arguments for “creature” in place of the traditional designation “Frankenstein’s Monster,” as it is the name by which the creature refers to itself. See Close for an introduction to the debate between soft Romantic readings and hard intentionalist interpretations of *Don Quixote*. For an example of a recent attempt to bridge the controversy, see Resina.

<sup>5</sup>Mary Shelley’s journals first arrived in print as part of *Shelley and Mary*, a compilation of the Shelleys’ papers, letters, and journals which were censored,

Shelley condensed days and nights of rigorous study, stimulating discussion, and quiet artistic creation. Hurried lists of the texts she and Percy Shelley studied together often substitute for more subjective reactions to their tumultuous private life. However, rather than giving off a tone of cold impersonality, a charge often leveled against the journal by critics, the brisk record indicates the extent to which work and life bled into one another in the Shelley household. Such is the implication of the entries spanning October 7 to November 7, 1816, a critical month during the writing of *Frankenstein* and a period during which Percy Shelley indulged in a nightly habit of reading aloud to his mistress-wife. Tellingly enough, the month's reading was *Don Quixote*.

The first evidence of the Shelleys' reading of *Don Quixote* appears on October 7, 1816. For that date, Mary recorded, "Read Curtius and Clarendon—write. Shelley reads Don Quixote in the evening" (Shelley, *Journals* 139). Except for one eight-day period—from October 9, the date Mary learned of her half-sister's suicide, to October 17—the next month saw the Shelleys in regular visits with the mad Don, his misadventures apparently becoming a source of relief from the darker pressures of grief and mourning. Their reading concluded on Thursday, November 7, a day which Mary hastily summarizes with, "Drawing lesson—walk—read Sir C. G.—Shelley reads Montaigne in the morning and finishes Don Quixote in the evening" (145). It should be noted that Mary Shelley had begun composing her most famous text in June of 1816, and would continue to work on it for the next eleven months. The journal entries for October to November of 1816 fall almost exactly one-third of the way through the completion of *Frankenstein*.

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edited, and privately distributed by Lady Shelley, Mary's daughter-in-law, in 1882. Until very recently, the only other printed assemblage of the journals available to readers was that of Jones. The Preface and Notes to Jones's edition reveal his unmistakable bias toward Percy Shelley, as well as his unmistakable irritation with the reserved quality of the journal entries. According to Jones, the journals are important "in spite of...limitations"—which he identifies as Mary's failure to exhaustively detail the scandals surrounding the Shelley household and her habit of skipping entire days—as "an invaluable source of information concerning what [Percy] Shelley read and when he read it" (Preface xiv).

A more even-handed introduction to the journals, one that focuses on the importance of the notebooks as a means to better understand Mary Shelley, became available in 1987 with Paula K. Feldman's and Diana Scott-Kilvert's *The Journals of Mary Shelley*. All further in-text references to and quotations from the journals are based upon the Feldman and Scott-Kilvert edition.

Various critics have noted the impact Mary Shelley's daily reading, apart from Cervantes, seems to have had on the development of her first literary child.<sup>6</sup> Evidence of Mary Shelley's ongoing interest in the work of Cervantes, however, does not end with her journal. Rather, it simply begins there. References to Don Quixote and his proverb-spouting squire appear throughout her writings, both public and private. In two of her novels published after *Frankenstein*, *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner: A Novel* (1837), there are explicit references to Don Quixote as a psychological type by which to better understand the motivations of socially inept, central characters.<sup>7</sup> In addition, her journal records her return to *Don Quixote* in 1820, though

<sup>6</sup> Mary's journals have provided scholars with ample evidence to support intertextual readings of her works. Pollin was one of the first studies to record the "most essential" (98) subtexts to Mary Shelley's novel. Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's famous reading of *Frankenstein* in *The Madwoman in the Attic* as a revision of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is one example of extended studies devoted to rediscovering Mary Shelley as not only a popular novelist of remarkable power, but also as an intellectual in dialogue with the literary greats of the past as well as of her own age. Other examples include Stephen Bann's Preface to the critical anthology *Frankenstein: Creation and Monstrosity*, which argues that the ambiguity of *Frankenstein* mirrors Mary Shelley's conflicted process of revising the narratives inherited from her often radical family; and Ellis and Mellor's "Possessing Nature," both of which draw heavily from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to argue that Mary Shelley's tale of horror is an extension of the feminist work initiated by her mother. See Zonana for a discussion of the influence of *The New Arabian Nights*. See also Levine and Knoepfelmacher's *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, the first anthology of critical essays devoted to *Frankenstein*, which contains an entire section on the biographical and intertextual echoes contained within Mary Shelley's classic. No study of *Frankenstein*'s intertextuality would be complete without reference to Charles E. Robinson's *The Frankenstein Notebooks*, a comprehensive reproduction of the *Frankenstein* manuscripts which promises to change the face of *Frankenstein* scholarship and which takes on the mammoth task of tracing Mary Shelley's drafting and revision processes, in part, through reference to the reading lists contained in her journals.

