

Spiritual Oppression in *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

This article connects Mary Shelley's depiction of a complex spiritual malaise in *Frankenstein* (1818) with Bahá'u'lláh's definition in the Kitáb-i-Íqán of the oppression experienced at the end of a reigning spiritual dispensation by the soul who seeks God but does not know where to look. The article examines the spiritual oppression of both the over-ambitious Victor Frankenstein, who strives for godlike power, and of his self denigrating creature, whose sense of monstrous difference prevents him from finding his place in the world. The article also explores the influence of Shelley's novel on two well-known contemporary critics, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, whose theories enact contemporary versions of the spiritual responses of Victor and his creature. Finally, the article uses the above analyses to cast a fresh light on the new emphasis on the feminine and maternal qualities of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í Revelation.

The mythic power of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) has been such that the novel has spawned hundreds of film progeny and given rise to increasingly varied and thoughtful literary analyses.¹ Critics have branched out recently to examine not only Shelley's other works but also how Shelley acts as a "sensitive register" of her milieu, "elaborat[ing] on [its] most compelling trends" (Lowe-Evans 1).² Especially important for our purposes, they have also begun to explore how Shelley critiques the response by early nineteenth-century Romantic writers to the revolutionary and apocalyptic excitement of the times. As Abrams notes, "The French Revolution had aroused in many sympathizers the millennial expectations that are profoundly rooted in Hebrew and Christian tradition" (Abrams 12). When the French Revolution disappointed their apocalyptic political hopes, British Romantic writers turned instead to a "spiritual revolution" and "proposed that 'the new earth and new heaven' of Revelation is available here . . . if only we can make our visionary imagination triumph over our senses" (Abrams 13).

Shelley was in an ideal position to register and reflect on these Romantic ideas as the daughter of two of the leading radical thinkers of the day: her father, William Godwin, was a proponent of "egalitarianism" and critic of established institutions and ideas about justice; her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was the first great feminist thinker and writer (Lowe-Evans 2). She also spent her late teens and early twenties (during which time *Frankenstein* was written) as the companion and wife of the visionary apocalyptic Romantic poet Percy Shelley. However, Shelley possessed her own "unique perspective on the legacy of Romanticism on the perils of imaginatively remaking our minds and our world" (Fisch, Mellor, and Schor 9). For example, in novels after *Frankenstein* Shelley both uses and critiques millennial aspirations: in *Valperga* (1823) she uses the teachings of a contemporary millenarian, Joanna Southcott, as the basis of the character Beatrice (Sunstein 53), a religious prophetess who is destroyed by her visionary imagination (O'Sullivan 140); in *The Last Man* (1826) she portrays an apocalypse that is not followed by a millennium, even though the millennial outcome of apocalypse "had previously been celebrated in some of the great works of the Romantic epoch," including that of Percy Shelley (Paley 110). It is in her masterpiece *Frankenstein*, however, that I hope to show she offers her most thoughtful critique of Romantic ideas and of the special "predicament of the creative female" (O'Sullivan 140). Both registering and reflecting on the spiritual condition of her time, when numerous groups were anticipating the Return of Christ and just before the declaration of the Báb and the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith, Shelley offers an extraordinarily moving and thoughtful depiction of a spiritual malaise composed of patriarchal gender relations, perverted apocalyptic dreams, and unsatisfied spiritual yearnings.

Besides registering her own time, Shelley has also powerfully influenced our own. *Frankenstein* reveals her "as a 'prodigious generator' of cultural myths, ethical conundrums, and haunting metaphors" (Lowe-Evans 1). In this role she has again become a favorite for contemporary literary critics who have used the novel as a "touchstone" for everything from investigations of the nature of female authorship, to theories about the construction of identity and Eve's role in *Paradise Lost*.³ While not specifically using Shelley's novel as a touchstone, the works of

contemporary critics Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva powerfully reflect *Frankenstein's* influence and use some of its key mythic formulations. Derrida, the founder of the philosophic theory of deconstructionism, seems both to share Victor's attitudes and to celebrate the monster's situation as one of the central symbols in his analysis of contemporary theories in the social sciences. Kristeva, a Lacanian psychoanalyst and literary critic, investigates at length the complex of ambivalent feelings experienced by the infant toward the mother and their embodiment in language and culture, an emotional complex of which the monster represents a unique and most powerful example. I will argue that both critics offer contemporary examples of the apocalyptic confusion and spiritual deprivation depicted so powerfully in the novel.

As the basis for my analysis of the spiritual malaise so powerfully portrayed in the novel and manifested in the contemporary critics. I will use the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith, which directly address the complex of hopes and fears that characterizes the early nineteenth century's mixture of apocalyptic dreams and patriarchal assumptions as well as our own later version of these spiritual dilemmas. After establishing the key terms in the Bahá'í framework that will be brought to bear on the novel, I will then examine the novel in two parts: first looking at the overreaching spiritual aspiration and patriarchal domination that characterizes Victor Frankenstein's creation of and response to his creature, and then at the creature's corresponding self-denigration and acceptance of his maker's perspective (which is in many ways a portrayal of the predicament of nineteenth-century women) as he seeks to discover who he is and how he relates to the rest of the world. The paper will then explore how Derrida and Kristeva enact contemporary versions of the spiritual responses of Victor and his creature. The last part of the paper will return to the Bahá'í framework, using the earlier literary analyses to cast a new light on some aspects of the new spiritual paradigm provided by the Bahá'í Revelation which directly answer the needs and correct the misapprehensions of both Victor and his creature.

The Bahá'í Theory of a Spiritual Dispensation

Shelley's novel portrays Victor Frankenstein's and his monster's methods of constituting the self as symbolically suggesting two kinds of response to the oppression experienced by the soul which is unable to satisfy its spiritual needs, by the soul seeking to find God and not knowing where to look. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh discusses at some length the nature of this oppression, linking it to "the want of capacity to acquire spiritual knowledge and apprehend the Word of God" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 32). This lack of capacity is not only an individual failure but is also common to the human condition during periods of civilization marked by a waning of spiritual guidance—periods such as the early nineteenth century when the teachings of Christianity, which had dominated the West for almost two thousand years, no longer seem able to spiritually vivify the souls of many believers. Bahá'u'lláh identifies the oppression which accompanies this loss of spiritual capacity as one of the signs marking the end of a reigning spiritual dispensation and the imminent appearance of a new Revelation. Thus, it is "the essential feature of every Revelation. Unless it cometh to pass, the Sun of Truth will not be made manifest. For the break of the morn of divine guidance must needs follow the darkness of the night of error" (31).

