ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

Walter Reed

Author and Hero in Frankenstein's Aesthetic Activity

In *Dialogism*, his expansive study of the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael Holquist shows with characteristic panache how Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* is a near perfect embodiment (textually speaking) of the theory of the novel advanced by Bakhtin in his essay "Discourse in the Novel"[1].This is only one of many revealing comparisons of Bakhtin with other dialogical thinkers that Holquist offers in his 1990 study, where he places Bakhtin in conversation with Kant, Hegel, Einstein, Saussure, Piaget and George Herbert Mead among others. But the comparison with Shelley bears further consideration. The correlation of this now well-known 20th c. Russian thinker and the even better known 19th c. English novelist that I offer here is mainly concerned with the early Bakhtin, the author of the uncompleted treatise "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", whose title, supplied by its editors, my own title plays on and the related fragment *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. It is also primarily concerned with Frankenstein the character, the hero or villain who, I will argue, borrows or usurps the role of author from Mary Shelley, even as she shows him appropriating the role of creator from the deity of Christian religious tradition.

Frankenstein the novel has been an anatomy students' cadaver, so to speak, for instruments of dissection provided by just about every theorist or thinker who has come before the public in the almost two centuries since its own creation by Mary Shelley. This is a book for which no modern scheme of interpretation, however unlikely, has not been found to provide the essential hermeneutic key, the most revealing X-rays of hermeneutic suspicion[2]. My only

claim to novelty here is that, along with Bakhtin, I am concerned with poetics rather than with hermeneutics, with how authors and heroes create meaning in concrete aesthetic activity, as Bakhtin calls it, rather than with what they mean in the realm of abstract cognition.

I.

"Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", a text of 227 pages in Vadim Liapunov's English translation, is hard to categorize, even for dedicated Bakhtinians[3]. Holquist, in predicting its reception by enthusiasts of the earlier translated texts *Rabelais and His World* and *The Dialogic Imagination*, recalls the apocryphal story of Queen Victoria asking for the next book by the author of Alice in Wonderland and getting a copy of Charles Dodgson's *Condensation of Determinants*. "Author and Hero" has certainly proved less amenable to contemporary literary-critical appropriation than any of Bakhtin's later writings, at least those writings published under his own name. My own view is that it offers a phenomenological aesthetics or aestheticized 'first philosophy', one that evolves, in the course of its elaboration, toward a philosophical poetics, a poetics with distinct resemblances to some of the treatises of earlier German Idealist and Romantic thinkers like Schelling and the Schlegels. I will not argue for direct influence or imitation in this regard. Taking a page from Borges, I will only say that Bakhtin has "created" such authors as his "precursors". Which is perhaps only to say that like Schelling, the Schlegels, Fichte and others, Bakhtin was deeply preoccupied in "Author and Hero" with reworking the critical philosophy of Kant — in particular, with bringing Kant's ethics and aesthetics into a less austere, less categorially arms-length relationship with one another. In the opening pages of the text (the "Supplementary Section" provided at the end of the Holquist/Liapunov edition), Bakhtin goes as far as to suggest that it might be possible to read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* aesthetically, if one were to pay close attention to the "anthropomorphic" origin of its architectonics or formal design.

"Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" was to be part

of an even more ambitious philosophical work, a magnum opus to which his American editor and translator have given the provisional title "The Architectonics of Answerability", which had the following agenda of concerns. "It is [the] concrete architectonic of the actual world of the performed act that moral philosophy has to describe", Bakhtin writes, "*not* the abstract scheme but the concrete plan or design of a unitary and once-occurrent act or deed, the basic concrete moments of its construction and their mutual disposition. The basic moments are I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other". Focusing on this fundamental structure of human "answerability", the accountability of the self to itself and others in these three constitutive relationships, Bakhtin promises an inquiry in four parts. The first will be concerned with ethics proper (the "actual world of the performed act or deed"), the second devoted to "aesthetic activity as an actually performed act or deed, both from within its product and from the standpoint of the author as an active participant". The third section is to consider the structure of politics ("the ethics of politics", as Bakhtin calls it) and the fourth section the architectonics of religion[4].

It is in the context of this larger philosophical scheme that the extended essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" needs to be understood. For it is here, in the largest surviving section of the projected work, that the peculiar character of Bakhtin's own discourse may be appreciated. While the four sections are presented as categorically different from one another, describing radically different types of value or "axiologies", in the Kantian term, they also turn out to overlap. One realm or sphere of activity turns out to "interpenetrate" or to "permeate" another in Bakhtin's terms. In other words, what seem at first to be hard and fast boundaries turn out to be un-policed and quite cross-able borders; these borders, in turn, become thresholds, inviting trespass. Such category transgressions occur without logical inconsistency on Bakhtin's part, it seems to me, because it is always an individual person who is envisioned as acting — as taking meaningful and valid steps, as the Russian word postupok favored by Bakhtin connotes — across as well as within the categories. Furthermore — and this is crucial to my argument — the individual person is always defined by his or her architectonic

relations: I-for-myself, the-other-for-me, and (less prominent in Bakhtin's analysis but important nonetheless) I-for-the-other. The individual person does not disappear from philosophical view in this analysis. But she or he only has meaning — only makes meaning and receives meaning — in relationship with others, others who themselves are meaningful — aesthetically, ethically, politically and religiously — as dialogically constituted persons.

