

Introducing Frankenstein

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Comento aquí la introducción de 1831 que escribió Mary Shelley para su novela Frankenstein (1818).

Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus.

Ed. M. K. Joseph. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969. (World's Classics ed., 1980).

Epigraph from *Paradise Lost*. (Sigue inmediatamente la dedicatoria a Godwin, dos "makers": "to mould Me man", irónico, — ¿clave genérica para la novela como travestismo?)

Introduction (1831).

(Se oye una voz nueva, nueva relación del autor con la invención y la imaginación. Lo presenta como parte de su vida interior, sólo con dificultad y límites transmisible al papel. Escribe desde niña, pero le gusta fantasear:)

"my favourite pastime, during the hours given me for recreation, was to 'write stories.' Still I had a dearer pleasure than this, which was the formation of castles in the air—the indulging in waking dreams—the following of trains of thought, which had for their subject the formation of a succession of imaginary incidents" (5) Dreams free and original, writings derivative, because they are going to be read by others, "but my dreams were all my own" (5). "I did not make myself the heroine of my tales" (6) (pero sugiere un elemento de proyección que además se realiza: "I could not figure myself that romantic woes or wonderful events would ever be my lot; but I was not confined to my own identity, and I could people the hours with creations far more interesting to me at that age, than my own sensations" (6). Nota: to people, creations. Luego se presenta a sí misma como discípula e hija intelectual de Shelley. Historia de la estancia en Suiza, historias de fantasmas alemanas que lee prefiguran temas en Frankenstein: el retorno de lo reprimido, el creador que acaba con su raza. Byron propone escribir ghost story, pero Mary implica que ni la prosa ni la narración se les dan bien: "The illustrious poets also, annoyed by the platitude of prose, speedily relinquished their uncongenial task" (8). (¿Detecto un tono de burla?) "I busied myself to think of a story" desea mostrar miedos misteriosos ocultos en nuestra naturaleza y asustar al lector, pero— writer's block: "that blank capability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations" (¿invocar a lo oculto?)

Mary aprende de Byron y Shelley como el monstruo aprende de Paradise Lost: "Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener" (8). Experimentos científicos discutidos, posibilidad de crear vida, electricidad, fabricación de partes corporales "brought together, and endued with vital warmth" (9) —Cf. el sueño de su hija muerta, acercado al fuego y calentado a la vida.

La noche de la conversación, "I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie" (9). "Ve" la imagen central de la novela, el monstruo animado "on the working of some powerful engine" (9). "Frightful it must be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (9). Cf. la oposición entre la auténtica vida y creación de la poesía de Byron y Shelley y el "mecanismo" de la prosa, que ellos no consigue crear pero Mary sí, efecto de una "Uneasy, half vital motion" quizá.

Crucial en el prefacio el tema de Frankenstein durmiendo, paralelismo con M. Shelley, esperar que se disuelva la fantasía, "that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter" (9). Paralelismo monstruo / historia: Frankenstein libro, creador y monstruo son todo uno. Pasa al presente histórico, el libro como proyección y conciencia autónoma, nos mira con "yellow, watery, but speculative eyes" (9). —Enlace narrativo: "I opened mine in terror." Paso al pasado, busca librarse de la idea, pero sólo lo puede hacer aceptándola, creando el monstruo. "I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me" (10). Chocante que hasta entonces no hubiese relacionado ese monstruo con la historia, y entonces percibe la relación. Además, anuncia orgullosamente que lo que la aterroriza a ella aterrorizará a otros, y se libra de su complejo de inferioridad ante los grandes poetas: "I announced that I had thought of a story". Shelley la anima a desarrollarlo, etc.

"And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart" (10). Sugiere que para ella tiene asociaciones personales con aquella época, pero no para el lector. ¡Tela! Lo importante es la semiconsciencia con la que establece el paralelismo entre la creación del monstruo y la de la novela.

Algunas notas de la introducción a esta edición (por M K Joseph):

Prometheus myth basic clue to meaning. 2 myths: Prometheus pyrphoros and Prometheus plasticator mixed since late Antiquity. Theme being worked on by Byron and Shelley at the time. Theories of galvanism, E. Darwin, H. Davy, Volta... and Shaftesbury's Characteristicks, on the possibility of creating a human being, use of P. myth.

3 concentric layer structure. (En realidad 4 capas concéntricas, pues el prefacio de Mary Shelley se ha vuelto parte de la novela (e.g. la versión de Gonzalo Suárez, Remando al viento), y las extrañas conexiones críticas con el libro desarrolladas tanto por la misma M. Shelley como por los comentaradores, que la suelen mostrar como la que roba el fuego de la inspiración de los poetas).

Parallelism Walton/Frankenstein, Faustian hybris. Cautionary tale vs . science which takes away from normal society. Echo of *The Ancient Mariner*. Parallelism Mer de Glace/Pole. Monster's narrative: a Godwinian Genesis.

Improbabilities and contrivances: cottage, Safie, journal. Paradise Lost: double parallel Adam/Satan. Demands Eve. "we are drawn to complete the equation for ourselves: as the monster is to Frankenstein, so perhaps is Frankenstein to whatever power created man. The clue to the monster's predicament—benevolence corrupted—may also be the clue to Frankenstein's" (xi)

Monster becomes *doppelgänger* or Mr Hyde. Only at the end is the story proved not an hallucination. "Yet the monster is, in a literal sense, a projection of Frankenstein's mind, and an embodiment of his guilt in withdrawing from his kind and pursuing knowledge which, though not forbidden, is still dangerous." (xi). Epigraph applies to both. (*Y a Mary Shelley también*). Sin vs. Godwinian social benevolence, influenced by Shelley's *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*.

Writing at the start of scientific revolution: Promethanism applied by S. to science not art, —a great move. *Frankenstein*, a lasting symbol of the perils of scientific Prometheanism, has become an independent myth. Films, etc., "It is ironic but entirely appropriate that, in the process, the nameless monster seems to have usurped the name of his creator" (xiii).

Stevenson y Olalla



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