<sup>7</sup> *Lodore* lifts a main plot line (love in the poor house) from Mary Shelley's own experiences following her elopement with Percy Shelley to the Continent in 1814. It is also a novelistic exploration of ideological tensions (appearance versus reality, subjectivity versus objectivity, Enlightenment Reason versus Romantic Passion), a point that becomes clearly distinguishable in the polarity of two heroines: Ethel Fitzhenry and Fanny Derham. A contrasting pair, Ethel and Fanny are both described in terms of *Don Quixote*: the latter in positive opposition to the delusional, bookish Cervantine protagonist and the former as a misguided victim of quixotic love. Mary Shelley's last novel, *Falkner: A Novel* (1837), also uses *Don Quixote* as means to explain a central character, the tragic captain John Falkner. Though responsible for the death and destruction of an

this time in the original Spanish, as part of an endeavor to acquire a fifth language. As a further example of an ongoing private intercourse with *Don Quixote*, in a letter to Maria Gisborn dated August 24, 1832, Mary affectionately speaks of her son and his return to school by relating that “on going away he insisted on having his supper alone in his room—telling me, to persuade me, that Sancho liked an onion behind a door, and why might he not enjoy the pleasures of solitary fare?” (*Letters* 247). Mary’s witty account of this incident indicates that Sancho Panza was no stranger to the Shelley household. The incident suggests, moreover, that *Don Quixote* was a text that both Mary and her son could refer to and play on with easy familiarity.

Mary Shelley’s interest in Cervantes found its most formal and explicit expression in 1837 with the publication of the third volume of *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal*. Part of Lardner’s *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, the third volume of *Lives* provides ample evidence of Mary Shelley’s interest not only in the general history of Spain, but of her particular interest in its multicultural past. She devotes a large section of the volume’s Introduction to documenting the positive aspects of Muslim rule, proclaiming that “The Arabs were a learned and refined race. They built cities, palaces, and mosques; they founded universities, they encouraged learning” (*Lives* 4). Second only in length to the Introduction is the volume’s chapter on Cervantes, whom she unabashedly praises as “the writer of the most successful book in the world” (*Lives* 121). It seems of no small account that in this chapter Mary Shelley describes Cervantes in terms of an ideal, socially conscious poet, laurels she also reserved for her late husband and his contemporaries. She describes Cervantes in terms of “fortitude in suffering,” “devoted courage when others depended on him,” “cheerful content in poverty,” “benevolence,” and “animation of...mind” (*Lives* 121). In addition, she argues that, contrary to popular opinion, *Don Quixote*’s most autobiographical section, “The Captive’s Tale,” is something other than “proof of [Cervantes’] vanity merely” (*Lives* 132). The opportunity presented by “The Captive’s Tale” allows her to launch a spirited defense of an artist’s use of his life’s experience in his work. She suggests in revealingly self-referential tones that, rather than

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innocent woman, Falkner is described as having “with all his sufferings and faults, much of the Don Quixote about him” (2: 130), and to have “never heard a story of oppression without forming a scheme to relieve the victim” (2: 130).

being a barely veiled excuse for self-congratulation, excursions into autobiography are draining and painful for the literary artist:

[T]he truth is, that, though we may be led to mention ourselves, it is ever a tedious task to write at length on the subject: ...hopes baffled, our dearest memories discovered to have taint, our lives wasted and fallen into contempt even in our own eyes, ...we readily turn from dispiriting realities to such creatures of the imagination as we can fashion according to our liking (*Lives* 133).

There is little question that Mary Shelley felt a special connection to Cervantes when she wrote his biography in 1837. The similar conditions under which they composed their lesser-known works—neglected by the reading public and abused by critics as one-book authors—do not seem to have passed by her unnoticed. The effusiveness of Mary Shelley's biography may evidence her delayed homage to one of the literary models fundamental to her development as a novelist. The structural and thematic resemblances of *Frankenstein* to *Don Quixote* seem more than sheer accident.

Critics have long recognized in *Don Quixote* a reaction against the narrowness of institutionalized tradition. At the risk of provoking an unpredictable and dangerous Royal Council, Cervantes satirized Catholic hegemony in Renaissance Spain and exposed the absurdity of legislating hatred for Spain's brilliantly multicultural past. Creating a travesty among chivalric romances, Cervantes blended realism with romance and autobiography in *Don Quixote* to erase the line separating fact from fiction, sanity from insanity, truth from lies. In so doing, he gave birth to what many consider the first modern novel: a "puling child" with teeth (Cervantes, I, Prologue; 3). To similar effect, feminist critics have argued convincingly that, through *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley was able to literalize the anxieties she felt as a woman writing in the shadows of a masculine literary tradition. In addition, she also mixed genres in her recipe for novelistic social critique. Gothic romance, autobiography, and fantastic science combine to produce *Frankenstein*: a peculiar hybrid especially equipped to test Romanticism's faith in the Imagination, the divine faculty by which the Poet transcends the human to resemble a high-minded god.

*Frankenstein* takes its shape from a network of interconnecting letters. Those of Robert Walton contain the narrative of Victor Frankenstein, whose tale in turn holds the confessions and diatribes of the creature. In such manner, Mary Shelley attempted to distance

herself as “author” from her first literary child—an attempt which proved only partially successful when twentieth-century critics came determined to root her out from the folds of her layered text. Cervantes also attempted authorial distance through use of interlaced narrators in his tale of a misfit hidalgo.<sup>8</sup> Cervantes uses as many as six different “authors” in the telling of *Don Quixote*, each with a distinct voice and agenda. The question of why Cervantes chose to hide behind so many authors has intrigued readers for centuries. However, as in the case of *Frankenstein*, one immediate consequence is to render inadequate the conventional means for measuring a storyteller’s authority and credibility. In both *Frankenstein* and *Don Quixote*, one can never trust the truth of the tale being told.

