# Articles

## A Veiled Inclusion: Safie as Mary Wollstonecraft in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Over 200 years after its conception, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* not only remains one of the most influential works of all-time, but researchers are still gaining new insights into the culturally and philosophically significant lessons drawn from its pages. Shelley's masterpiece takes influences from her life and cohesively stitches them together with politics and social commentary, paying homage to those she reveres as she seeks to establish herself as both an author and the torchbearer of her parents' legacies. Expectations were high for Shelley considering her pedigree as the child of two successful authors known for their progressive ideologies, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. Born Mary Godwin, Shelley's birth was marked by the untimely death of her mother, leaving her alone to navigate a social landscape that simultaneously held great expectations for her while also oppressing her because of her gender. Wollstonecraft's absence served as a painful yet substantial influence on Shelley, but it was Wollstonecraft's controversial status that contributed to Shelley's choice to shroud her mother's presence in the work. While *Frankenstein* quotes various Romantic writers and historically significant figures, such as future husband Percy Shelley and childhood influence Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Shelley's activist, progressive mother is neither directly quoted nor openly referenced (Robinson 132). Wollstonecraft's feminist ideologies and death are embedded in the characters of *Frankenstein*, and the novel's focus on the martyred feminine, such as Caroline Beaufort and Justine Moritz, is frequently recognized as a reference to Wollstonecraft. Indeed, the overarching theme of the toxic masculine resulting from the absence of the beneficial feminine can be interpreted as an allusion to Wollstonecraft's absence in Mary's life. However, examination of the novel's feminist core

features a lone female voice silenced in the midst of a male-dominated narration, that of the Christian Arab Safie, who flees oppression to be with her love interest, Felix De Lacey. While scholarship has identified Wollstonecraft's philosophies on education and slavery as depicted through Safie, there is further evidence to suggest that Safie's character is representative of Wollstonecraft herself. Through Safie, Wollstonecraft's actual experiences from her abusive upbringing, restricted education, and independent travels across Europe are depicted. Via the medium of letter-writing, Safie, like Wollstonecraft, makes the argument for women as independent, rational beings. Furthermore, the presentation of Safie's letters is stolen by the Creature, symbolically suppressing Safie's ideas just as Wollstonecraft's activism was silenced in a male-dominated society. It is through Safie's subtle inclusion that Shelley is able to disguise her mother's presence in order to safely navigate and confront the controversies surrounding her mother's life and make her a quintessential part of the *Frankenstein* lore.

**Wollstonecraft's Life and Influence on Mary Shelley**

Even though Wollstonecraft's death left Shelley without the direct influence of her accomplished mother, Shelley had access to all of her mother's writings and publications, which made up a large part of her informal education. Charlotte Gordon's dual biography on mother and daughter, *Romantic Outlaws*, sheds new light on Shelley's reverence for her mother and her obsession with her mother's words: "Throughout her life, Shelley read and reread her mother's books, often learning their words by heart…Shelley yearned to live according to her mother's principles, to fulfil her mother's aspirations, and to reclaim Wollstonecraft from the shadows of history" (Gordon xvi). Beyond her own lofty goals set for herself, Shelley experienced external pressure from a number of directions, including leading up to the time when she generated the idea

for *Frankenstein* in the summer of 1816. Her future husband, Percy, held high expectations for her writing, further compounded by her own goal to impress their summer host at Geneva, Lord Byron (Mellor 28, 54). As the child of two exceptional parents, Shelley faced a unique dichotomy of both an empowering pedigree and an intimidating anxiety at attaining similar levels of success. She, perhaps better than others, understood her place in the world; not only was she a woman in a patriarchal society, but she was the daughter of a revolutionary feminist who had, in so many words, abandoned her by dying shortly after her birth. She felt both outward and inward pressure to incorporate her mother's progressive ideology in her own achievements, but there remained a conflict on how to best represent her mother's ideals and legacy while also safely navigating a patriarchal society in which she was yet to make a name for herself.