Before applying this understanding of spiritual oppression to *Frankenstein*, we need to examine one more term—that of the Manifestation of God—and to consider its role in affecting the capacities of the soul at the beginning and end of a spiritual dispensation. Bahá'u'lláh explains that "since ... no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven" (*Gleanings* 66). This "stainless soul" is more than a trace of Divine Being, known only by its effects, to use terminology we will discuss in more detail when we examine Derrida's theories. That Soul is the Manifestation of the otherwise unknowable Essence, the "Primal Mirror" of the divine, "the Exponent[] ... on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose." By His Revelation "all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty, and grace, are made manifest" (*Gleanings* 47–48). Furthermore, without the aid of this Manifestation the human being is incapable of understanding or responding to the divine. While the human being contains a trace of the divine, and while God has "focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes" "upon the reality of man,"

These energies ... lie latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. (*Gleanings* 65–66)

Only recognition of the Manifestation for that age can free the individual to realize her spiritual potential.

When a dispensation draws to an end, humankind loses the capacity to know that it is a tarnished mirror, that it has lost the essence of faith and is now carrying out a purely formal religious exercise. Thus it loses the capacity to respond to or even be aware of the loss of the sign of true Being. This is the condition of spiritual oppression which we will see portrayed in *Frankenstein* and embodied in the contemporary theories of Derrida and Kristeva. However, this negative understanding of the end of a dispensation is only half the picture. When a dispensation loses its power to spiritually awaken humanity, then a new Manifestation appears with the power to cleanse the dross from the mirror of the inner being of humankind so that individuals can again perceive and respond to the Manifestation as the sign of Being. Less than twenty years after Shelley's novel was written, such a new Manifestation appeared in the form of the Báb and His Revelation marks the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith. It is this new spiritual dispensation which allows us to grasp fully the nature of the oppression portrayed in the novel and demonstrated by the critics.

In many ways Victor's narrative powerfully figures the oppression that results from an overreaching ambition that divorces the scientific from the spiritual and a harshly patriarchal understanding of gender relationships that identifies women with domestic duties and with nature; this mode of response emphasizes taking control of nature as a defense against the unknown or the incomprehensible. Derrida's theories will provide a contemporary working out of Victor's assumptions. The monster's story, symbolically embodying key elements of Shelley's own story, conveys the psychological and spiritual oppression that results from a traditionally "feminine" response to domination and deprivation; here the response involves self-destructive submission to the definitions of self provided by others and a failure to recognize one's inner spiritual reality. Kristeva's theories will shed light on the implications of this complex in a contemporary formulation. Both Victor's and the monster's oppression can be related to a spiritual failure connected to a devaluation of the feminine; both fail to acknowledge or respect the caring, nurturing dimension of psychological and spiritual strength.

Again the novel and the critics present only the negative side of the picture. The subsequent appearance of the Bahá'í Faith with its emphasis on the feminine and maternal qualities of the Manifestation and its revolutionary new understanding of the spiritual role of the feminine would inaugurate a new spiritual maternal paradigm which answers the critics and satisfies the spiritual needs of the novel's characters.

Victor Frankenstein's Intellectual/Spiritual Oppression

Fascinated from childhood with metaphysical speculation, Victor Frankenstein's search for intellectual and spiritual knowledge has no positive outlet. His early interest in alchemy leads him nowhere, and his father can provide no meaningful alternatives. Both father and son are "afflicted with 'oppression' and hardship, knowing not whither to turn for guidance" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 32). Thus Victor arrives at university possessing an intense desire to discover the secrets of nature, a desire combined with spiritual ignorance. Furthermore, his powerful intellectual drive is also combined with an ignorance of his own emotional needs or feelings. At home his extremely self-sacrificing mother and adopted sister Elizabeth had taken on all the nurturing, care-giving responsibilities, leaving Victor free to pursue passionately his intellectual interests with little regard for others. His mother's death just before Victor leaves home symbolically suggests the severing of his links with nurturing domesticity.

Although Victor rationalizes his scientific work at university as a means of benefiting humankind, Victor, nonetheless, rapidly begins to reveal the signs of his spiritual and emotional inadequacy (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 52). Having discovered the secret of life, Victor decides to begin work at once on creating a human being, explaining with unconscious hubris that he had no doubt of his ability to give life to "an animal as complex and wonderful as man" (52). Next he decides to make the creature "of a gigantic stature," "as the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to ... [his] speed," completely ignoring the effect that his decision might have on the emotional well-being of his creature. These glaring examples of his spiritual and emotional emptiness are complicated by more devious faults. The only time he thinks of the possible feelings of his creature is when he fantasizes how he will create a new species "that would bless ... [him] as its creator and source" and anticipates from this new species a gratitude such as "no father could claim ... so completely ... should [I] deserve theirs" (52-53). Thus Victor's initial desire to "bring a torrent of light into our dark world" (52) has metamorphosed into a desire to attain fame and godlike power through the creation of a wholly dependent and controllable surrogate family. What had been spiritual ignorance and emotional inadequacy has rapidly given way to corruption, illustrating the oppression that comes when "the portals of divine unity and knowledge ... will have been closed and ... corruption will have usurped the place of righteousness" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 29).