Thus not long after the surviving ethical section of Bakhtin's project (given the title in English of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*) has gotten rolling, it suddenly turns to aesthetic or literary evidence. "In order to give a preliminary idea of the possibility of such a concrete, value-governed architectonic", Bakhtin explains, "we shall analyze here the world of aesthetic seeing — the world of art"[5]. What this means is that the discussion will focus on a literary hero, since the work of art is organized, according to Bakhtin, around the human being as the embodiment of aesthetic value. The hero is the center of human value not because he is good in any ethical sense or powerful in a social or political sense, but simply because he or she is the focus of the interested — that is, the loving and sustaining — attention of the author. As in English, the Russian geroi, means 'protagonist' or 'main character' as much as 'heroic personage'. As Bakhtin develops the distinctively Russian idea of the author's aesthetic love for his hero, he turns to the Russian national poet Pushkin for a concrete example. The last ten pages of what has been for sixty pages a treatise on ethics become a close reading of Pushkin's lyric poem "Parting", a poem in which there turn out to be two heroes (the speaker-hero or "objectified author" and the beloved whom he is addressing), as well as an "author-artist" situated behind the poem, and a "contemplator", not fully distinguished from the author-artist but not identical with him, before the text. Instead of the ethical unity of one person acting responsibly toward others, we are presented with an aesthetic plurality of four persons, four possible persons in relationship within one another within a work of art, formed by the creative act of still another person, the author, who exists (or existed) in actuality rather than possibility.

The same poem by Pushkin is the focus of attention at the beginning of "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", the much

longer but still incomplete aesthetic section of Bakhtin's early magnum opus. (This opening is placed in a "Supplementary Section" at the end of the text by the editors of the 1990 English translation, as I mentioned, probably because it exists in only a fragmentary form in the surviving manuscript.) Though the terms and concepts in the aesthetic analysis here are somewhat different from those of the ethical analysis in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, it is the presence of a human being, a concrete although fictive person who functions as a center of value in and of himself, that establishes the domain of art and provides the foundation for aesthetic activity within the literary process and product. "There is no aesthetic vision and there are no works of art without a hero", Bakhtin argues. "The only thing we must do", he says, "is distinguish between an actual expressed hero and a potential hero who strives to break through the shell, as it were, of a given object of aesthetic vision" (228). On the other hand, there is no hero — only a given but undeveloped potential of human being — if there is no author, no creator behind the work. But in the very next paragraph Bakhtin acknowledges the instability of this distinction, admitting that in some cases "a given human being and a determinate hero do, in fact, gravitate toward each other and often pass into each other without any mediation" (229). Like his philosophy in general, Bakhtin's aesthetics is internally transgressive. He introduces sharp distinctions, only to blur them later on. The last paragraph of the opening section of this aesthetic system with interpenetrating parts gives an uncharacteristically fable-like explanation of how, in literature proper, the single or singular person of ethics becomes more than one.

Author and hero meet in life; they enter into cognitive-ethical, lived-life relations with each other, contend with each other (even if they meet in one human being). And this event, the event of their life, the event of their intensely serious relations and contention, crystallizes in an artistic whole into an architectonically stable yet dynamically living relationship between author and hero which is essential for understanding the life of the work. (231)

There is perhaps a touch of Borges in this account of how a work of literature comes into being — one is reminded of Pierre Menard becoming Cervantes — but unfortunately for literary crit-

ics unaccustomed to transcendental philosophy, such pithy parables are infrequent in the five sections of "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" that follow this preliminary discussion, sections entitled by Bakhtin "The Problem of the Author's Relationship to the Hero", "The Spatial Form of the Hero", "The Temporal Whole of the Hero (The Problem of the Inner Man — the Soul)", "The Whole of the Hero as a Whole of Meaning" and "The Problem of the Author". Nevertheless, within all of these analytical elaborations, Bakhtin's own distinctive version of the literary personality in several persons remains central. Once its intra-personal as well as inter-personal character is grasped, its focus on an individuality which is also a sociality, the possibility of personality elaborated in this early and unpublished essay can provide a compelling scheme for the interpretation of literary texts of all kinds, not the least of which, I will argue, is the English novel *Frankenstein*.