Wollstonecraft, despite her literary successes, was a controversial figure turned pariah following her husband's 1798 posthumous biographical account of her life. Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* included accounts of Wollstonecraft's suicide attempts, sexual exploits, and other controversies that led to the tarnishing of her legacy with highly critical reviews, which Frankenstein critic Johanna M. Smith believes created more reticence in Shelley than it did inspiration (qtd. in Foertsch 708). Shelley documents her reading of Godwin's *Memoirs* in her personal journals in June of 1820, after the publication of *Frankenstein* (Feldman & Scott-Kilvert 319). However, Mary's journals only start in 1814, slightly before her seventeenth birthday, and fail to take into account her childhood reading under Godwin's care. Though Godwin attempted to shield Mary from reading *Memoirs* in her girlhood, it is hard to believe that the precocious and knowledge-hungry Mary did not find a way to subvert this order, especially considering her obsession with her mother. Mary had also found a way to drop in on conversations at pivotal moments of influence, whether as a child hearing Coleridge

recite *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in her home or listening in on the conversation between Percy and Lord Byron on galvanization during her stay in Lake Geneva (Levy 693). Mary also understood that no writing was private, so it is possible that she hid her reading of *Memoirs* while living under Godwin's roof before eloping with Percy (Feldman & Scott-Kilvert xvi). Percy also played a considerable role in editing the first edition of *Frankenstein*, and his love of literature and reverence for Mary's parents is well documented (Gordon 216-17). Mary's relationship with Percy and their conversations on writing and her pedigree provide yet another avenue through which she had access to information surrounding her mother's life. Thus, even without a recorded reading of Godwin's *Memoirs* predating *Frankenstein*, Shelley had access to it and was at the very least aware of her mother's early life, later reputation, and the dangers of association with her name (Feldman and Scott-Kilvert xv-xvi). The existence and awareness of Godwin's *Memoirs* and its reception created a dilemma on how best to honor her mother while also simultaneously building and protecting her own reputation. This, meshed with her own personal anxieties stemming from the aforementioned social pressures, likely factored into her decision on how to best represent her mother in *Frankenstein*. Charles Robinson, an author featured in the anthology *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, speculates on Shelley's mindset while writing *Frankenstein*, acknowledging Godwin's *Memoirs* as a focal point for why Shelley hesitated on directly naming her mother, worrying that "such naming or quoting might not benefit her mother's reputation" (Robinson 132). Robinson also considers that "Shelley felt unworthy of or unequal to her mother with respect to women's rights," making it plausible that Shelley considered including a direct reference to her mother ineffective or, even worse, potentially misconstruing her mother's message (Robinson 133). Thus, it is likely that Shelley's basis for shrouding Wollstonecraft's feminist ideologies in *Frankenstein* without directly mentioning her in the text is born out of

Shelley's awareness of her mother's legacy and further compounded by the societal pressures she faced as a budding female author.

Considering the central themes of *Frankenstein*, a novel that highlights toxic masculinity and the subjugated feminine through a deadly conception and an ensuing abandonment, it is conceivable that Shelley aimed to incorporate her mother and her ideas in a subtle rather than overt manner. Writer and translator Joyce Zonana asserts that *Frankenstein* is "conspicuously feminist in context and form, rather than unconsciously shaped by the contingencies of Mary Shelley's female existence," establishing the basis that everything Shelley did was entirely intentional rather than incidental (171). Indeed, Shelley's masterpiece is carefully crafted with a number of symbolic references to her birth, hardships, and influences on her life, giving credence to the theory that Wollstonecraft is embedded as an integral part of the text. Even *Frankenstein*'s setting of the polar north, the "masculine realm" that had been traversed and vividly described by Wollstonecraft in works such as *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), can be seen as paying homage to Wollstonecraft (Curran 588). Considering the plot, setting, and Shelley's knowledge of and connection with her mother's writings, the basis for honoring Wollstonecraft is ever present within *Frankenstein*, but the truest and strongest representation of Wollstonecraft lies in the heart and feminist core of the novel, the story and narration of the Christian Arab, Safie.