Perhaps what is most original about Shelley's portrayal of Victor's corruption is her linking of intellectual overreaching with the appropriation and distortion of the maternal role. In artificially creating a humanlike being, Victor is doing in a complicated way what any mother does naturally (Homans 101). Furthermore, Victor's response to his creature after its "birth" resembles the "revulsion against newborn life" sometimes experienced as a result of

normal birthing (Moers 93). At the moment that the creature comes alive, Victor suddenly sees for the first time how ugly it is. In recognizing his creature's loathsomeness, Victor seems to be experiencing what Julia Kristeva calls "abjection," the feeling of repulsion experienced not only by the mother but by the infant from the mother as the child tries to establish its own identity vis-à-vis the mother—i.e., casting off and being cast off by the mother. Kristeva extends this sense of repulsion to the crossing of forbidden boundaries, such as in incest or necrophilia (*Powers of Horror* 1–17). I will discuss the implications of Kristeva's theory later; for now, it is sufficient to note that Victor's sense of horror at the creature's ugliness seems to involve a repulsion from the creature's blurring of identity between the animal and the human, the living and the dead, a horror ultimately associated with being unable to extricate one's identity from being blurred with that of the mother.

Victor's sudden and dramatic awareness of the creature's ugliness also suggests Victor's first partial awareness of his own failure as a creator/parent. This recognition contains within it the possibility of his recognizing that he has committed a spiritual transgression (that the creature is created in some sense in his own spiritual image), but he denies this insight, and rather than take responsibility for what he has done, he flees, projecting his transgression onto the creature, calling him a "demoniacal corpse" (Shelley 57). Ironically, the incident that sparks his flight is the creature's attempt to reach out and establish an emotional bond with his creator through touching him. The incident seems deliberately to evoke Victor's assumption of the role of "mother" and to place the creature in the role of an infant instinctively attempting to establish contact with the one who gave it birth. Victor's repugnance at being called upon to play a maternal role combined with his sudden realization that he does not have full control over his newly awakened creature complicates his sense of guilt and contributes to his decision to abandon the new life he has created. Both psychologically and spiritually, Victor's creation and subsequent rejection of the monster seem to circle around his ambivalence over maternal powers and qualities.

Unable to face the sight of his creature and all that he symbolically represents, the scientist flees. But, of course, he takes his emotionally and spiritually flawed self with him, and his actions again and again reflect this limited, fractured self. His thinking is characterized by his inability to perceive or respond to the emotional needs of others and by a rationalized obsession with safeguarding his own reputation and safety. When his creature murders his brother and implicates an innocent young woman in the crime, Victor is incapable of informing the authorities about the existence of the creature, excusing himself by assuming that no one will believe him, that he will be thought crazy. Later when he actually meets and converses with the creature for the first time on the glacial slopes of Mont Blanc, he is incapable of responding to the monster's story of loneliness and persecution by providing any kind of nurturance for his creature.

The Monster's Story of Psycho-Spiritual Oppression

Victor's tale of the attempt to control emotional ambivalence and perverted spiritual yearnings through overreaching, obsessive technological creation is not, however, the novel's only autobiographical account of the response to spiritual oppression. When the creature confronts Victor on the slopes of Mont Blanc and tells the scientist his story, we realize for the first time that the creature, too, faces his own form of spiritual oppression. With the switch in narrative points of view, we suddenly also face a switch in the symbolic significance of the creature. Up to now, the creature has been presented from Victor's perspective, as the embodiment of the scientist's transgression—the mirror of his monstrous inner world. However, as the creature begins to recount his story and share his earliest memories, we suddenly realize that despite his unnatural creation and grotesque appearance the creature's mental world is very like that of an ordinary young human. Here we encounter one of the strangest features of the novel and one of its most effective. Without giving any explanation for how the monster acquired a normal human inner world, Shelley chooses to portray the creature as passing through the various stages of normal infancy and developing equivalent moral and spiritual understanding.

One source of Shelley's mode of portraying the creature's development seems to have its roots in a conversation between Lord Byron and Percy Shelley concerning the scientific origin of life, a conversation she had I listened to the night before she experienced the "waking dream" that gave birth to *Frankenstein*. Apparently troubled by the two men's purely technical considerations regarding the way "the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth" ("Introduction" 9), Shelley seems to have immediately grasped how totally the men left out considerations of the human needs of such a creation. In effect, she seems to have asked what would it feel like to be the child of such a procedure.

Shelley was highly sensitized to the plight of an unwanted child by her own difficult childhood, which began with the death of her famous mother ten days after Mary was born and was complicated by her father's remarriage when Mary was four to a woman who was jealous of Shelley's famous mother and resented Shelley's superiority to the stepmother's own daughter from another father (Sunstein 30). Perhaps the most painful result of the new marriage, for Shelley, was her father's withdrawal to his study and his remoteness from her (Sunstein 30–

31). Shelley was never to accept her stepmother and continued to believe all her life that her father loved her “more than anyone else in the world” (Sunstein 33).

However, by the time she began *Frankenstein* at eighteen, she had become even more sensitized to tensions surrounding parents and children. She had no contact with her father for two years after he had rejected her for eloping at sixteen with the unhappily married young poet Percy Shelley. Furthermore, as she began what was to be her most famous novel, she had already lost her first child, a premature baby who died after two weeks, and her second was an infant of six months. The shock over her father’s rejection, as well as the new responsibilities and emotions that motherhood brought, tempered her to the overreaching “male” ambition and aspiration that she had partly shared with Percy (Sunstein 107). These newer experiences of childbirth, motherhood, and infant death, combined with her own childhood sense of maternal deprivation, all coalesced in her imaginative creation of the creature. In bringing all her imaginative sympathies to bear on the physically grotesque, mechanically constructed, emotionally uncared-for creature, Shelley seems to have been freed to imagine and to explore feelings and concerns that she would not otherwise have dared to acknowledge. In so doing, she would hold up a mirror to nineteenth-century women’s unsatisfied emotional and spiritual yearnings.