The notion of unreliable narrators is immediately presented in *Don Quixote* by Cervantes’ use of Cide Hamete, an Arab historian, as the text’s most important fictional author. On an objective, intellectual level, Cide Hamete is an author and is therefore deserving of the trust of his readers. However, on a cultural level he is also an Arab—the racial and religious Other in a fiercely Catholic Spain. By virtue of his cultural and racial difference, Cide Hamete is synonymous with “potentially-lying-author,” and is evocative of the assumption that the authority of a tale (i.e., its truthfulness) is predetermined by the teller’s position inside or outside of his society’s prescribed bounds. In *Don Quixote*, the racial, ethnic, and religious conformity (or nonconformity) of the teller foreordains the amount of value assigned to his tale. The second narrator tells us that “if there is any possible objection to the truthfulness of the account, it can only be that the author was an Arab, since it is very natural for people of that race to be liars” (I, 9; 46). In a case such as that of Cide Hamete, an indeterminacy of value, not to mention of meaning, is unavoidable. This ambiguity comes to a head in “The Captive’s Tale,” one of the interpolated tales concluding Part I, where a beautiful Moor crosses from the Islamic East into the Christian West.

Often interpreted as a record of Mary Shelley’s argument with the popular Romantic rhetoric espoused by her father and husband, *Frankenstein* is also a site of contesting discourses. Populated by a cast of flat, barely visible women and Promethean, spiritually blinkered men, the text gains its structure from the competing discourses of three male narrators—Walton, Victor, and the creature. These narrators partially base their respective bids for authority on a shared

<sup>8</sup> See Parr and El Saffar for discussions of *Don Quixote*’s layered levels of discourse.

gift for reducing to silence the women who feature most importantly in their tales. To some extent, the women in *Frankenstein* act as simple appendages to and proofs for the male narratives that enclose them.<sup>9</sup> The glaring absence of female characters of agency is often cited as *Frankenstein's* central weakness. However, such readings neglect to account for the presence of one woman not only able to effect agency, but also to partially tell her own tale: Safie, the lovely Arabian who occupies not only the geographic center of *Frankenstein*, but who also embodies its thematic core.<sup>10</sup>

In both *Don Quixote* and *Frankenstein*, a female figure who is half Moor (the body) and half Christian (the soul) enters into self-imposed exile from her home culture in order to actualize a hidden and purportedly European self. Representations of the Other, they are similar in their racial, ideological, and religious difference from the men on whom they come to depend. Foreign texts, they disrupt the socio-symbolic orders used to contain the feminine and the alien in order to boldly enact self-determination in a Christian value system that—like their own—honors the word of the Father as Law. They do so, however, in open defiance of their own fathers. Zoraida cruelly abandons her father, Agi Morato, on a deserted island in the process of actualizing her quest for the Christian world. Safie, no less perfidiously, takes advantage of her father's political misadventures to pilfer gold and steal forth in quest of her beloved Felix. Interestingly, both women write letters that must be translated for their Christian lovers, and both depend upon a language of signs, symbols, and meaningful looks to initiate their cross from one paternalistic culture to another. Veiled and translated, Zoraida and Safie violate the boundaries separating the Orient from Europe by circumventing spoken language. They invoke, instead, a language system of iconography and types dependent upon collapsing ambiguity into a mutually agreed upon symbolic order. However, as

<sup>9</sup> For example, Walton's outer narrative is addressed to the sphinx-like and distant Mrs. Saville, his sister, who operates as both an excuse for the contained narrative and as a hostile, unenlightened audience. Her imagined opposition to his quest provides the occasion for Walton to identify himself as a would-be conqueror of Nature's most northerly regions. Similarly, in both Victor's and the creature's narratives, the hapless and gullible Justine dies on the scaffold as an example of the sacrifices which must be made to ensure the ascendancy of masculine pride and power. Elizabeth too, according to Victor, dies as payment for a man's faithlessness, arrogance, and vanity.

<sup>10</sup> My discussion of Safie as a geographic and thematic locus is indebted to Zonana's perceptive discussion.

Moorish “types,” Zoraida and Safie cannot help but immediately disrupt the Christian and European symbolic orders called upon to contain them. Although it is impossible to fully reconstruct Mary Shelley’s interpretation of Cervantes’ text, I would argue that there is sufficient evidence in *Frankenstein’s* Safie episode to indicate which elements Mary Shelley intentionally appropriated. Though aware of the critical distance separating nineteenth- and twentieth-century readings of *Don Quixote*—today’s readers have information and critical tools unavailable to a nineteenth-century audience—, I provide my own interpretation of “The Captive’s Tale” as simply one possible paradigm by which to measure Mary Shelley’s later reworking.<sup>11</sup>

Zoraida enters Cervantes’ text as a literal representation of a romantic damsel-in-distress. Her arrival follows on the heels of Dorotea’s impersonation of Princess Micomicona, an imaginary construct devised by the priest and the barber to put an end to the Don’s chivalric misadventures. A once great lady, the Princess is said to require a knight’s service to restore her and her family from the tyrannous hold of an “overgrown giant” (I, 37; 248). In an intriguing parallel, Zoraida—herself a reduced and vulnerable woman—provides a real-life mirror to the fabulous Princess. A willing expatriate from her home culture, Zoraida enters the text after having been relieved by pirates of her Moorish bangles, pearls, and rubies, and appearing a materially impoverished Christian convert. Where the imaginary Micomicona is protected by the madly romantic Don Quixote, Zoraida is protected by the Christian Captive. Together, Zoraida and the Captive arrive at the inn as realistic figurings of a modern Christian knight and his chastely silent Lady.