In this first section (whose title and opening are missing), the resemblance of the author to God, the "theological allegory", as George Steiner calls it, that early Modernism inherited from Romanticism, in which "the successful dramatist or story-teller or painter is 'God' in miniature", is not much in view[6]. Bakhtin in fact explicitly holds religious discourse at arm's length when he observes of the aesthetic resolution in the demand for a kiss after death from the beloved at the end of Pushkin's poem "Parting", "We do not need to know whether Pushkin actually received a kiss on the other side of the grave; we do not need a philosophical, religious, or ethical validation of the possibility and the necessity of meeting beyond the grave and of resurrection (immortality as a postulate of authentic love); the event is wholly consummated and resolved for us [within the poem]" (221). But in the sections that follow, the family resemblance between author and deity is given a discreet but a distinctively Christian and peculiarly Russian Orthodox formulation. It is not the sovereign power of the deity over his creatures that the author reenacts in his relations with his hero in Bakhtin's version of the theological allegory. Rather it is God's loving attention to his children. The author is godlike not in the initial creation of his characters as much as in his ongoing, self-limiting and self-sacrificing provision for their existence, in his "loving removal of

himself from the field of the hero's life", as Bakhtin puts it (14). But the author is also God-like, within a Russian Orthodox theological tradition, in his ability to "interpenetrate" without merging, to "permeate" without losing his separate personhood, the other person who has proceeded from him, the hero whom he has begotten. As many Bakhtin scholars have accepted in Russia and as some now recognize in the West, Bakhtin's literary and philosophical analysis draws extensively, though somewhat obliquely, on Christianity in its theological, liturgical and biblical expressions[7]. For many literary critics in the West today, this may well be Bakhtin's greatest transgression. It may seem good grounds for rejecting his theory of literature, particularly this early version of it, out of hand. On the other hand, as I will argue shortly, it also makes the early writings of Bakhtin particularly well-adapted for looking back at the literature of Romanticism, where — for better or worse — the religious dimension of literary activity and the underlying analogy between author and deity are hard to ignore.

In the last section of the manuscript, "The Problem of the Hero" Bakhtin insists that the domain of art is autonomous. Art has a special architectonics of its own, a special disposition of human personhood that is not the same as the architectonics of religion or of any other domain of culture or form of life Art cannot provide the blueprint for answerability within life in general, nor for answerability within any of its other separate spheres of activity; rather, it occupies a distinctive cultural space. "Special answerability is indispensable (in an autonomous domain of culture)", Bakhtin explains near the end of this section; "one cannot create directly in God's world. This specialization of answerability, however, can be founded only upon a deep trust in the highest level of authority that blesses a culture — upon trust, that is, that there is another — the highest other — who answers for my own special answerability, and trust in the fact that I do not act in an axiological void. Outside this trust, only empty pretensions are possible" (206)

What Bakhtin offers not a hermeneutics of suspicion but a poetics of trust, a poetics based on the belief that art as such is possible. His enterprise stands apart from the hermeneutics of suspicion still dominant in literary criticism today in the West, which searches

for meaning and truth based on the conviction that art is not possible, that aesthetic activity is either delusional (the formation of empty and groundless pretensions) or ideological (the imposition of false forms of consciousness in a deceptive exercise of power). Without any trust at all in the possible person or persons of God, Bakhtin intimates, trust in the artistically given human being and the creative consciousness that has assumed the task of bringing this image of human being into existence is no longer possible, and art — especially literary art — disappears as such. Under such a cultural regime, literary art itself can no longer be created, nor can it any longer be understood as something that once was created in the past. Literature can be studied as something else — as language or as social history or as psychology — but not as creative and created art. Nevertheless, the forms of the author and hero — the forms of their reciprocal and aesthetically constitutional relationship with one another — are by no means fixed or simple, as the intermediate sections of this treatise demonstrate in generous analytic detail.

I believe it is possible to discern an overall system of aesthetic interactions in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", even if it is a somewhat unstable and unpredictable system in some respects. I try to describe this rough-hewn cabinet of many compartments in a book on Bakhtin and Romanticism that I have recently completed and hope to publish soon. But here in this essay I want to take a more direct approach and move from theory to practice, from general principles to a specific example. I want to introduce the other personage I intend to use as dialogic partner for the early Bakhtin: Victor Frankenstein, as lovingly created or aesthetically "crystallized" by the early Mary Shelley. Let me say in passing here, without adequate argument or evidence, that I don't find the early Bakhtin a completely different thinker from the later Bakhtin, however. Passing over the many other brilliant interpretations of the extended career of the great Russian thinker and theorist, I refer only to an essay by Ann Shukman on the abiding "personalism" or *lichnost*' throughout Bakhtin's writings[8]. I find this idea intuitively convincing as well as useful for advancing my particular argument, and I will make reference to some of his later writings as well.