The creature’s own emotional and spiritual yearnings are developed in the context of responding, while hidden, to a spied-on surrogate family. Deserted by Victor, the creature eventually finds shelter in a hut behind the cottage of the De Lacey’s, an educated family fallen on difficult times. Secretly watching the loving behavior of the blind father with his grown son and daughter, the creature first starts to learn about feelings such as pity, kindness, and love, seeing them reflected on the faces of the cottagers. Eventually, the creature comes to regard the De Lacey’s as his protectors, but he knows enough from earlier persecution by peasants because of his monstrous appearance to conceal his presence and his feelings from them for fear of being spurned. His role of mainly passive observer, biding his own needs and emotions, powerfully captures Shelley’s own childhood situation. She later wrote that by the age of twelve her feelings were “covert—except that Mrs. Godwin had discovered long before my excessive & romantic attachment to my father” (*Letters* 2:215). Those “covert” feelings also included her anger and resentment of her father and stepmother, but these emotions too had had to be suppressed due to “her inhibitions as a female, an idealist, and by her training” (Sunstein 35). She was not alone in her need to suppress unsatisfied feelings and the accompanying anger toward those who failed to recognize those needs. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, nineteenth-century writing by women is filled with images of women suppressing their inner worlds, forcing their lives to fit a mold from which they burst forth imaginatively in images of mad and violent doubles when the anger brought by such suppression can “no longer be contained” (85).

The creature’s acquisition of literacy raises to a crisis point his search for self-understanding and ontological meaning. Obtaining a copy of *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s retelling of the story of humankind’s creation and fall in Genesis, the creature—like Mary Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft—searches for a way to situate himself in the text.⁴ He is struck by both his similarities to and his differences from “our first parents.” Like Adam, he is alone, but unlike Adam he does not have the benefit of a loving creator. Reading Milton’s mythic poem “as a true history” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 126), he is unable to find in it a symbolic representation of his lonely, un-nurtured state, or an answer to his troubled ontological questions. Instead, he is left feeling more deprived and isolated than ever, identifying more with Satan than Adam in his envy of the cottagers’ joy.

The creature’s ontological search and moral ponderings seem to be the representation of Shelley’s own unanswered ontological questions and the embodiment of her own sense of spiritual deprivation. His “unnatural,” originless state mirrors not only Shelley’s motherlessness but also her own sense of a gifted girl’s abnormality. On the one hand, she was encouraged to write, but, on the other, she was also discouraged from putting herself forward and was not educated as well as her brothers (Sunstein 42, 40). Lacking the companionship of equals, she chose to be alone much of the time as a young girl, resorting to reading and daydreams to satisfy unmet needs, defining her sense of self through poring over the books of her parents (Sunstein 48, Gilbert and Gubar 223). Through the creature’s dilemma, Shelley seems to portray her childhood attempt to find out “How do I fit in? Where do I belong?”

If *Paradise Lost* stimulates but does not answer the creature’s ontological cravings, the next text he finds and reads seems to answer some of his questions directly. He discovers Victor’s journal account of the four months preceding his animation. There in gruesome detail he learns the secrets of his physical construction and of his maker’s revulsion toward his hideous form. Grasping the implications of Victor’s story, he immediately realizes that his physical grotesquerie is the embodiment of Victor’s emotional and spiritual defects. He notes that “God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even for the very resemblance” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 126–27). Thus the monster is forced to recognize that his very form belies his desire for a transcendent and good God.

The monster's awareness that he is a grotesque imitation of Victor's normal form also captures the nineteenth-century woman's sense that physically and emotionally she is an aberration from the male norm. Indeed, womanhood was defined as a kind of illness: a lady was expected to be frail and sickly and practiced "tight-lacing and vinegar-drinking" to look suitably beautiful and frail (Gilbert and Gubar 54). Nineteenth-century women writers, both reflecting and rebelling against these imprisoning gender definitions, "often envision an 'outbreak' that transforms their characters into huge and powerful monsters" (Gilbert and Gubar 86). The creature's grotesqueness seems to express such an outbreak, embodying in part Shelley's repressed anger over societal pressures to be a lady. Such an unconscious resistance is all the more ironic because in real life Shelley inevitably surprised new acquaintances by her ladylike, frail, and quiet demeanor (Sunstein 244). The monster's discovery of his origins through reading a journal also seems to be directly modeled on Shelley's own situation. She too as an adolescent may have read her mother's love letters to her father "during the first four months of their relationship in 1796" which describe in loving detail her mother's feelings during the time when Mary was probably conceived (Rubenstein 170). Indeed, the creature's disgust at this account of his origins may in part express Shelley's adolescent discomfort with the evidence of her parents' sexuality.

The monster comes to feel his abjectness in the most comprehensive form, instinctively aware that his physical being violates the boundaries between self and other, just as Victor's artificial act of mothering also violates the boundary between procreation and creation. Moreover, he can find no explanation for his moral being, no source for his spiritual yearnings. Unsatisfied by his discovery that he is nothing but filthy materiality—the monstrous product of Victor's technological manipulation—the novel offers him no other explanations for his longing for transcendence. The creature is truly spiritually oppressed.

The creature's spiritually deprived state offers us a second, more poignant representation of the oppression that Bahá'u'lláh claims is "the essential feature of every Revelation," that "grievous" oppression in which "a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 31). However, unlike Victor's aggressive intellectual response to spiritual and emotional confusion—his determination to understand and control the secrets of nature—the creature experiences a self-denigratory response to emotional and spiritual deprivation—submission to the other's ability to define the self. He accepts Victor's journal as his Genesis even though he finds it even less satisfactory than *Paradise Lost* as an answer to the cravings of his inner self.

Above all, the creature yearns to be nurtured—emotionally and spiritually. He searches out his physical creator to fulfill that need, bestowing on Victor not only filial affection but also the reverence and respect of a creature for his God. Confronting the scientist, the creature calls himself "thy creature" and vows to be "even mild and docile to my natural lord and king" (96). The creature's reverence for Victor suggests both Shelley's personal history and the whole structure of the patriarchal nineteenth-century family. Shelley later wrote that as a child she had thought of her father as a "God" and remembered "many childish instances of the excess of attachment" (Letters 1:296). This adulation was in part the result of the admiration and respect for her father's greatness that were instilled in her: "His very name and his followers' admiration intensified the child's reverence" (Sunstein 27). "Moreover, he was reserved and to a child, awesome" (Sunstein 24). However, these early feelings were strengthened after her father's remarriage by her resentment of her stepmother, who, she felt, kept her father away from her, and by her father's tendency to be withdrawn and remote (Mellor 13, Sunstein 33). All these feelings left Mary adoring her father but hungry for more recognition from him.