The inn is a place of extravagant meetings and denouement—a place where reunions of families and thwarted lovers abound. Appropriately, it is into this magical sphere, where the knots of relationships and plots are untied, that Zoraida and the Captive wander. “A woman in Moorish clothing, her face hidden by a veil” (I, 37; 250), Zoraida immediately excites the curiosity of the inn’s guests and, in particular, that of the women. Luscinda and Dorotea, “drawn by clothing the likes of which they had never seen,” are both fascinated and repulsed by Zoraida’s exoticism (I, 37; 250): the veil hiding her face and her colorful robes mark Zoraida as outside the fixed order

<sup>11</sup> My reading of Zoraida has been influenced by a number of the provocative discussions of “The Captive’s Tale” which have appeared in recent years. I would like to make particular note of my indebtedness to Garcés, Smith, Gerli, Hathaway, and McGaha. See also Sieber.

for Christian interpretation. Courteous as well as curious, Luscinda and Dorotea speak to Zoraida in Spanish, but receive in return a language of gestures, the daughter of Islam "bowing both her head and her body as a sign of appreciation" (I, 37; 250). It is perhaps only fitting that Dorotea would then posit a question that continues to confound *Don Quixote's* readers. Looking to Ruy Pérez, she asks the Captive, "Tell me, sir, if this lady is a Christian or a Moor? Because by her clothing and her silence we have been led to believe that she is, in fact, what we wish she were not" (I, 37; 251). The source of Dorotea's bafflement seems clear: Zoraida is a mass of conflicting signs. She is fair and chaste, and she yearns for Christianity. Indeed, she is perhaps more fitted to the popular image of the virtuous Christian maiden than at least one of the inn's own Christian maidens.<sup>12</sup> The trouble is, Zoraida also displays the codes of an exotic in dress, form, and plot, and, despite her apparent virtuousness, her appearance resonates of "the wanton, threatening, enamored Moslem princess" of inherited cultural mythology (Kahf 157).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>On this point, Hathaway concludes a comparison of the Muslim Zoraida with the Christian Dorotea by stating that the Eastern heroine "seems yes, certainly seems to be more spiritual, more religious, in contrast to...the fair Andalusian" (49).

<sup>13</sup>Cervantes' reliance on certain cultural types for depiction of his female characters is well documented. Sadie Trachman conducted one of the more dated studies in the 1930s and separated Cervantes' Moorish women into four categories: Mohammedan Converts, Lovers of Valor, Lovers of their Christian Slaves, and Sorceresses. Of particular interest for my study, Trachman places Zoraida in the category of "Mohammedan Converts" and points out that Zoraida is a more complicated figure than most because she is capable of denying one father in the name of another. Trachman, like subsequent scholars, interprets Cervantes' Arab women in terms of passion. Whether inspired by Christianity or a Christian slave, these women are known on one level of Western consciousness in terms of a crafty willfulness, lust, and singular self-possession. As a point of contrast (and as an example of the distances scholarship has traversed in the last sixty years), Garcés, Smith, and Kahf explore the position of Zoraida in more modern terms according to signs and socio-economics. Where Garcés and Smith focus upon Zoraida as an object of economic exchange, Kahf explores the timing of Zoraida's appearance in literary history. Kahf argues that Zoraida is a transitional figure demarcating Western literature's turn away from depictions of the Muslim woman as vocal and willful to that of the immured princess, vulnerable and slight. For another perspective see Gerli's discussion of Zoraida in terms of Cervantes' revision of Neo-Gothic Reconquest mythology and, specifically, the cultural myth of La Cava Rumia. Gerli persuasively contends that Cervantes' consciously inverted the traditional story to produce an alternative myth "of a Christian Spain in interracial marriage...and resolution as it transcends cultural, geographical, and linguistic difference" (57).

From the first, Zoraida is represented as an object unable to demonstrate a sense of self; she enters the text nearly void of subjectivity. In contrast to the Captive, who actively interacts with the inn's guests and thus defines himself as part of their community, Zoraida is passive and mute and distanced. Indeed, she becomes visible to her new companions only after the Captive translates and thereby reconstructs her for interpretation by a specifically Christian audience. The success of Zoraida's cross-cultural enterprise depends upon the Captive; he must assume the authority of a culturally validated intermediary and build her within the telling of his own tale. It is not without consequences that Ruy Pérez "recognizes his situation...and therefore loads his tale...to win the support of all" (Hathaway 53).