II.

In a set of notes entitled "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book", only published in 1976, after his death, Bakhtin elaborated on personality as a "problem of polyphony":

A completely new structure for the image of a human being — a full-blooded and fully signifying other consciousness which is not inserted into the finalizing frame of reality, which is not finalized by anything (not even death), for its meaning cannot be resolved or abolished by reality (to kill does not mean to refute). This other consciousness is not inserted into the frame of authorial consciousness, it is revealed from within as something that stands *outside* and *alongside* and with which the author can enter into dialogic relations. The author, like Prometheus, creates (or rather recreates) living beings who are independent of himself and with whom he is on equal terms. He cannot finalize them, for he has discovered what distinguishes personality from all that is not personality[9].

Although Bakhtin is thinking primarily of Dostoevsky here, his remarks have a peculiar applicability to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, not only to her own strategies as a neophyte author, but also to the project of her hero, Victor Frankenstein, "the Modern Prometheus", as the book is sub-titled, as he anticipates his project of creating new life from dead bodies. "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me", her hero recalls thinking. Of course, his own performance as "author" (a word that he applies to himself from time to time) is far from relational or polyphonic, in Bakhtin's terms. He resists being "on equal terms" with his creation or creature and seems quite unaware of "what distinguishes personality from all that is not personality" in this other living being. From the moment the creature looks back at him with his "dull yellow eye", Victor Frankenstein shows himself to be the monologic creator par excellence[10]. He is less like Bakhtin's Prometheus than he is like the "worldly-wise Hermes" whom Jean Paul Richter describes, disparagingly, in a chapter "On Characters" in his *School for Aesthetics*:

Like the writer [himself], every literary life . . . is born, not made. All worldly and human knowledge cannot by itself create a

character which would continue to live. The worldly-wise Hermes frequently conjures up Christian skeletons, skeletal angels, and skeletal devils. He who selects and links together a skeletal character for himself from the bones lying in the various churchyards of his experience and disguises and covers them rather than give them a body, torments himself and others with a pseudo-life, whose movement he must provide through marionette strings, instead of muscles[11].

Of course the problem that Mary Shelley's novel dramatizes is that Frankenstein's creation of a life is neither literary nor mythological. The "pale student of unhallowed arts" (172) has chosen scientific rather than aesthetic activity, in a literal and material realization of the Romantic metaphor of the artist as God. And in doing so, he ends up imitating not so much Prometheus, whose making of mankind out of mud is secondary in most versions of the myth to his stealing of fire from the gods on behalf of these already miserable and oppressed creatures, nor even Hermes, who guides the souls of the dead to the underworld. Rather he imitates the God of the Enlightenment philosophers, the Deist deity who creates but then withdraws from his creation, a creation whose clockwork operation needs neither his ongoing providential support nor his subsequent redemptive intervention. Victor Frankenstein lacks the emotional power to sustain and nurture his new species, even when the creature, following the example of Adam in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a book that he has encountered in his autodidact's education, asks for a bride, an Eve to make such a species possible. He also lacks the imagination to see what most readers feel once the creature has told Frankenstein his story in the hut on the mountain in the Alps: that Frankenstein has unwittingly made the creature, whom he addresses during this primal encounter as "Devil" and "monster", in his own human image. It is a particular cruelty that when the creature discovers Frankenstein's laboratory journal in the pocket of the coat he has been wearing, he concludes from that horrified narrative of his origins that he is not "beautiful and alluring", as God made Adam when he made him "after his own image", but is rather a "filthy type" of his creator's humanity, "more horrid even from the very resemblance" (88).

I don't mean to suggest that this unusual novel is a theological or even an aesthetic allegory, although such interpretations would be as plausible, I would argue, as the remarkably various readings that have been made of it during the last several decades in which it has gradually become a major text in the canon of Romanticism. Rather I mean to invoke the author-hero/creator-creature analogy, widely used in Romantic literature, to focus attention on the distinctive way that Mary Shelley presents the otherness of personality in this work. Whether they are measured ethically, aesthetically or religiously, the deficiencies of the single hero (proclaimed as such by the title) are finally less interesting than the variations on the author-hero relationship that the novel conjures up, quite self-consciously, out of the *disjecta membra* of Western literary tradition. As Garret Stewart puts it, "like the Creature made rather than born, demonically cobbled together, the novelistic mode is pieced out before our eyes, born of epistolary directness, midwifed by a framing structure that remains vectored beyond the plot's own closure"[12]. To which may be added the observation of Michael Holquist: "Frankenstein's monster springs from the library as much as he does from the charnel house and laboratory: he is made up not only of other bodies from the past, but like Mary Shelley's novel, from other books from the past". And to which I would only add that Mary Shelley's aesthetic activity is successful, in Bakhtin's terms, where Victor Frankenstein's is not, because she *has* discovered what distinguishes personality from all that is not personality, at least as far as the authorizing otherness of Romantic personality is concerned.