Moreover, like her monster, Shelley also seems to have "needed transcendence" (Sunstein 43). Offered only a vague theism by her father, whose real religion was humanism, and discouraged from respecting the religion of her country by her stepmother's hypocritical practice, Shelley seems to have found an unconscious outlet for her religious yearnings in her worship of her father and in an "idiosyncratic faith" in her mother's spirit watching over her (Sunstein 43). Angry and hurt by her father's rejection of her after her elopement with Percy Shelley, Shelley seems to have bequeathed to her monster both her unsatisfied childhood idolatry and her adult resentment of her father's hypocrisy.

In identifying his human creator with a spiritual Creator, the monster experiences the confusion between "God as Creator and humanity as creature" that Ross Woodman identifies with the Romantic poets, in general, and the philosopher Nietzsche, in particular ("End of the World" 63). He also falls into the idolatry that Bahá'u'lláh describes as "servitude to the gods of ... idle fancies—gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of, their wretched worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection" (*Gleanings* 93). In the monster's case his idolatry of his flawed creator and his acceptance of his own inferiority, embodied in his gross physical form, symbolically capture the acceptance by nineteenth-century women of the dictates of the patriarchal family with its elevation of the father to godlike

authority and its perception of women's physical, intellectual, and emotional inferiority, and its insistence that they fit their inner lives to its Procrustean bed.⁶

The monster's face-to-face encounter with Victor and his enunciation of Victor's moral responsibility bring to a climax the different responses to spiritual oppression experienced by the two. Victor, anticipating what Woodman calls "the moral and spiritual crisis" of the nineteenth century, the "usurpation of power that belongs to God" ("End of the World" 63), first technically creates a humanlike being which in some unexplained way turns out to possess a fully human inner world and then fails to come to terms with the moral and emotional responsibility that French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas associates with encountering the face of another (352). He fails to recognize the sign of the soul, what Bahá'u'lláh calls the sign of God, in the monster's scarred face.⁷ However, the monster's confused acceptance of Victor as his god suggests Mary Shelley's representation of her own childhood situation and of the socially and spiritually oppressed understanding of the women of her day who allowed their understanding of themselves to be dictated from without by fathers, husbands, and society.

***Frankenstein* and Derrida's Theory of Centerlessness**

Victor's assumption he possesses the power to create a new species of being is echoed in the thinking of the influential postmodern theorist Jacques Derrida, who himself seems to find a parallel between his theory and Shelley's novel. He ends "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1967) by evoking an image that seems to be deliberately drawn from *Frankenstein* to characterize the new birth in the human sciences that will affirm the ability to play (with structures, interpretations, words) without the limitations imposed by a "center," or "fundamental ground," or "origin" or "end" (279). Self-consciously using the language of "Childbearing," he speaks of the "*conception, formation, gestation, and labor*" of the "as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so...only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" (293). Although Derrida seeks to celebrate the birth of this formless monster as an escape from an outmoded and imprisoning sense of origin and structure that he finds in Western ontology, he also includes himself among those who "turn their eyes away" (293) from its sight. His ambivalence powerfully connects him to Victor Frankenstein. Furthermore, Derrida seems, like Mary Shelley, to sense that one whole era of history has come to an end and that whatever the future brings will be different and unimaginable. Like Shelley, although living over a century-and-a-half later, he still seems to suffer under the oppression of living in the last days of a cycle of Revelation. While he theorizes that he is living at the end of Western philosophy's 2500-year-old metaphysical way of thinking and partially grasps the nothingness identified by Bahá'u'lláh as characterizing the moment when one spiritual dispensation ends—the moment when "the entire creation hath passed away!" (*Gleanings* 29)—he cannot grasp the new creation that follows this apocalyptic moment. He imagines that the state of centerlessness, of which he is so vividly aware, will itself usher in the future. But his vision of the centerless future is precisely what Shelley's creature embodies.

The monster can find no origin or purpose for his creation beyond being a function of Victor's obsessive ambition. Rather than celebrating his freedom to create his own meanings, however, the monster offers a sober critique of the dangers of centerlessness. He does not deny his need for a center, instead he accepts a purely material and mechanistic center—as the physical product of Victor's technology. But Shelley has unsettled this reading by giving the creature a powerful inner world that cannot be accounted for by his creation and that yearns for spiritual meaning and transcendence. Unsatisfied with the purely material base for his origin, the creature finally looks to Victor as his center and god, and grants to the scientist the exclusive power to render him happy. When his technical maker completely fails to satisfy his needs, the creature is left with no center to his existence but his obsession with exacting revenge on his parent-god, with making him suffer as the monster has. His acts of violence not only destroy all those close to Victor but also testify to the monster's destruction of his own instinctive moral values and create his own subsequent self-loathing. Looking back on his crimes, the monster explains, "My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy, and when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 212). Ironically, when it is too late, the monster discovers he does have a moral center. The ultimate freedom of this centerless being, the monstrous freedom to destroy what he cannot acquire, casts an ominous shadow on Derrida's theory.

Derrida's terrifying, centerless future, like Shelley's creature, also raises the vexing question of responsibility. When the wartime letters and articles of a prominent associate, Paul de Man, proved de Man to have been actively involved in writing Nazi propaganda, Derrida himself spoke of deconstructionism, his new theoretical understanding, not in terms of the play of signs without a reference outside themselves, but in terms of the trace left by a past that must be remembered even as it is forgotten. He declares in an interview that "'Auschwitz' . . . has never been 'very far from my thoughts' and notes that "the thought of the trace, without which there is no deconstruction, is a thought about cinders and the advent of an event, a date, a memory" (*Logomachia* 211). Here

Derrida seems to contradict the very strong denial of origins in “Structure, Sign, and Play” and suggest that at least the trace of a memory of the origins of an unthinkable event of the past remains. But Victor’s inability to recognize the trace of the other in the face of the monster, and the moral responsibility that Levinas (and implicitly here Derrida) attach to it, suggest that humankind without the aid of spiritual understanding is incapable of meeting its moral responsibilities.