Throughout the course of "The Captive's Tale," Zoraida speaks only once, and then it is in animated and declarative revision of her name: "No, not Zoraida: Maria, Maria" (I, 37; 251). Renamed Maria, Zoraida would be able to reinscribe her feminine identity within the realm of the Christian Virgin Mary. If renamed, Zoraida's Moorish identity would be replaced by a Christian ideal of feminine chastity. However, in the words of María Antonia Garcés, Zoraida is a "sign which fluctuates between history and fiction, between the Spanish and the Arab cultures, between the Castilian and the Arabic languages, between the socio-economic language of power and the unspoken language of desire" (69). Zoraida initiates her cross-cultural enterprise during a historical period when Catholic Spain successfully used the mechanisms of religious and racial intolerance to act upon its deep-seated resentment of Islamic wealth and culture. For Zoraida's longings to become more than curious fantasy, the Captive must help construct her new identity. First, however, as her betrothed and as a Spaniard, he must translate Zoraida for a specifically Spanish audience in a way that will paradoxically allow for his own reintroduction to Christian society. In reply to Dorotea's questioning of Zoraida's identity, the Captive translates his Lady into a context that can be validated by the inn's community. He explains, "She is dressed like a Moor, and her body is that of a Moor, but her soul is that of a very genuine Christian, for she has the immense desire to be one" (I, 37; 251). The Captive's pat answer does little to reveal the truth of Zoraida; she remains hidden. The veil of her dress expands metaphorically to conceal the entirety of her identity. But it is perhaps the veil, the active sign of obfuscation and difference, which allows the Captive to fragment Zoraida into her different parts. Her Moorish body is amputated from her Christian soul,

and so she is able to gain a positive identity within the inn's shared value system.

In Part I, Chapter 40, the Captive recalls being chained and confined within a prison yard encompassed by the high walls of a rich and noble Moor's house. One day he sees a stick suddenly protrude from one of the windows "covered over with heavy, tightly coiled grillwork" (I, 40; 264). Through a series of gestures, the stick singles out the Captive as the recipient of 10 cianiis, "coin of unrefined gold which the Moors used" (I, 40; 265). The Captive recounts,

[We] saw a singularly white hand. ... A little while later a small cross, fashioned of sticks... This seemed proof that some Christian lady was a prisoner in that house, ...but the intense whiteness of the hand we'd seen, and the jewelry we'd seen on it, made us reconsider and think. (I, 40; 265)

That the Captive is ultimately confused by this early encounter with Zoraida seems clear. The white hand at first seems only to signify a generous gentlewoman. However, the cross later extended revises and expands upon the meaning behind the hand, this time seeming to designate a Christian woman in need. And yet, that same hand, which first extended the stick and then the cross, still seems out of place. The extreme whiteness of the hand seems suspicious, and the jewelry is enough to cause the Captive to "reconsider and think" (I, 40; 265). Even on this most basic level of signs and symbols, Zoraida cannot be located.

Garcés points out that Zoraida is intrinsically a "foreign text" which is read by the Christian Captive and then incorporated into his own tale of captivity and liberation (67). Zoraida, however, is also a writer. She writes three letters to the Captive, offering herself and riches from her father's coffers in return for safe passage to Christian lands. Through these letters, written in Arabic and then translated by a renegade, we learn the uncertain nature of Zoraida's tale. In her first love letter Zoraida relates,

When I was a little girl, my father had a woman slave who taught me in my own language how to say Christian prayers, and told me a great deal about Lela Marién. But the woman died, though I know she did not burn in eternal flames, but went to Allah, because since then I've seen her twice, and she told me to go the Christian world to see Lela Marién. (I, 40; 266)

From the renegade's translation of Zoraida's letters, we find that on a very real level Zoraida's fervor for Christianity is less based on an

adoration of Christ than on grief for the death of a past slave. In keeping with this, Zoraida's fervor for Lela Marién, Arabic for the Virgin Mary, is not based on visions of the Madonna, but on the rather uncanonical visitations of a dead nurse. Zoraida's references to Lela Marién are further undercut by references to Allah, an Islamic frame that excludes Christ from its center. Zoraida's apparently effortless intermingling of the two religious systems does little to clear the ambiguity that surrounds her. This sense of ambiguity is only heightened by the second letter; there Zoraida invokes Lela Marién as a mystical agent for feminine vengeance. Reminding Ruy Pérez of their betrothal, Zoraida threatens, "remember, you've got to marry me, because if you don't I will ask Marién to punish you" (I, 40; 268). Zoraida's understanding of the Virgin Mary as an intercessor seems markedly different from that pronounced in Christian theology. Which raises an important question for readers: what is the nature of Zoraida's conversion? Is Zoraida the Christian convert the Captive wishes to portray, or is she the calculating and willful Moorish seductress of cultural mythology? Or is she both? To muddy the waters even further, Zoraida's own father later cautions, "don't think she's changing religions because she believes yours is any better—no, it's just that she knows how much easier it is to practice indecency in your lands than it is in ours" (I, 41; 278–79). Ironically, it is this self-interested design identified by a father that defines the conversion of another Muslim heroine nearly two centuries later: Safie, the lovely Arabian in *Frankenstein*.