Safie's story is a forgotten part of the *Frankenstein* mythos, especially in terms of popular film representations. Even the elder, blind De Lacey is a fixture in most interpretations of the *Frankenstein* story (albeit frequently nameless), but Safie's presence, including her letters, is largely excluded. Prior research has explored Safie as influenced by Wollstonecraft's philosophy, though Robinson associates Wollstonecraft with Safie's mother, who pushed Safie to pursue

independence but died before the events of the novel. *Frankenstein* scholar Anne Mellor offers Safie as the "incarnation of Mary Wollstonecraft in the novel," but this interpretation does not explore beyond Safie's independent travels or refuge sought in other families (118). However, there exists further textual and historical evidence to support Safie's presence as directly representative of Wollstonecraft herself. Safie was a late addition to *Frankenstein*, the novella form of which was completed in the summer of 1816. It was not until that December that Safie's character was crafted and the chapters focusing on her education and letters to Felix drafted. Shelley, ever the avid reader of her mother's works, journaled her reading of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* from December sixth through ninth, 1816 (Robinson 131, 134). The connection between Shelley's reading of her mother's feminist opus and the creation of Safie is incontrovertible, yet the relationship between Wollstonecraft and Safie is far richer. During her short appearance in the novel, Safie, similar to what Wollstonecraft accomplished in life, "confounds the masculine/feminine dichotomy based on gendered virtues" (Kick 303). She is an independent traveler who, like Wollstonecraft, fought against the forced domestication of women within her society and culture. Even her abusive upbringing parallels that of Wollstonecraft, and Safie further channels Wollstonecraft through the medium of letter writing, in which she looks to pioneer the same notion that women are thinking, rational beings. Safie's placement in the core of the novel gives further weight to the idea of Wollstonecraft's representation and Shelley's venerated view of her mother. Safie's name holds a double meaning, deriving from the Greek *Sofia* (meaning "wisdom") and the Arabic word for "clean" or "pure" (Kick 303; Peterfreund 95). The significance of this furthers the connection to Wollstonecraft, with Shelley looking to both acknowledge Wollstonecraft's wisdom and successes as a writer while also presenting her mother in a purer, uncontroversial state, potentially looking to undo the damage from Godwin's *Memoirs*.

Safie, therefore, is not solely a mirror of Wollstonecraft but is the embodiment of Shelley's idealized vision of her mother with the added presentation of purity as a means of symbolic absolution of her mother's reputation.

**Safie as Wollstonecraft: Their Shared Experience and Purpose**

The extensive connections between Wollstonecraft and Safie are not limited to just a single, general comparison at a specific moment in their lives. Their shared experience begins at their respective upbringings, during which both women suffered under abusive fathers. Though Wollstonecraft was not present to educate her daughter on her abusive upbringing, Shelley, as already established, was at the very least aware of this through conversation with Percy if not via reading Godwin's *Memoirs*, which covers Wollstonecraft's abuses in her early life as well as her later activism and subsequent controversies. Edward Wollstonecraft, Mary Wollstonecraft's father, was "hot-blooded and capricious. An alcoholic who squandered his family's money [and] brutalized his wife and children" (Gordon 11). Edward's frivolous spending and domestic abuse of his wife and daughters caused both physical and psychological suffering based on patriarchal control. Similarly, these abuses are echoed in the Creature's narration of Safie's story, in which he mentions that Safie's father, a Turkish Arab wrongly charged with an unknown crime in Revolutionary France, had caused the expulsion and ruin of the De Lacey family (Shelley 110-13). Not only did he use Felix's interest in Safie to exploit their kindness and steal their money, but his intent to return to Turkey implied a physical and sexual subjugation of Safie analogous to Edward Wollstonecraft's abuses. Even though Safie's father is not directly physically abusive, by mandating his daughter's return to Turkey, which Safie describes as a "harem" culture, Safie's father is implicit in the forced religious subjugation she would experience due to her gender

(Shelley 112-14). While the particulars differ, the existence of gender-related abuse and financial exploitation served as a spark for both Safie and Wollstonecraft, helping push them towards the life-altering decisions and radical choices that shaped both their immediate futures and legacies.