This is how I interpret the many allusions to Rousseau in Mary Shelley's novel. Victor Frankenstein is a representative man of the Enlightenment, and like his fellow Genevan Rousseau, whose doctrines haunt the novel, his idea of the harmony of human nature, the natural world, and the ideal social order is based on the belief that nature is the work of a virtuous and reasonable deity. As Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had argued, still within the Enlightenment paradigm of reason, Rousseau's novel of and on education, Emile, had left half the human race out of consideration in setting forth the ideal development of this faculty in younger

members of the species. Less overtly, Mary Shelley demonstrates how the ideal of authentic, self-identical personhood dramatized in Rousseau's epistolary novel Julie and in his autobiographical Confessions is unable to come to terms, creatively or sympathetically, with the depths of otherness that had been opened up in the sphere of the personal by the creative and critical aesthetic activity of Romanticism. Interestingly, her father William Godwin had undergone a similar aesthetic conversion in his political and psychological Gothic novel *Caleb Williams*, on which, along with many other precursor texts, it is clear that Mary Shelley drew. *Frankenstein* is dedicated to Godwin, identifying him as "the Author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, &c" (4).

In the narrative of *Frankenstein*, we have characters who are both authors and heroes, narrator-creators of one story and main characters within another story, characters who turn out to be radically interdependent with one another in these roles. The novel is constructed in concentric circles of storytelling, storytelling that turns from the presentation of the speaker's self to the presentation of another being he has encountered. At the center, we have Victor Frankenstein's laboratory journal, accidentally preserved and coincidentally read by his creature, which gives the creature confirmation of his identity as a monster. This is a story which remains untold; it is simply alluded to, not reproduced. Framing this story is the creature's own narrative, reproduced verbatim, as the quotation marks at the beginning of every paragraph assure us, which occupies six of the nine chapters of the second volume. Framing the creature's autobiography is the story of Victor Frankenstein and his creation, as told by himself, which runs from the first chapter of the first volume to the interrupted seventh chapter of the third volume. But framing this self-portrait of the maker as a young man is the first-person narrative of Robert Walton, the aspiring polar explorer, which begins with four letters to his sister in the first volume and ends with five letters (or five dated entries in a single letter) which conclude the novel.

Although they appear in traditional fictional forms — the journal, the interpolated tale and the familiar letter — each of these incorporated narratives begins as an autobiography (the autobio-

graphical form of author-hero relationship, in Bakhtin's terminology from "Author and Hero") which then transforms itself into the story of a Romantic hero, heroic and/or villainous in his otherness, something like what Bakhtin calls the "lyric" form of author and hero. In each case, a tale of an I-for-myself turns into a tale of the other-for-me. Walton abandons the story of his own adventure, prospective and retrospective, to become the worshipful author and faithful amanuensis of Frankenstein's heroic personality. Frankenstein leaves the account of his own *Lehrjahre* to become the horrified witness to his creature's career as a monster — perhaps because he has not been able to bring such witness into court, either to save the falsely accused servant Justine or to enlist the law in bringing his friend Clerval's murderer to justice. The creature begins with the story of his own coming to consciousness and social awareness but ends with the story of his fanatic counter-plotting against his creator, once he has learned of Frankenstein's existence. At this point, in the middle of the novel, the direction of these author-hero relations is therefore reversed. The monster becomes the author of a different representation of Frankenstein as hero. He transforms the modern Prometheus of the subtitle into a latter-day Zeus or Jupiter, "the Oppressor of mankind", as Percy Shelley called him in his own remaking of the Greek myth, rather than the "Champion" of a new species, as he has presented himself [14]. "You are my creator, but I am your master; — obey!" the creature/monster later tells his miscreant creator (116). It is not that the creature controls Victor's actions — Victor has just destroyed here the female of the species he had been laboring over in conflicted response to the monster's demand for her. It is rather that he controls Victor's social identity, denying him first the vital friendship of Clerval, then his long-deferred marriage to Elizabeth. Even more important, he controls Victor's image before the reader, a rhetorical mastery that has led many critics to decide that Frankenstein must be the villain of the story and the monster his innocent victim, treating the novel as the form of author-hero relationship that Bakhtin calls "Sentimental character" in his early treatise on aesthetics.