Like Zoraida in *Don Quixote*, Safie represents a female cultural Other. She additionally presents, however, an inverted human mirror for the unnatural and marginalized creature. Gayatri Spivak has noted that "the very relationship between sexual reproduction and social-subject production—the dynamic nineteenth-century topos of feminism-in-imperialism—remains problematic within the limits of Shelley's text" (259). I would add that it is through Safie that the problematics of Shelley's position become fully known. Feminist interpretations often see Safie either as a literal representation of Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist ideals defined in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), or as a literary echo of *The New Arabian Nights* (translated edition 1814), two texts Mary Shelley was thought to have read shortly before writing her fantastic "waking dream" (Shelley, Author's Introduction 172).<sup>14</sup> However, Safie is first and fore-

<sup>14</sup> See in particular Mellor's *Mary Shelley* and Johnson.

most a scantily sketched and ambiguous signifier, difficult to read and difficult to fully know. In point of fact, newly recovered evidence suggests that Safie's indeterminacy may be symptomatic of the appropriation and reduction of a far different literary source. On December 5, 1816, Mary Shelley wrote her husband, "I have . . . finished the 4 Chap. of Frankenstein which is a very long one & I think you would like it" (*Letters* 18). Until very recently, scholars have read this letter in the context of the 1818 published novel, and have quite reasonably assumed that Mary referred to the chapter wherein Victor describes his pursuit of "nature to her hiding places" and gives the recipe for corpse reanimation (*Frankenstein* 32).<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Charles Robinson's edition of the *Frankenstein Notebooks*, however, a more accurate picture emerges. Robinson's carefully compiled and annotated study of the notebooks in which Mary drafted *Frankenstein* from 1816 to 1817 indicates that the Safie episode was in fact the long fourth chapter to which Mary referred.<sup>16</sup>

The 1816–17 draft of *Frankenstein* expanded upon a shorter *Ur-text* (now lost) to create a two-volume novel that was later revised into the three-volume text published in 1818. Noting a "textual trauma," Robinson speculates that the original draft of the Safie chapter (the fourth chapter in volume two of the 1816–17 draft) was considered overly long by either one or both of the Shelleys and was "reduced" into a much shorter fifth chapter in volume two of the three-volume 1818 text (lxxxiii). Robinson's study of the draft manuscripts reveals that the writing of the Safie chapter probably began in late November 1816 and concluded with the letter to Percy Shelley on December 5, 1816. Robinson promises to prove in a later article that the drafting and inspiration for Safie is most directly indebted to Mary Shelley's re-reading at this time of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. However, Mary's re-reading of the *Rights of Woman*, as indicated in her journal, did not begin until December 6, a day after Mary's letter to Percy Shelley. Mary Shelley's delineation of Safie (whom she alternately named "Maimouna" and "Amina" in drafts prior to April 1817) seems more easily associated with the conclusion of the Shelley's reading of *Don Quixote* on November 7, 1816. When considered a Romantic reading and rewriting of Cervantes' Zoraida, Mary Shelley's decision to place her Arabian

<sup>15</sup> Citations from *Frankenstein* are taken from the 1818 text, as edited by Hunter. All further citations are cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>16</sup> See Robinson's Introduction, specifically pages lix to lx, for a discussion of the Safie episode.

woman at the textual center of the novel seems all the more strategic, particularly as it complicates wholly positive readings of Safie as an educated feminine ideal. Though always dangerous to speculate on an author's exact motivations, it may have been that the drafting of Safie raised questions which in turn prompted Mary's review of her mother's famous feminist tract, rather than the other way around. Taken as a whole, Mary Shelley's *oeuvre* indicates a constant reworking and reassessment of her opinions and ideas regarding the proper division of the spheres, the relationship of the sexes, and the politics of oppression. Safie's presence in *Frankenstein* lends support for what Sylvia Bowerbank has called Mary Shelley's "contradictory mindedness": a problematic ambivalence which "sentimentally defends, and yet skeptically attacks, domestic and social tranquility" (419).

*Frankenstein* can be described in terms of a tripartite structure. Sections where Victor acts as primary consciousness flank the creature's narrative, which originally formed the second volume of the three-volume 1818 edition. The mid-section begins above a sea of ice and with the creature's demand that his faithless father, Victor Frankenstein, listen to the story of a monster's birth into consciousness. Critics have extensively commented on the fact that the creature centers his autobiographical account on the De Lacey family cottage.<sup>17</sup> It seems of particular importance to note, however, that the creature offers Safie's love letters as textual proof of his own tale. In addition, a new significance seems to come into play when the De Lacey cottage is realized as strangely reminiscent of Cervantes' inn, complete with a backdrop of European fear of and fascination with the East. Like the inn, the De Lacey cottage is a locus of reunions and storytelling. Here thwarted lovers are reunited. Here the human tales of Volney, Milton, and the cottagers are told. Here the creature first learns of love, and here he first learns what it is to hate:

Of what a strange nature is knowledge! ... I heard of the difference of sexes, and the birth and growth of children, how the father doted on the smiles of the infant, and the lively sallies of the older child, how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up in the precious charge, how the mind of youth expanded and gained knowledge, of brother, sister, and all various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds. But where were my friends and relations? (*Frankenstein* 81)

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Bowerbank, Rubenstein, and Zonana.

A voyeur in his tale but a mediator of objects in his telling, the creature speaks of the tender interactions of his "perfect" cottagers whom he spied upon to discover a facet of human existence defined by community and familial affection (76). Early on in his scotophilic enterprise he noticed the sense of incongruous melancholy that shadowed the otherwise ideal domestic scene. At first, the creature attributed the gloom of Felix and the tears of Agatha to their undeniable poverty; in time he learned that the melancholy stirred from far less typical grounds.