Aside from Wollstonecraft and Safie's abusive fathers, the early death of their mothers helped send them on parallel paths towards advocation of women's rights. Wollstonecraft's mother, Elizabeth, slipped into a coma and died in the Spring of 1782, when Wollstonecraft was in her early 20s. Elizabeth had generally ignored Wollstonecraft and favored her oldest brother, Ned, while also remaining critical of Wollstonecraft's zealous and rebellious nature (Gordon 47). Wollstonecraft used her family life as a means of understanding what she did not want to be, but it was not until after her mother's death that she was able to free herself from certain familial burdens. Wollstonecraft had always sought refuge in other families, but the loss of her mother opened the door for Wollstonecraft, on her friend Fanny Blood's insistence, to move in with her and her family (Gordon 47-48). Living with the Blood household was an experience that helped to shape Wollstonecraft's future, and the sanctuary and education provided to Wollstonecraft here serves as a direct parallel to Safie's journey and residence with the De Laceys. In terms of Safie's mother, the Creature notes that she died at some point before the events of the story, and considering that Safie is of marriable age, it can be concluded that Safie was also young when she lost her mother (Shelley 112). Though Safie's mother had more of a significant role in encouraging her daughter's independence, her absence, like the death of Elizabeth Wollstonecraft, was a driving factor in freeing Safie from her father's oppression and that of her religions, resulting in Safie's travelling across Europe to live with the De Laceys (Shelley 104). The death of their mothers provided both Wollstonecraft and Safie with opportunities to prove themselves to be independent, free-thinking individuals. Their life-changing decisions, especially considering the era, to remove

themselves from oppressive environments in order to pursue better lives highlights how importantly they viewed their goals of demonstrating female independence. Safie's flight from a "harem" culture and Wollstonecraft's continued pursuit of knowledge both blossom in the kindness and progressive ideologies of other families, shunning the despotic patriarchal control both experienced and opening the door to friendship, intimacy, and, most importantly, education.

Education for women in the eighteenth century was commonly sparse and inadequate as compared to the education of men, so Wollstonecraft often found herself struggling to find the means to learn despite her strong desire to do so. Wollstonecraft, along with her siblings, had learned to read at home, but her formal education at the Beverly Grammar School, which she attended upon turning eleven, was lacking, limited to basic addition and needlework while her brothers learned multiple subjects and languages (Gordon 18). Despite this less-than-ideal experience, Wollstonecraft made a valuable friend in school, Jane Arden, whose father took to educating Wollstonecraft. She was allowed to explore with microscopes and telescopes, and she was encouraged to "read thick, difficult volumes" from authors such as John Dryden and Oliver Goldsmith, opportunities which she did not squander (Gordon 20). Upon moving to Hoxton at age fifteen, Wollstonecraft found her education with the Ardens interrupted. However, her new neighbor, the dissenting liberal Reverend Henry Clare, granted Wollstonecraft access to his study. Here, Wollstonecraft was introduced to John Locke's philosophies, which gave her "an ethical foundation" for her feelings on equality and freedom (Gordon 36-38). Locke's significance to Wollstonecraft cannot be understated, with the introduction to his philosophies equipping her with a basis for her beliefs on equality which she, in turn, compounded and turned into a career. Wollstonecraft's education not only helps establish the basis for her feminist ideals, but it also serves as a means of debunking potential misconceptions about her connection to Safie.

As mentioned before, prior scholarship and multiple interpretations of Safie express the belief that she is the embodiment of Wollstonecraft's ideals. However, Wollstonecraft's position on education greatly differs from how Safie is educated throughout her life; in fact, Safie's private education through another welcoming household more mirrors what Wollstonecraft experienced herself rather than her dogmas. A large portion of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is dedicated to fighting for equal education of the sexes rather than the private, incomplete education that she received. The goal of her opus was to argue for the dangerous consequences that lie in the various forms of unequal education, thereby "enable[ing] the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent" (Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 229). To avoid misinterpretation, Wollstonecraft addresses this directly rather than implicitly:

> To prevent any misconstruction, I must add, that I do not believe that a private education can work the wonders which some sanguine writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in…till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education. (Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 230)

Here, Wollstonecraft confronts critics and her own upbringing by addressing the weakness of private education and her fervent belief in equal education of the genders. She further deems private education as inherently flawed in preventing deeper analysis and limiting learning to only surface-level fragments rather than granting women the ability to "pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to the judgment" (Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 230). While Wollstonecraft was undeniably appreciative of the education she received from Mr. Arden and Reverend Clare, she also gained important insight through her readings and contextualized her situation with the social climate. With equality at the

forefront of the French Revolution and injustice not only in her own life but ubiquitous throughout the world, Wollstonecraft grasped what society and equality were and what they could, and should, be. Shelley was wholly her mother's daughter in this regard, and her passion for maintaining her mother's legacy not only spurred her career in writing but was directly responsible for the creation of Safie's character.

