

about the meaning of the picture and therefore treats the image as linked with the whole play. Although this identification indicates that Kelly uses textual associations to read the visual image, he refuses to grant that the image, in turn, may interpret the text. We argue that, whenever a text is given definite visual form, its generic structures and patterns of meaning are supplemented, opened up by this new representation. Zoffany's painting offers a rich reading of *Macbeth* precisely because it "grat[if]ies contemporary interests," because it reveals what was found necessary to interpret in and for a previous age. This image helps us locate a problematic moment, a "gap," in the text; it witnesses the pressure of historical concerns on interpretation, and it reminds us that our own moment is no more privileged than Zoffany's.

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Frankenstein: Criticism versus Subcriticism

To the Editor:

One of the saddest results of the decision by many poststructuralist critics to neglect historical scholarship is that, when their insights *are* perceptive, these critics often lack the information necessary to provide their readings with a factual ground that would convince those who value accuracy as well as rhetoric. Paul Sherwin's eloquent and stimulating paper "*Frankenstein*: Creation as Catastrophe" (*PMLA*, 96 [1981], 881–903) provides an example of this problem. Those who are not well versed in Mary Shelley's fiction and P. B. Shelley's poetry might fail to distinguish Sherwin's argument from several other, much less intelligent readings of *Frankenstein* that have appeared in recent years, because Sherwin's selective use of scholarship has permitted him to overlook some elementary facts about the novel.

While arguing that the creative process produces an "authorial self" quite distinct from the "empirical self" of the writer in his or her other relations, Sherwin concedes more than is necessary to recent feminist critics. He writes:

. . . even if we agree that the novel is informed by [Mary Shelley's] personal experience and that the novel, had it been anonymously published, would be recognizably a woman's book, we cannot necessarily trace

its creation back to her empirical self or conclude that its meaning is coextensive with its point of departure. . . . (p. 899)

Sherwin's assertion, in this hypothetical formulation, might become a subject for endless debate between ideological feminists and theorists of the impersonality of texts unless someone pointed out that, in fact, *Frankenstein* was published anonymously and (in further support of Sherwin's position) that Walter Scott, who reviewed it favorably in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, not only failed to recognize it as the work of a woman but attributed the novel to the author of *Alastor* (see *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part C, 1, 73–80). This attribution also buttresses Sherwin's later speculations on the complex intertextuality of *Alastor* and *Frankenstein* (pp. 901–02), two works that many critics have misread as simplistically antithetical.

If Sherwin decided to add historical research to his other accomplishments, he would naturally dig deeper and would learn that there were extraliterary reasons why Scott (as well as John Wilson Croker, who reviewed *Frankenstein* for the *Quarterly Review*) might suspect Percy Bysshe Shelley of being the author of *Frankenstein* (see, e.g., *Shelley and His Circle*, v, 471–73). But Sherwin ought not to consider such efforts unrewarding if the avoidance of elementary errors comes to distinguish his fluent and convincing explications from equally fluent and persuasive misreadings by the "prevalent mode[s] of subcriticism" (p. 887) that self-destruct when confronted by such facts.

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Mr. Sherwin replies:

I agree with Donald Reiman's thesis that critics, of whatever persuasion, should get the facts straight before they proceed to spin hypotheses. Had I not known the circumstances of *Frankenstein's* publication, noted in several studies of the novel and biographies of Mary Shelley, and had I not read the contemporary reviews, I would have betrayed the high ideal of (or grand passion for) responsible scholarship that informs the writing of the best literary theorists, from Vico and Nietzsche to Auerbach and Hartman. The first draft of my essay read, "even if we agree . . . that the novel, published anonymously, is recognizably a woman's book. . . ." The excellent editors of *PMLA* must have found this version awkward or unclear. Their revision