While Shelley’s novel powerfully portrays Bahá’u’lláh’s discussion of the oppression that marks the last days of a spiritual dispensation, it suggests as well the possibility of the new dawn to come that such oppression also indicates. Both Victor’s search for the secrets of the physical universe and the creature’s search for his origins and for a spiritual center to his existence represent the early nineteenth century’s search for a new understanding of the relation of the human being to the universe. However, the narrative’s portrayal of the disastrous results of Victor’s unthought-out creation of a new being and the creature’s desperate acceptance of Victor (and mechanistic thinking) as his god, signal the failure of such a search at the end of a dispensation and leave the way open for a new spiritual vision to be revealed. As Woodman notes in his article on the changes in the nineteenth century’s understanding of its relationship to God, each soul must expire symbolically before it is able to be recreated through the coming of a new Revelation (“End of the World” 61)⁸

The creature’s story powerfully suggests that passing away of all the known understandings of human reality. Nothing about him fits what we ordinarily associate with a human being, neither his grotesque physical makeup nor his technological creation. It is only his possession of an inner spiritual reality that marks him as symbolically representing a human being. Shelley presents this inner reality as symbolically expiring, as facing the unthinkable nothingness of its creation and situation without the knowledge of a new Revelation.⁹

Derrida’s theory of deconstruction gives us a contemporary restatement of the passing away of all meaning and the facing of nothingness so powerfully portrayed in the novel. In “Differance” (1968), as part of his investigation of the nature of meaning in language, he defines the *trace*.¹⁰ He characterizes it as suggesting an aspect of language, and of human understanding, that is not and cannot be fully and absolutely manifest, that senses something beyond itself, just as the unconscious cannot be fully known by consciousness. Derrida, however, pessimistically feels that even the knowledge of the power of language to evoke a referent beyond itself, to evoke a trace of an otherwise unknowable reality, has been lost. Thus the trace of the trace has been lost. Derrida finally uses the word *differance* to capture the play in language (as well as in metaphysical understanding) brought on by language’s haunting suggestion of an unknowable absolute referent: the difference between presence (the total presence of the subject to his or her consciousness) and present (subject’s temporal existence), between Being (the state where humanness is fully revealed) and beings. Because he feels that “there is no name for this, not even essence or Being. . . . there never has been and never will be a unique word, a master name There will be no unique name, not even the name of Being” (“Differance” 159). But, in fact, Bahá’u’lláh defines this master name and announces that a unique word has been spoken which overcomes the loss of the knowledge of the trace of the unknowable. Moreover, for the first time the understanding of why we forget that we have lost the knowledge of the difference between Being and being and of how to overcome this loss has been revealed.

The Unique Word and the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh

The Manifestation of God, according to Bahá’u’lláh, makes it possible for the individual to become aware of not the trace of Being, to use Derrida’s terminology, but the presence of Being. Bahá’u’lláh’s writings define the Manifestation’s person and words as more than a trace; they are a *sign* of the divine, of a real essence that provides a ground or origin or center by Being. As we noted earlier, toward the end of a dispensation, humankind loses the capacity to respond to or even to be aware of the loss of the sign of true Being. This is the condition which characterizes Derrida as he describes the loss of the trace of the trace. In this state, language loses its power to evoke Presence and falls into an endless chain of words referring only to other words. It is at this point that a new Manifestation appears with the power to awaken those who recognize Him to the presence of One who is the Sign of Being and thus to a reality outside an endless free play of signifiers.

Bahá’u’lláh specifically links the power of the Manifestation to the creation of a unique Word. Bahá’u’lláh writes that “He Who hath been manifested is the Hidden Mystery, the Treasured Symbol, through Whom the letters B and E (Be) have been joined and knit together” (*Prayers and Meditations* 321). This unique Word recreates and reanimates the trace of the divine that is present in all aspects of life and most completely in human reality. It rekindles the human desire for and capacity to find the Sign of God revealed in the Manifestation. It creates the capacity to understand the Words spoken by the Manifestation, and awakens the capacity to perceive new meanings in older words and thus, in effect, it creates new selves. It also circumscribes *differance*, the capacity of words to endlessly evoke a referent that is not there, and provides for the period of the dispensation a center or moral standard against which to measure meaning. Bahá’u’lláh explains that in this day humankind has a new capacity not available

earlier to understand the whole cycle of the rise and fall of dispensations. Thus, as Derrida seems to partially intuit, this is the time of a birth that is not commensurate with the birth of earlier dispensations. This is the beginning of human maturity in which we can grasp the whole panorama of humankind's spiritual history. For the first time, we can understand how the centers that past dispensations provided can no longer hold and how a new center, a new sign, can be revealed. Thus we can accept the unifying but progressive nature of spiritual understanding and its ability to partake of a multiplicity of meanings.

Frankenstein and the Quest for the Presence of Being

Let us return to *Frankenstein* with this new understanding and terminology. The monster's face, however configured by human error, symbolizes the human being or Levinas's "other," with its implicit moral claims. His inner self figures the soul—the tarnished mirror or effaced trace of the transcendent—in the world. As the embodiment of nineteenth-century women's (and Shelley's in particular) spiritual deprivation and oppression, he symbolizes their inability to clean that mirror, to find the trace of the divine in themselves, or interpret it in texts. He represents the gap in spiritual understanding that exists just before the appearance of the Manifestation who recreates the power of words to evoke the sign of Being and the capacity of human beings to grasp those words.

Victor also figures the confusion and false assumption of power of those who have lost the knowledge that anything exists beyond the self. In particular, he associates power with the masculine intellect and associates mothering with weakness and dangerous loss of control. His disastrous attempt to play God and create new life by appropriating a form of mothering power for himself suggests how much his spiritual oppression consists of an inability to understand the maternal qualities that will be an important part of the human and spiritual power that the new dispensation will establish.