Safie is a standout character in *Frankenstein*, a lone female narrator in a novel on the toxic masculine resulting from the absence of the beneficial feminine. At its core, *Frankenstein* is "a novel about the dangerous consequences of education and the pursuit of knowledge," which is very much what *Vindication* expresses when it comes to the restrictions that women face in terms of education (Robinson 133). Safie is the only female character shown to have any true independence, demonstrated in her decision to abandon her father and flee oppression in Turkey. Safie's independence stems from her mother's influence, which the Creature addresses in his narrative:

> She instructed her daughter in the tenets of her [Christian] religion and taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Muhammad. 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 harem. (Shelley 112)

Nothing else is known about Safie's early education beyond the guidance her mother provides her with and its basis as a means for Safie to pursue independence and intellectual freedom, filling her with "grand ideas and a noble emulation for virtue" and an adoration for the "prospect of…remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in society" (Shelley 112). Upon entering the De Lacey cottage, Safie is greeted with love and compassion, treated as an equal

and granted the same rights of every other member, regardless of her gender or the cultural and language differences. Her education begins almost immediately, with Felix choosing Volney's *Ruins of Empire* as her foundation. This selection echoes the heavy volumes that Mr. Arden offered to a young Wollstonecraft, but it holds further significance because of its historical context; not only was this the book Napoleon read to prepare for his 1798 invasion of Egypt, but Volney provides an "imitation of Eastern authors" and offers a perspective of the Arab world (Shelley 107). Safie's first lesson ends with her and the Creature separately weeping over the fate of the indigenous people of the Americas, a subtle inclusion that resonates with Safie's ultimate purpose in the novel. Syrian-American poet and professor Mojha Kahf, in her dissertation on Muslim women in Romantic literature, argues that Felix, in choosing this volume and its histories of oppression and ruin, "teaches Safie the history of the World, and by implication, her place in it" (304). Like Wollstonecraft, Safie is an eager, young learner struggling to adapt to the unfairness in the world. Her actual education, conducted in a private household with another family and through the usage of texts well above her level, closely mirrors Wollstonecraft's actual experience more than it reflects Wollstonecraft's philosophies on education. The pursuit of education is the fundamental basis for their independence, and through learning of subjugated people, Wollstonecraft through Locke and Safie through Volney, both women gain insight into their own strength and potential. Thus, the right to education is the means to attaining a voice, an idea further communicated through the medium of letter writing, which both Wollstonecraft and Safie use as the primary mode through which to convey their ideals.

Though both Safie and Wollstonecraft learn of the unfairness of the world in their studies, they were both able to channel letter writing as a means of representing their hope for the future. While Reverend Clare undoubtedly holds significance in introducing Wollstonecraft to Locke,

who served as the basis for her future work on equal rights, his wife, Mrs. Clare, arguably plays an even more important role in Wollstonecraft's life. Upon Wollstonecraft's arrival in Hoxton, Mrs. Clare introduced her to the Bloods, a family much like the De Laceys in that they offered a stark contrast to almost every other familial experience through which Wollstonecraft had suffered. Wollstonecraft became immediately infatuated with Fanny Blood, the eldest sister, who is noted as being Wollstonecraft's "first true example of the power of female resourcefulness" considering she supported her family through her art (Gordon 39). Upon beginning a correspondence, Wollstonecraft was quick to identify a clear discrepancy between her own writing and that of Blood's superior style and intellect. Wollstonecraft requested that Blood teach her how to write as well as she did, to which Blood agreed (Gordon 39). Not only did Wollstonecraft gain a strong friend and influence, but she eventually learned how to formulate her arguments for equality through letter writing, which ultimately turned into her most successful work during her lifetime, *Letters from Sweden*. In this, Wollstonecraft transforms letter writing into a medium through which she is able to convey her beliefs and ideals, just as Safie does in *Frankenstein*. *Letters from Sweden* serves as a contemplative travel diary with a unique purpose in furthering the progressive nature of the world through the presentation of an independent woman, Wollstonecraft, as a rational being with a soul. This notion, echoed in Safie's letters to Felix and her own independent travel, utilizes the sublime in order to present Wollstonecraft's progressive philosophy. In this case, the sublime lies in the reflections in nature and the presentation of the sheer notion of equal rights and confrontation of inherent biases, something Wollstonecraft made into a career and that Shelley addresses on multiple levels of gender, religion, and appearance throughout *Frankenstein*.