The reversal of creative polarity extends to the author-hero relationship between Walton and Frankenstein as well. When Wal-

ton's sailors try to extract from him a promise to abandon their desperate polar quest, the ever-eloquent Frankenstein exhorts them not to lose faith in their noble captain and their "glorious expedition". His appeal is obviously self-interested, and it is finally unsuccessful, since Walton announces that he is returning to England as the novel ends, after Frankenstein dies. But it is the last of many indications that the relationship between an author of a story and the characters within the story is reversible. "I agree with you", Frankenstein tells Walton at the beginning of the novel, ironically, as it turns out, when Walton confesses his longing for a friend and "a more intimate sympathy with a fellow mind than had ever fallen to my lot". "We are unfashioned creatures, but half made up, if one wiser, better, dearer than ourselves — such a friend ought to be — do not lend his aid to perfectionate our weak and faulty natures", Frankenstein says[15]. The character of the other — intimate but also alien, friend but also enemy, self but also other — looms large within each of the initially first-person narratives that make up the novel. The other-as-hero exerts an unexpected and powerful influence, generally for the worse it turns out, on the self-as-author who assumes responsibility for presenting him to the world. In Mary Shelley's version of it, the authorizing otherness of Romantic personality takes the form of a revenger's tragedy. The sublime otherness of nature, seen among the mountains of the Alps and amidst the ice floes of the Arctic, is simply the stage-set for this drama.

In the light of Bakhtin's explicit poetics of author and hero, however, resembling as it does the Romantic unwritten poetics of authors and characters, both dominant and recessive, we can appreciate that the aesthetic whole of *Frankenstein* is more than the sum of its parts. The novel is neither an artistic failure, as earlier generations of scholars tended to assume, nor it simply a success of an ethical or political nature, a righteous critique of some unrighteous ideology, past or present, in which content merits more attention than form. Frankenstein is an aesthetic success, a valid and imaginatively coherent work of art, because it proceeds from the aesthetic activity of an author behind the scenes, an author who is not creating from within the domain of the egotistical sublime, as is the case with Victor Frankenstein and his creature or, when

the creative tables are turned, with the monster (now self-identified with a Romantically sympathetic Satan of *Paradise Lost*). Nor is this author like the negatively capable Robert Walton, who has been inspired to seek a polar paradise, as he reminds his sister, by that most abject of unheroic author-heroes of Romantic literature, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, and who remains to the end an uncritical hero-worshipper of the "godlike" Frankenstein. Rather this author beyond the authors, realized by the aesthetic activity of Mary Shelley, assumes a position of charitable outsideness toward all her would-be authors and would-be heroes, a position not unlike that described by Bakhtin in his analysis of the author-hero relationship he calls "character". In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" Bakhtin uses the term "character" to describe not a single literary personage or discrete person, but a particular kind of relationship **between** author and hero:

"*Character* is the name we give to that form of author-hero interrelationship which actualizes the task of producing the *whole* of a hero as a determinate personality, where, moreover, this task constitutes the fundamental task: the hero is given us, from the very outset, as a determinate whole, and the author's self activity proceeds, from the very outset, along the essential boundaries of the hero. Everything is perceived here as a constituent in the characterization of the hero, i.e., fulfills a characterological function; everything reduces to and serves as the answer to the question: *who* is he?" (174)

This is the form of author-hero relationship that Bakhtin will later call polyphonic and will find most fully realized (more prescriptively in the first edition of 1929, **only** realized) in the fiction of Dostoevsky. It is a form of author-hero relationship where, as we noted above, the consciousness of the hero "is revealed from within as something that stands *outside* and *alongside* and with which the author can enter into dialogic relations".

This may seem like an exaggerated claim for the first literary effort of a nineteen-year old, daughter of two rather indifferent novelists and protégé-lover of a poet with little interest in prose fiction. I have no intention of claiming that with *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley proved herself as great a novelist as Dostoevsky — or

Flaubert or Jane Austen, for that matter. Rather I mean to specify the way that her rendering of the author-hero/creator-creature/self-other complex of Romantic thinking about human persons and personality anticipates the poetics of author and hero relations at the heart of Bakhtin's literary theory, a theory in which, in spite of its many permutations over five decades, a peculiar form of personhood remains fundamental. It is not just that *Frankenstein* fits Bakhtin's theory of the novel or illustrates Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogism, although as Michael Holquist has shown, both assertions can be effectively supported. My point is more specific: that Mary Shelley's novel realizes, in a distinctive way, the interdependence of persons on which, for Bakhtin, the singularity of personhood is based and for which, as he found in the course of writing "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", the aesthetic part of his projected "first philosophy", the history of literature provided him with such rich and varied example.