The creature symbolizes another form of spiritual loneliness and, specifically, feminine oppression that exists just before human reality is recreated in the dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. His hunger for meaning, recognition, and spiritual re-creation, while being fed with the dead words of texts cut off from the mother word, provides still another powerful figure for the peculiar lack of feminine nurturing in the spiritual oppression of the time. Both Victor's aggressive denial of his emotions and spirit, while usurping the power of God and mother, and the monster's denial of his inner spiritual reality, while accepting Victor as his parent and god, suggest the lack of an adequate appreciation of the spiritual power of the feminine in themselves or in the universe.

Kristeva and the Maternal Power of the Word

Kristeva, unlike Derrida, is aware in some ways of a distinctly feminine aspect to the spiritual deprivation associated with the contemporary era, in particular in her analysis of language. Following the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Kristeva identifies language, the realm of the symbolic, with the authority of the father (and the institutions of society in general), to which the child turns as a substitute for physical and psychic closeness to the mother. Unlike Lacan, however, she theorizes that language is not just a substitute for closeness to the mother. She asserts that language contains also a primal, physical quality. It contains not just abstract meaning but sounds and rhythm that connect it to our physical sense of self and our earliest physical connection to the mother, both before birth in the womb and after birth through being carried, sung to, and rocked. Thus through this "semiotic" dimension of language, which ties language to our earliest relation with the mother, Kristeva finds a connection between mothering and the physical properties of language ("From One Identity to Another").

For Kristeva, however, it is almost impossible to recapture this hidden connection to the mother through language. Kristeva is too aware of the difficulties and dangers involved in the mother-child relationship, specifically the difficulties involved in the child's separation from the mother, both psychically and physically. Defining this separation in terms of setting boundaries between oneself and the mother, she defines the fear of crossing that boundary between the self and the mother as giving rise to a sense of confusion about the limits of one's identity and thus as the source of the feeling of abjection or nothingness. In *Powers of Horror* (1980), she identifies the attempt to control this fear of being loathsome or undifferentiated or nothing with the rise of religions—i.e., with the prohibitions of Judaism and the internalized prohibitions that constitute the sense of sin in Christianity (90–132). Since for Kristeva, as for Derrida, these religions are now seen as illusions and no longer have their power to absolve sin, the only recourse for the modern individual is the cry of loathsomeness and horror of modern literature and the speaking of one's self-horror to the therapist (*Powers of Horror* 133, 209).

Spiritual Mothering and the Language of the Soul

Kristeva's sense of the peculiar difficulties of managing the fear of separation from the maternal in the contemporary world implicitly points to the need for a new understanding of the mother-child relationship and the role of language, one in which closeness to the mother would not entail loss of one's own unique identity (the fear

that led Victor to leave home and to appropriate for himself the act of procreation), one in which language would not symbolize only the child's relationship to the father and to the world of culture (as it does for the creature who can find in language only evidence of the technological power of his father).

On a secular level psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, an adherent of the intersubjective school of psychology, has partly answered this need, recasting the mother-child relationship in terms of a balance between mother and child in which each is both autonomous and dependent, each asserting the self and needing the recognition of the other; from birth each part of the duad participates in creating a shared interaction.¹¹ Benjamin's theory suggests the psychological implications of a new spiritual maternal paradigm implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in which a reciprocal relationship exists not only between mother and child but also between the individual soul and the Manifestation. While the Manifestation calls out in this day to all humankind (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 320), each individual must choose to listen and respond, for the Manifestation cries out, "Love Me, that I may love thee" (Bahá'u'lláh, Arabic Hidden Words no. 5). Such choice, however, does not wipe out the individual's need to think for himself as he attempts to live in accordance with the laws and ordinances of this new dispensation. Furthermore, each individual soul is responsible for his or her own spiritual decisions and does not have the right to justify failure to recognize the Manifestation as the result of the failure of others: "For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 143).

If the new Revelation provides a spiritual nurturing which makes possible recognition of the Manifestation while still retaining individual responsibility, it also brings attunement with and the capacity to understand the mother spiritual principle of unity without the loss of self. The new relationship between unity and individuality at the heart of this new Revelation allows for a new balance between individuals in which a person may choose at times to sacrifice her own interests for the benefit of the group without losing her sense of self. Such a choice is only possible, however, when an individual possesses a strong sense of her own center, her own soul, and its connection to the Manifestation. (Frankenstein's creature shows what happens when one lacks this center and connection). In such a case being true to one's own deepest needs and caring for others are not mutually exclusive.

Not only does the new maternal paradigm for this day recreate the individual's relationship to the Manifestation and to other individuals but also Bahá'u'lláh endows the mother-child relationship with an intense spiritual purpose and meaning. Whereas Kristeva finds a negative spiritual significance in the fears of encroachment or abandonment which grow out of the mother-child bond, Bahá'u'lláh reveals that the earliest stages of life and the earliest bond of mother and child provide a symbolic spiritual grounding for the individual and enact in an analogous form the relationship of the Manifestation and the rest of humanity. Not only do the Bahá'í Writings stress that "mothers are the first educators" of children and "train them in all the perfections of humankind" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Women* 27–28), but through her sensitive care for the infant's earliest needs, the mother models the spiritual love at the heart of the universe.¹² The signs of the mother's care, beginning with her ability to provide the perfect nourishment for her child and including later her wisdom in deciding when to wean the child are used by Bahá'u'lláh as symbols of divine love and justice (Persian Hidden Words no. 29; *Gleanings* 175). Bahá'u'lláh, in fact, describes the act of creation itself as the outcome of a divine maternal birthing. Thus He describes God as One who "hath delivered His creation from the nakedness of non-existence, and clothed it with the mantle of life." (*Gleanings* 77). Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh designates the Báb's Revelation, which marks the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith, as the "Mother-Word" and the "Mother-Book."¹³ Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh elevates not only maternity but also the feminine itself. Whereas Kristeva defines the feminine as figured in religion as the forbidden, the veil that separates the individual from the spiritual (*Powers of Horror* 101–8), Bahá'u'lláh reinscribes the feminine as the mystic bride—the inner capacity of the word when wedded to the Manifestation to give birth to new meanings. Woodman points out that this marriage gives birth to "the consciousness of the oneness of God and of creation" ("Role" 90), which is the heart of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Thus, the feminine becomes the source rather than the veil between the individual and the spiritual. It is this new understanding of the feminine as the inner spiritual meaning of the word that has, until now, been veiled. Thus Bahá'u'lláh ends the *Hidden Words* by announcing that "the mystic and wondrous Bride, hidden ere this beneath the veiling of utterance, hath now, by the grace of God and His divine favor, been made manifest even as the resplendent light shed by the beauty of the Beloved" (51). This mystic bride bequeaths to all language a marriage of inner spiritual meaning and outer form and to each individual a marriage of closeness to the Mother-Word (the Manifestation) with closeness to one's own soul.