*Letters from Sweden* is based on Wollstonecraft's travels across Scandinavia while representing Gilbert Imlay on business. Interestingly, he refers to her as his wife even though they

were not married, which Felix also does with Safie (Ingpen xxii; Shelley 127). On the trip, Wollstonecraft journaled her travels and edited her entries into a reflective, introspective dialogue demonstrating the idea of woman as an independent, rational being. Her letters became so much more than a simple travel journal and looked to penetrate the very soul of the reader, with her primary message being that "The most essential service…that authors could render to society, would be to promote inquiry and discussion" (Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 261). The reflective component of her writing, in addition to her melancholic yet resilient tone, intermingles with the Romantic tenet of power in nature to create a work that captured the attention of many, including future husband William Godwin: "If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book. She speaks of her sorrows, in a way that fills us with melancholy, and dissolves us in tenderness, at the same time that she displays a genius which commands all our admiration" (qtd. in Mellor 24). Godwin goes on to remark on the "gentleness of her spirit" and how her trials and misfortunes had given her heart "a softness almost more than human" (qtd. in Gordon 365-66). Wollstonecraft is painted in a rather unique image following *Letters from Sweden*, that of a somber yet empowered woman subtly making an argument for equality and independence. It is in these descriptors and goals that Wollstonecraft's most successful work is echoed in Safie's character.

Wollstonecraft's era was a time when women frequently communicated with one another via letters, but that does not make it a feminine medium. In fact, the travel narrative in the eighteenth century was dominated by the journeys of Captain Cook, and even Walton utilizes the travel narrative as the frame which both opens and concludes *Frankenstein*. Safie's narrative comes in the form of letters, the only female narrator in a male-dominated work, akin to how Wollstonecraft seized this male-dominated genre and turned it into a powerful female treatise. The

fact that Safie utilizes letters is not merely coincidental and holds a significant purpose in the novel and in Shelley's life. In fact, Shelley's next novel immediately following *Frankenstein*, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), is modelled entirely after her mother's *Letters from Sweden*. Safie, like Wollstonecraft, writes a travel narrative that helps Felix (and, perhaps, too, the Creature) fall in love with her, all while embodying the same tenderness and melancholy that Wollstonecraft expresses and is described as having in *Letters from Sweden*. While Safie's presence "diffused happiness among" the De Laceys and the Creature's narration describes her as "always gay and happy," her voice is compared to that of a nightingale, a trope in Middle Eastern poetry and symbol of melancholy stemming from the legend of Philomela and Procne (Shelley 106). While Safie's "voice" here is presented in the literal sense, this could also theoretically represent her perspective. Safie is a victim of both of her parents' religions, her father's oppression, and patriarchal society, dangerously embarking on a self-reflective quest to find a place where she belongs, akin to Wollstonecraft's *Letters*. Her melancholy is further echoed in her response to learning of the fate of the indigenous people in America, exemplifying her ability to form her own opinions and experiences, again echoing Wollstonecraft's ideals from *Letters from Sweden* (Shelley 107). Beyond the similar purposes in these letters is their effect of garnering affection. In the same way that Wollstonecraft's letters drew the attention of Godwin, so, too, do Safie's letters pique the interest of the Creature: "Safie's letters are, accordingly, the Creature's earliest formative written intellectual-emotional ballast, emphasizing communication, forthrightness, and reciprocal love, given that Safie's letters carry on a dialogue with those of Felix" (Kick 301). The Creature is able to reconcile his understanding of human interaction and equal affection in his characterization of Safie through her letters, just as Wollstonecraft's travelogue appeals for self-reflection and equality to its readers. Shelley, like Wollstonecraft, uses letter writing as a means of facilitating logical

thought to promote a simple truth: that women are free-thinking beings with their own rational minds (Sleigh 8). Through their letters, both Safie and Wollstonecraft present a rich duality of character in which they embody a feminine tenderness while usurping a masculine domain of travelogue and exploration, transforming it into an avenue for promoting rational thought through the sublime. Both Safie and Wollstonecraft champion this message, with Zonana further identifying Safie as "an exemplar of a woman claiming her rights as a rational being" (174). This is the clear embodiment of the ideas Wollstonecraft developed throughout her life, first appearing at the forefront in *Vindication* and later blossoming into her thought-provoking *Letters from Sweden*.