This greater "outsideness" of the actual author, as Bakhtin would put it, beyond the images of authors dramatized in this novel, comes initially from the simple fact that on the plane of events in the novel, each author is presenting a hero who is essentially biographical, who has an extra-aesthetic existence and existential autonomy outside and alongside the autobiographical narrator that make god-like transgredience, in Bakhtin's Kantian terminology, impossible. In this respect, it is relatively easy for Shelley as author of the novel to keep her creative focus (and the reader's contemplative focus, as Bakhtin would have it) not on one character or another but on the author-hero relationship itself. Thus none of the three authors who present first themselves and then others as heroes (only to become the heroes of an other's authorship) becomes a "determinate personality", a free-thinking and freely acting person or personage in whom the spiritual form of the hero approaches autonomy, as Bakhtin will argue is the case with the heroes of Dostoevsky. Victor Frankenstein is no Ivan Karamazov; the creature is no Prince Myshkin; Robert Walton is no Underground Man. Nevertheless, all three of Shelley's personages embody the vital but precarious alterity of persons "but half made up", as Frankenstein puts it, as they pursue projects, creative and destructive, of remarkable single-

mindedness. They are all characters of "the idea", as Bakhtin puts it, which he says is another discovery of the artist who is able to create polyphonic or dialogic narrative. "The second discovery is the *depiction* (or rather the re-creation) of the *self-developing* idea (inseparable from personality). The idea becomes the object of artistic depiction and is revealed not at the level of a system (philosophical or scientific), but on the level of the event", he writes.[16] None of the ideas in Shelley's novel is a particularly good idea; that we can easily see. But neither is Raskolnikov's idea of the superman a good idea in *Crime and Punishment*. Walton's idea of polar exploration and exploits, Frankenstein's idea of discovering the principle of biological life, and the creature's idea of symmetrical revenge on his creator are all ethically, politically and cognitively flawed, to say nothing of their religious value. But each idea madly pursued is inseparable from the separate persons whom it brings together, both in friendship and in bondage. None of these persons can be understood as a full or self-sufficient personality apart from the others with whom it has involved and incorporated itself, but none can be understood simply as an emblematic projection of part of a single personality, as a virtue or mental faculty in some kind of psychic allegory, either. In an odd way, Mary Shelley has created an image of human personality in three persons, a grotesque, secular version of the triune personhood of God in classic Christianity rather than the one-personed or depersonalized deity of the Enlightenment philosophers, created, as Voltaire quipped, in man's own image. In this imagining, she anticipates the aesthetic personality that is also a social commonality that was envisioned by Bakhtin. "The artist's third discovery is dialogicality as a special form of interaction among autonomous and equally signifying consciousnesses", Bakhtin writes in "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book". Such aesthetic transformation opposes "monologism", which Bakhtin calls "a denial of the equal rights of consciousness vis-a-vis truth (understood abstractly and systematically)"[17].

What is striking about Mary Shelley's version of this discovery avant la lettre is that she was able to add still another level of such interaction in her "Author's Introduction" to the third edition of *Frankenstein* published more than ten years later. This retrospective

account of her own aesthetic activity, written by Shelley in 1831, expands the dialogic interactions of her completed (but also now revised) novel to include the author — an autobiographical representation of the author — herself. As in the novel itself, her own story of how she came to write the novel unfolds within a domestic setting that nurtures creativity at the same time that it inhibits it. The storytelling circle that she recalls, convened during summer evenings in a rented house on the shores of Lake Geneva, becomes still another frame-tale of intimate and alienating relations. On the one hand, she is included in the ghost-story-writing collective, along with the "illustrious [male] poets" Byron and Percy Shelley and Byron's doctor-friend Polidori. On the other hand, when she is asked each morning "*Have you thought of a story?*" she is "forced to reply with a mortifying negative" (171). The modifier "mortifying" is figurative, but it reveals her continuing solidarity with the work she goes on to call "my hideous progeny" (173). Her reaction to her creation is thus markedly different from Victor Frankenstein's. She does not now, as she did not in her aesthetic activity at the time of the novel's composition, turn away in revulsion and abdication of responsibility. Rather she acknowledges her maternity, recounting her conception of the story during a night-time revery of unusual vividness, when her imagination was "gifting" her with images of life generated according to scientific principles, as the subject had been discussed earlier in the evening by "Lord Byron" and "Shelley", with herself a "devout but nearly silent listener" (171). It is significant that the catalytic image or inspiring "idea" is not the "horrid thing" itself, nor is it the "artist" himself who created it. It is the imagined sight of the once impersonal thing looking back with dawning personal consciousness at the person who has brought him into being: "looking at him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes" (172). The words "but speculative" are crucial. The vision of the creature reflecting on his creator is an emblem of the "dialogicality" that Bakhtin claims for the artist who has succeeded in grasping "the problem of polyphony". It is also an emblem of the otherness of the Romantic person, authorized by the formerly self-identical self and authorizing that self, no longer self-identical, in return.