Returning to *Frankenstein*, we can say that from Victor's perspective the monster represents the sign of the body as object—as removing the veil between the individual and the other, and the living and the dead—the sign of the body without a soul. This in part is why he sees the creature as "daemoniac." Because Victor separates his emotions from his intellect while creating the monster and then comes to fear the creature after animating it, the creature suggests his fear of his own object surrender to the impure mixing of thought and feeling, of self and mother.

From the monster's perspective, he represents the abject, self-loathing of the unnurtured, deprived being who can only find connection to the other through total masochistic submission to the other's definition of him. However, the monster's search for spiritual meaning and recognition, although unsuccessful, like Victor's earlier search for a spiritualized science, points the way to a new capacity, beyond horror and self-loathing, that is about to be revealed: a capacity that would allow Victor to find in the materials of science and of the physical world not a veil to spirituality but a sign of it; that would allow him to integrate his feelings and intellect without the fear of losing autonomy.

This capacity would allow the monster to discover and honor in himself his own symbolic spiritual reality while understanding his imperfect materiality. In this way he would symbolize the ability of the women of Mary Shelley's time to find their place in the universe without succumbing to a false or incomplete identity imposed on them from the outside. *Frankenstein* dramatically illustrates the need for a new spiritual dispensation which would create the capacity to respond to a new maternal spiritual paradigm—a capacity that would solve the tragic dilemmas of both Victor and the monster, and more generally, of men and women. By illuminating the spiritual gap that has opened up in humankind's understanding just before the revelation of a new spiritual dispensation, *Frankenstein* reveals to us the implications of the "passing away of all creation" in the culmination of a tyrannical patriarchal vision of humankind in which "man" aspires to be God and woman is man's creature. Written in the shadow of the Bahá'í Revelation, it prepares us to acknowledge that nothing remains in creation except the Face of God, about to be newly unveiled.

Notes

1. See "*Frankenstein* and its Cinematic Translations" by Tracy Cox (1998) for a discussion of film adaptations of the novel. Starting with *Literary Women* by Ellen Moers (1963) there have been a steadily increasing number of interesting literary interpretations of *Frankenstein* including "My Accursed Origin': The Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein*," Marc Rubenstein (1976); *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. U.C. Knoepfelmacher and George Levine (1979); "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve" in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979); "Bearing Demons: Frankenstein's Circumvention of the Maternal" in *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*, Margaret Homans (1986); *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, Anne K. Mellor (1988); "Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Woman Writer's Fate," Stephen Behrendt (1995); and *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: An Introduction*, Betty T. Bennett (1998).
2. For example, they have examined how she captures the patriarchal biases of early modern science and reveals the problematic nature of the nineteenth-century separate spheres philosophy in which a woman's place was believed to be in the home where she could establish a moral and emotional haven from the harsh economic world that men inhabited (Mellor, "Feminist Critique," Ellis).
3. Stephen Behrendt uses it to characterize the unique problems of the woman writer. Margaret Homans to investigate the implications of current Lacanian psychological theories about women and language, and Gilbert and Gubar to discuss the way Victor and his monster play all the "neo-biblical parts" of *Paradise Lost* but especially that of Eve (230). The word touchstone" comes from Behrendt (134).
4. See Mary Wollstonecraft's comments on *Paradise Lost* in chapter 2 of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
5. She also may have read her father's diary account of their courtship with its intimate discussion of his relations with Shelley's mother (Mellor 45).
6. Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Homans's *Bearing the Word*, and Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* all discuss nineteenth-century women's sense of physical, emotional, and intellectual inferiority under patriarchy.
7. From a Bahá'í perspective, if we read the novel literally the creature has no soul (being created unnaturally by Victor). However, such a literal reading does not acknowledge the novel's powerful mythic and symbolic structure. Shelley has clearly endowed the creature with an inner life, one that so strongly parallels her own that we could say that she has symbolically endowed the creature with her soul.

8. Woodman quotes Bahá'u'lláh's words that when the entire creation has passed away, "Nothing remaineth except My Face [the face of God], the Ever Abiding, the Resplendent, the All-Glorious' (*Gleanings* 29).
9. See Ross Woodman's "The Role of the Feminine" for a fuller discussion of the negative side to the passing away of all creation (82).
10. In "Differance" Derrida draws on the structuralists' definition of language as a binary system of signs consisting of the signifier or sound pattern and the signified or concept (Lehmann, "de Saussure" 467). Saussure, the founder of structuralism, "argued that signs mean what they mean not through direct correspondence with external objects, but through their difference from other elements in the system" (Heble, "Trace" 647). Derrida extends Saussure's definition "to its ultimate consequences: if there are only differences then meaning is only produced in the relation among signifiers not through the signified; the signified is thus endlessly deferred and delayed through the differential network" (Adamson, "Differance/difference" 535).
11. See chapter 1 of Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love*.
12. In Persian Hidden Word no. 29 Bahá'u'lláh connects His creation, love, and spiritual nurturing of the individual soul with a mother's maternal care and physical ability to feed her child. "Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things. Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother's womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee."
13. Paula Drewek discusses in some detail feminine images in Bahá'í scriptures, including mothering images, in "Feminine Forms of the Divine in Bahá'í Scriptures." Ross Woodman also discusses the new paradigm for not only the maternal but for the feminine in general in his article "The Role of the Feminine in the Bahá'í Faith."

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