Despite her successes as a writer, Wollstonecraft often struggled to garner respect and attention as a woman. Her first in-person meeting with radical London publisher Joseph Johnson in 1786 proved fortuitous. Not only was he an immediate fan of her, but he also worked to find her a new home and introduce her to a more educated, aristocratic crop of people with whom she could associate and learn, including future husband William Godwin (Gordon 112-17). Even with the established message of *Letters from Sweden* and its role in guiding Godwin, and his progressive mindset, to Wollstonecraft, she often found herself subjugated to a more domestic role in their marriage. Godwin, even considering his radical politics, "believed that women stood in need of male protection" and "valued 'the softness of their natures [and] the delicacy of their sentiments'" (Gordon 365). Wollstonecraft was appreciative of the fact that Godwin helped relieve her of financial burdens, with which she often struggled, but it never truly sat well with her that she, one of the main voices of women's rights, was reliant on the support of a man (Gordon 396). Furthermore, Godwin encouraged Wollstonecraft's writing, but he never made good on his promise to "shoulder some of the household responsibilities so that [she] could write," which left

Wollstonecraft with the domestic burden of maintaining the home (Gordon 396, 425). Wollstonecraft was the owner of a powerful voice, not only a published woman but one who was, in many influential circles, held in a high regard. However, this did not change the fact that she was an outlier in society and generally struggled in many facets, including finances and social acceptance. Even in a more idealized marriage and a progressive household such as that of Godwin's, Wollstonecraft continued to struggle and found herself in a more subjugated role. Though this was undoubtedly an improvement from her earlier situation, Gordon notes that "she looked sadly vulnerable" in this relationship, echoing the melancholy and openness that made *Letters from Sweden* so successful in defining Wollstonecraft's character and drawing the attention of Godwin (365). Wollstonecraft's life echoes the sad reality for women in this era and reiterates that even in the best of circumstances, the most successful of women still struggled with rampant inequality and suppression. Safie also finds herself in a comparable situation with the De Laceys, a family representing the Egalitarian philosophy of social equality. Despite this situation being an improvement on her prior life, Safie, too, becomes domesticated and her voice silenced.

Safie's arrival at the De Lacey cottage is marked with happiness and joy, yet while her position in the household seems to be of some equality, in truth she is domesticated just like Wollstonecraft. Safie is already inherently silenced by the existing language barrier, but her relationship with Felix both objectifies and exoticizes her. Safie's entrance into the cottage is marked by her immediate kneeling at the elder De Lacey's feet, and though he openly embraces her, Safie's naturally oppressed state is ever-present. Next, Felix refers to her as "*my* sweet Arabian," a possessive term that diminishes Safie's value as an independent woman by both exoticizing her as a foreigner and claiming ownership of her (Shelley 105, emphasis added). This, Kahf contends, demonstrates that Safie becomes "*his* domesticated exotic property" (306,

emphasis added). Kahf's usage of "exotic" not only holds an important connotation of presenting Safie as something different or unusual, emphasizing a disconnect between the entity and the 'normal' society, but it also resonates with language Wollstonecraft uses in *Vindication*. Wollstonecraft expresses that if women are not given complete freedom, then "they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature" (Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 241-42). Safie's journey is marked by complete freedom and independence, but her arrival is marked by submission. Thus, Safie's independence and education, much like Wollstonecraft's freedom to continue her writing career under her marriage to Godwin, come at a great cost. Safie is, for all intents and purposes, domesticated in the De Lacey home, even though she is given more rights and freedom than women in other families. The ultimate insight gained here is that Safie, like Wollstonecraft, is an outlier in society and will always struggle as such, even in an accepting household.