In thus exercising the Romantic activity of criticism in concert with her previous act of creation, Mary Shelley effectively

counters the earlier "Preface" of 1818, authored by her husband Percy Shelley, which condescended to the "enervating effects of the novels of the present day" and the "humble novelist" from the vantage point of "the highest specimens of poetry", to be found in the works of Homer, Shakespeare and Milton (5). Percy himself had published two inconsequential Gothic novels, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, in 1810 at the beginning of his literary career, but wisely decided to devote his efforts to poetry and essays thereafter. He later re-imagined Mary's modern Prometheus, as well as Aeschylus' ancient Titan, in the form of poetic drama in his *Prometheus Unbound*, begun several months after the publication of *Frankenstein* in 1818. In the enemy brotherhood of Prometheus and Jupiter, which Prometheus must repent of in order to become free, as well as in the loving communion of Prometheus and Asia, which can only come to fruition after Prometheus "unsays" his self-destructive curse, given back to him by Jupiter's ghostly double, one can see a kind of "Frankenstein Unbound". Among other things, the later work suggests a more central role for the marginalized female character of the novel, Elizabeth Lavenza, in the quest for liberatory revelation undertaken by Asia in Act II. However, these "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence", as Percy called them, meant to appeal to "the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers", have proved much less compelling to later audiences (viewers as well as readers) than the monstrous realism of Mary's interrelated persons[18]. Bakhtin speaks of the "novelization" of traditional poetic genres when the less respectable form of the novel gained authority in the course of the nineteenth century. But it is clear that in the period of Romanticism, poeticization of novelistic genres was also common. The currents of populism and elitism flowed in both directions, in those times as well as in our own.

The family resemblances between the multi-disciplinary thought of Mikhail Bakhtin and the many-splendored poetry and fiction of the Romantic era can be (and will be, as I will show at greater length elsewhere) further elaborated in years to come. But they should not be pursued simply as the imposition of later, sophisticated philosophical theory upon earlier, naive artistic practice — as the production of active "Bakhtinian readings" upon inert or passive

Romantic literary works. Rather the shared concerns of the modern, 20th c. thinker and the older, 19th c. artists should be considered in light of one another, considered dialogically in the deepest sense of this distinctive Bakhtinian word. Among the several concerns, central (or centrally circumferential), that Bakhtin and his Romantic precursors share is a concern with the complexities of what it means to be a person, in art as well as in life. To return to Michael Holquist, with whom I began: Bakhtin's "meditation on the possibility of selfhood makes its way through the most powerful doubts about its existence that have been raised across the spectrum of the human, social, and even the so-called precise sciences"[19]. To which I would only add: and across the spectrum of the creative literature of the past two centuries, from the revolution that was Romanticism onward, as well.

Emory University
Atlanta, GA, USA

Уолтер Рид, автор книги «Диалоги Слова: Библия как литература согласно Бахтину» («Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin», Oxford University Press, 1993)

[1] *Dialogism*: Bakthtin and his world. — London/New York: Routledge, 1990. — P. 90—106.

[2] See, for example, *The Endurance* of Frankenstein: essays on Mary Shelley's novel / ed. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher. — Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979 or Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*: the 1818 text, contexts, nineteenth-century responses, modern criticism / ed. J. Paul Hunter. — New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.

[3] All quotations are from *Art* and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin / ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, translation and notes by Liapunov, supplement translated by Keith Bostrom. — Austin: University of Texas Press,

1990, with page numbers in parentheses.

[4] *Toward* a Philosophy of the Act / trans. Vadim Liapunov, ed. Liapunov and Michael Holquist. — Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. — P. 54

[5] Ibid, P. 65.

[6] *Grammars* of Creation. — New Haven: Yale UP, 2001. — P. 172, 173.

[7] See, for example, *Emerson C.* Russian Orthodoxy and the Early Bakhtin // Religion and Literature. — 1990. — 22; *Mihailovic A.* Corporeal Words: Mikhail Bakhtin's Theology of Discourse. — Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997.

[8] M. M. Bakhtin: Notes on his Philosophy of Man // *Poetry, prose and Public Opinion: Essays Presented in Memory of Dr. N. E. Andreyev.* — Letchworth: Avebury Publishing, 1984.

[9] Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book // *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* / ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. — Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. — P. 284.

[10] *Shelley M.* Frankenstein / ed. Hunter. — P. 34. Further quotations, except where noted, give page numbers in parentheses from this edition, based on the first edition of 1818.

[11] *Horn of Oberon: Jean Paul Richter's School for Aesthetics* / trans. Margaret R. Hale. — Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973. — P. 150.

[12] *Dear* Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction. — Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. — P. 97.

[13] *Dialogism*, P. 97.

[14] Preface // *Prometheus Unbound in Shelley's Poetry and Prose* / ed. Donald Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. —New York: Norton, 1977. — P. 133.

[15] This passage was added to the third edition, published in 1831; see the Penguin Classics edition of *Frankenstein*, ed. Maurice Hindle (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), P. 73.

[16]