In a subtle structural echo of the imaginary Micomicona's history preceding Zoraida's arrival at Palomeque's inn, the De Laceys are reduced nobility who have been struck from positions of financial and social prosperity by an evil giant, here the French government. The creature recounts to a silent Victor the expulsion of the De Laceys from their ancestral home in France as punishment for aiding a persecuted Turkish merchant whose "religion and wealth" made him "obnoxious to the government" (82). Included in the creature's narrative is a tale remindful of Ruy Pérez's trips to the courtyard below Zoraida's "tightly coiled grillwork" (Cervantes I, 40; 264). In the creature's account, an outraged, indignant, and youthful Felix visits the "strongly grated window" of the imprisoned Turk's cell with promises of aid and succor (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 82). Eventually, the two men agree that, in reward for any acts of heroism, young Felix should receive the hand of the Turk's daughter, Safie, with whom Felix has fallen desperately and suddenly in love. Risking his family's safety, Felix works to secure the Turk's freedom, all the while thinking of Safie as the "treasure which would fully reward his toil and hazard" (82). Unfortunately for Felix, once liberated, the Turk declares that a Christian is no fit groom for his daughter and whisks Safie away. Adding insult to injury, Felix's role in the Turk's escape is soon discovered. Declared traitors, Felix and his family are sent into exile, impoverished and with only each other for comfort.

While ensconced in his hiding place, the creature observes the remarkable reactions of the cottagers following the arrival of Safie, "a lady on horseback, ... dressed in a dark suit and covered with a thick veil" (78). An object before the creature's curious and hungry gaze, Safie throws up her veil and the creature beholds "a countenance of angelic beauty and expression," her "hair of a shining raven black," her "eyes dark, but gentle," her "complexion wondrously fair" (78). Implicit to the creature's descriptions of Safie is a juxtapositioning

of dark with light, of spirit with flesh, of the hidden with the revealed. The creature's rhetorical strategy calls to mind a similar approach utilized by Ruy Pérez. Where Pérez fashioned Zoraida's tale to accommodate his own bid for reassimilation by the inn's community, so the creature, in making a case to Victor for Safie's acceptance, seizes upon the opportunity to further an appeal for compassion, charity, and legitimacy.

While telling Victor the tale of the De Laceys, the creature is careful to underscore the connection between Safie's plight and his own orphaned state. In the creature's telling of Safie's tale, she becomes more fair, more virtuous, and more wondrous than the Europeans to whom she has escaped. Agatha fades in the Arabian's company, her simple song "unlike the wondrous strain of the stranger" (79). Yet, as in the case of Zoraida, Safie's identity as an Other is meticulously maintained; she is designated more often by "stranger" and "sweet Arabian" than by her own name. According to the creature's account, Safie interacts with the De Lacey family through tearful gestures and sweet smiles: "I soon perceived that although the stranger uttered articulate sounds and appeared to have a language of her own, she was neither understood by nor herself understood the cottagers" (78). Outside the shared spoken language of the cottagers, Safie is as removed from direct exchange with her lover's family as is the text's covert creature. She and the cottagers must instead communicate via a problematic system of signs that collapses events and thoughts into clear-cut emotional responses. The creature tells Victor, "They made many signs which I did not comprehend, but I saw that her presence diffused gladness through the cottage, dispelling their sorrow as the sun dissipates the morning mists" (78).

As the tale of a foreign object out of place in a European context, it seems intriguing that Safie's story, like that of Zoraida, is inscribed by a packet of love letters—letters which were first dictated in Arabic, then translated into French, and finally summarized by the creature. The letters themselves are not reproduced as text within the novel. They remain, instead, peculiarly silent. Offered as proof of the creature's narrative, they are simultaneously qualified by the creature, who thrusts them aside by explaining, "at present I shall only have time to repeat the substance of them for you" (83). Through the creature's abridged version of these letters, we learn that, as in the case of Cervantes' Zoraida, a Christian nurse influenced Safie as a child. Her mother was a Christian Arab first enslaved by Turks and then able to win the heart of Safie's Muslim father. As the creature reports,

She instructed her daughter in the tenets of her religion and taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet [sic]. This lady died; but her lessons were indelibly impressed on the mind of Safie, who sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia and...being immured within the walls of a haram [sic], allowed only to occupy herself with puerile amusements, ill suited to the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and a noble emulation of virtue. (83)

The creature foregrounds among Safie's motivations a desire to escape the confines of tyrannical patriarchy defined by harems and "infantile amusements" (83). This passage is often understood within the context of Mary Wollstonecraft's repeated use of "Mohammedan" patriarchy as a metaphor for the subjugation and debasement of European women.<sup>18</sup> However, Safie's story seems to have as much in common with Cervantes' tale of an Eastern woman. Both Safie and Zoraida are corrupted from Islam by Christian proselytes. The mother figures in these two tales are female slaves with deep faith in Christianity's benefits for women. Zoraida's nurse communicates an obsession for Lela Marién, Christianity's chief female intercessor, and Safie's mother teaches her daughter that Christianity is synonymous with a form of feminine liberty. It seems significant that the letters of Safie and Zoraida are not available for perusal, particularly when we remember that, in both cases, the letters guarantee the legitimacy of their claims for assimilation by Christian Europe. Of no less importance, the creature echoes Zoraida's father's warning as the open motivation for Safie's cross