Safie's letters are simultaneously the greatest and most troubling indication of her independence as a woman. Not only was her voice silenced, but her story is stolen and told through the Creature's narration, in which he went so far as to transcribe her words rather than using the original letters he had stolen from the De Lacey cottage. Thus, Safie's letters are kept open, never fully voiced by Safie but rather digested and reiterated by the Creature (Zonana 171). Her story becomes a means of furthering the Creature's life and proving his tale. Zonana argues that Shelley's decision not to print the letters was deliberate in order "to keep them inviolate, unpenetrated by the consciousness of the reader" (Zonana 181). Rather than outrightly expressing right or wrong through the content of the letters, Safie's narration is available not only through the perspective of the Creature but also that of the reader, replicating how Godwin retold Wollstonecraft's life through his voice and perspective in *Memoirs*. Much like her mother,

Shelley's goal was to get readers to reflect on inequality and their own inherent biases, especially fresh off the end of the Napoleonic tyranny that spawned from the French Revolution. Gordon comments on Wollstonecraft's goal for her audience:

> If she could show her readers what it felt like to be powerless, what it was like to be a woman without legal recourse, poor, abused, and at the mercy of others, if she could reveal the root causes of human suffering and misogyny, then perhaps she could *galvanize* her readers and save others from the same miseries. (Gordon 516, emphasis added)

This galvanization of the reader was Shelley's goal as well and one of the key reasons behind adding her mother into the heart of the novel. Through Safie, thoughtful reflection occurs not only in the Creature but in the reader as well, and by silencing Safie through her stolen letters, Shelley is both preserving the purity of her mother's legacy while simultaneously inserting Godwin's damning *Memoirs* into *Frankenstein*.

Wollstonecraft died shortly after giving birth to Shelley, but Godwin continued her story with the posthumous publication of *Memoirs*, which destroyed her reputation partly due to her child born out of wedlock, something associated with promiscuity in this era. "In his hands, then, Mary [Wollstonecraft] becomes a tragic heroine; a woman defined in relation to men, not an independent individual, making her own choices and way in the world" (Gordon 491). Safie, similarly, can be considered immoral according to her culture in disobeying her father, casting off her religions, and eloping with her French lover. Thanks to Godwin's *Memoirs* and the untimely end to her life, Wollstonecraft was unable to truly accomplish what she set out to and it was not until centuries later that she became recognized for her achievements. Likewise, Safie's story ends abruptly before she could accomplish anything, with her fleeing upon seeing the creature in the De Lacey cottage (Shelley 123). Ultimately, Safie neither achieves her full independence nor finalizes

her message of proving women as independent, rational beings, "redeem[ing] neither the monster nor the text" and leaving the feminist core of the novel vague and unsettled (Robinson 136). Safie's inclusion is not only an homage to Wollstonecraft's successes but also her shortcomings, adding to the mystique and mythos that make *Frankenstein* such an historically significant work.

**Future Considerations**

Before arriving at the De Lacey cottage, Safie's attendant falls ill and dies despite Safie's "most devoted affection," leaving Safie alone to navigate an unfamiliar world (Shelley 114). Similarly, Wollstonecraft was at a loss following the death of Fanny Blood in 1785, unsure of her next step or if she had the ability to proceed forward with life (Gordon 73). Though the contexts and relationships differ, these similar losses and sense of uncertainty provide yet another layer to the connection between Safie and Wollstonecraft. Shelley's creation of Safie has one final comparison to Wollstonecraft in that they were both relegated to the annals of history and literary significance, or at least Wollstonecraft was until feminist criticism emerged in the 1960s and renewed interest in her works. Statues of Wollstonecraft are only now being commissioned, but Safie is yet to truly be featured in any significant way, including being completely cut from Kenneth Branagh's titular 1994 film, "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." More consideration is needed not only on why *Frankenstein's* feminist core is so often excluded from discussion and interpretation, but more importantly, further research is needed in order to better understand why Shelley designed and incorporated Safie as she did. Godwin's role upon disowning Shelley following her elopement with Percy, too, must be examined. A study of Wollstonecraft's appearance in conjunction with Safie's description could yield further comparisons beyond their emotional states, and a timeline of both Safie and Wollstonecraft's journeys across Europe can

potentially provide further overlap in their similarities. Future research should also aim at a deeper delving into Wollstonecraft's readings of Locke, the education gained from Joseph Johnson's social circle, and Percy's influence on Shelley. It is important to consider that Shelley's characters are deliberate combinations of people, philosophies, and events, and it is necessary to research and synthesize this information in order to create a better, fuller understanding of Wollstonecraft's influence on Shelley's creation of Safie.

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