<sup>18</sup>In "Possessing Nature," Mellor writes, "Safie...is the incarnation of Mary Wollstonecraft in the novel. Wollstonecraft too traveled alone through Europe and Scandinavia; more importantly she advocated in *A Vindication* that women be educated as the companions of men and be permitted to participate in the public realm" (222-23). Rubenstein remarks similarly that, "Safie's mother...is, for all practical purposes, the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Confirmation that Mary Shelley was thinking of her mother is supplied shortly after" (169). By way of contrast, Zonana connects Safie and her letters with the *Arabian Nights*: "[The *Arabian Nights*] is ultimately the story of a woman who uses her spirit to resist being treated as pure flesh.... Safie's letters, in their thematic content, encapsulate a similar message, inherent in the monster's tale and in Mary Shelley's novel as a whole: that an animated human body is spirit as well as flesh and will demand treatment as such" (177). Zonana goes on to point out that Mary Shelley's journal records Mary reading *The New Arabian Nights* on June 25, 1817 (184), a point which, in light of more recent scholarship, problematizes attributing Safie to the reading of this particular text.

to Christian culture. In Mary Shelley's text, the Eastern woman is in open quest of the liberties promised by membership to a Christo-European culture.

If Cervantes' Zoraida is used as a model through which to judge Mary Shelley's Arab heroine, the suggestion arises that Shelley limited the scope of Safie's character in order to deliver a prescient commentary on women's increasing socioeconomic mobility and claims to self-determination. The Safie episode examines, among other things, the high price attached to feminine liberty in societies—Eastern and Western, Christian and Muslim—where perfect women are defined as perfectly dependant. Implicit within the creature's relating only the substance of Safie's letters is a reduction of her tale so that it might appeal to Victor Frankenstein, a tyrannical father who nevertheless considers himself an enlightened libertarian. One question should be, then, what has the creature left out? Has the creature interpreted Safie as faithfully as he would have Victor believe? It seems safe to say that, in any other romance, Safie might have been as confusing as she is angelic and as dangerous as she is charitable. Mary Shelley's revision of Cervantes' text to accommodate her more politically charged feminist concerns occurs with an attendant shift from Zoraida's reliance upon theological notions of necessity—it is not within her power to resist visions of Lela Marién—to Safie's secular ideology of free will. It is Zoraida's fidelity to her Christian cause, reinforced and underscored by the *Captive's* presence, that justifies her idealization by both the inn's community and readers. Safie's lack of fidelity to any cause higher than convenient love and safety from "a residence in Turkey [which] was abhorrent to her" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 85) signals a crucial point of revision. There is a problematic lack of moral justification for Safie's abandonment of her father and Fatherland. Safie's is a more dispassionately willful act than that of Zoraida, who is portrayed by Ruy Pérez as ecstatically faithful to Lela Marién at the cost of all she holds familiar and dear. Safie sacrifices nothing in her cross from East to West. She retains her stolen wealth and is able to move from the status of propertyless daughter to propertied wife. In result, she gains rather than sacrifices power. In addition, where Zoraida pleads with her beloved father for forgiveness and weeps upon leaving him, Safie simply quits the Turk, without remorse and seemingly devoid of sympathy for the father whose persecution made her escape to the West possible.

Through the creature's reduction of Safie to barely a cipher, Mary Shelley was able to emblemize questions raised by her own

reading of "The Captive's Tale" as primarily a story about the mechanisms of agency. This may explain, in part, the maddening disparity between Safie's lack of psychological development, a point in common with *Frankenstein's* other female characters, and the seeming disproportionate amount of time spent in telling her tale. Based on the differences between the two tales, Cervantes' original and Mary Shelley's revision, one begins to understand the latter as a far more ambiguous pronouncement on women of agency than previously assumed. Mary Shelley's tale is fully modern in its skeptical assessment of the conditions under which a daughter might justify betrayal of her father. While interrogating the ethics of agency, Mary Shelley's text ponders whether a woman's quest for selfdetermination must come at the cost of spiritual and moral authority.

In Shelley's text, as in that of Cervantes, an exotic feminine figure is known solely through the actions of cultural translation. Ironically, it is through the act of translation in both texts that all interpretative authority is lost. Zoraida's white hand stretches forth from her casement window to extend a Christian cross; Safie communicates through gestures and tears. Zoraida and Safie gain authority through a seeming passivity—but it is a passivity that is paradoxically active. In their silence, Zoraida and Safie contain an innate capacity to destabilize language. Implicit in their silence is the possibility of a misreading. Seen in one way, they are disobedient rebels able to literally throw over one language system of paternal authority to initiate selfdeterminacy in a second. As a result, both texts share a skeptical vision where the "truth" of cross-cultural experience is never fully revealed. Readers of these two texts are never allowed to hear the first-hand accounts of the Arabian Safie or the Moorish Zoraida, and, by refusing these women unmediated speech, Cervantes and Shelley individually question the parameters of truth and of truthful representation. Their texts ask, though to arguably different ends, where can truth and interpretative authority be confidently located? For the moment, the truths of Zoraida and Safie remain safe behind their veils.

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