CHAPTER 6

Mary Shelley, Flesh-Caricature and Horrid Realism

The disproportioned and distorted bodies in Mary Shelley's horror writing have a legacy from the 'flesh-caricatures' of eighteenth-century writing descriptive of the body, where social critique and moral counsel often give way to materialist, detail-oriented fascination with the physical 'caricaturing' of the human body in vulnerable transitional states. From Thomas Browne's *Letter to a Friend* (1690) to J. P. Malcolm's *Historical Sketch of the Art of Caricaturing* (1813): in the century before *Frankenstein*, the *troppo caricato* meaning of *caricatúra* lends itself to lurid descriptions that not only speak on the subject of 'deformity' but offer grotesque representations of bodies partitioned into proportions and contrasts. Shelley and Scott use 'flesh-caricature' tropes as occasions for a 'horrid realism' of descriptive and narrative techniques that work to disrupt political and moral allegories of monstrosity. In *Frankenstein* (1818) and in Shelley's short story 'Transformation' (1831), horrid realism's literalising and fragmenting effects reify and 'de-characterise' deviant bodies into collections of material facts. This strain of horror writing dismantles character's place in formal realism, eliciting pseudo-sensory revulsion by continually drawing legible 'character' into tension with the mixed particulars of the material body. In horror writing's legacy from Romantic caricature talk, representation becomes flesh: caricature is made real, 'character' put in quotation marks.

I begin by countering the argument that in *Frankenstein*'s descriptions of the creature's 'disproportion', Shelley's vocabulary is non-technical, and the narrators' accounts unreliable. Highlighting the understanding of corporeal disproportion and distortion in the Shelleys' editorial decisions, I argue that *Frankenstein* describes the creature's body consistently and reiteratively, making his physical being static and factual, rather than an impression that alters depending on the viewer, or according to changes in moral or psychological 'character'. Examining the ways in which Shelley's concept of disproportion carries over to her story 'Transformation', I show

how both narratives open the potential of a formal realism for horror writing through the 'gigantic dwarf', an aesthetic type associated with a compulsive rhythm of looking and not looking. Repeatedly presented as a disturbing combination of divergent physical characteristics and aesthetic effects, gigantic/dwarfish bodies are chronically partitioned and detailed, providing opportunities for a 'horrid realism' prosaically concerned with material bodies. I analyse the tropes and techniques Shelley uses to represent physical disproportion as grotesque in *Frankenstein* and 'Transformation', making comparisons with Scott's grotesques in *The Black Dwarf*, *Rob Roy*, *The Pirate* and *The Talisman*. Exploring how these de-characterisation techniques continually destabilise critical readings that abstract the body into an 'image' or signifier, I address how horrid realism exists alongside idealising physiognomic portraiture and the mind-body equation in Shelley's novels, close-reading key passages in *Frankenstein* and indicating variants in the novel's textual history that establish the grotesque body as an exception to physiognomic analysis.

In the last section of the chapter, I point out some concrete links between Shelley's flesh-caricatures and their non-fiction precedents, collating passages about the physical disproportioning of growing and dying bodies in texts such as John Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1728), Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) and William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1769), as well as Browne's description of the Hippocratic face and Malcolm's theory of flesh-caricatures. To conclude Chapter 6, I suggest that the horrid realism developed through the depiction of 'gigantic dwarfs' in fiction – influentially by Scott, Hugo and Dickens as well as Shelley – can be seen to provide techniques, tropes and vocabulary for a tradition of flesh-caricatures in the 'body horror' subgenre.

Gigantic Dwarfs: Shelley's Vocabulary of Disproportion

It has been argued that *Frankenstein*'s descriptions of the creature's body do not use the term 'deformity' consistently, nor in accordance with Burke's attempt at a technical definition of deformity. Denise Gigante's focus on *ugliness* in *Frankenstein*, where ugliness 'precedes and predetermines [. . .] monstrosity', finds a gap where conceptions of ugliness might fit in eighteenth-century aesthetics, arguing that Shelley's monster represents an 'aesthetic impossibility: the positive manifestation of ugliness'.[1] This analysis separates ugliness from a particular conception of deformity, which refers to a *disproportioned* form. Thus, the monster, Gigante argues,

is not actually 'deformed', quoting Burke's precept that '[t]hough ugliness be the opposite of beauty, it is not the opposite to proportion':[2]

> Certainly, the Creature is not 'opposite to proportion'. [. . .] As Burke explains, it is not ugliness but 'deformity' that is opposed to proportion: 'deformity is opposed, not to beauty, but to the *compleat, common form*' (*E*, 102; emphasis in the original). One must keep in mind that Burke is working from an aesthetic tradition that he feels has been unsystematic in its use of terms and inexact in mapping the terrain of the non-beautiful. Even the Creature refers to the 'deformity of [his] figure,' despite the fact that, although large, he is not technically deformed' (*F*, 142). When he sees himself in a transparent pool for the first time, he laments, 'the fatal effects of this miserable deformity' (*F*, 142). Yet, as his creator seems to know better than himself, deformity is a distinct category not to be confused [. . .] with the ugly.[3]

This argument refers to Victor's description, on the night of the creature's animation, of how he constructed the creature 'in proportion'.[4] Since Gigante's compelling distinction between the monster's deformity and his ugliness, scholarship on Shelley's fiction seems not to have re-examined the key point that the creature is well-proportioned, excepting Essaka Joshua's mentioning that '[p]roportionality is an important element in the description of the creature, though the accounts of it [in the novel] are inconsistent'.[5] Looking at descriptions of the creature in the 1818 *Frankenstein*, alongside the Shelleys' manuscript revisions and the treatment of a physically grotesque character in 'Transformation', I will argue that the creature *is* technically deformed and consistently described as such. In this chapter, I am interested in the creature's disproportion because of the fundamental role it might play in readings of the novel, not as a political, social or moral allegory, but as a literary pioneer in the development of a 'horrid realism' whose descriptions and narrative techniques insist on the body as a material fact that defies abstraction.

The creature is identified most positively with proportion in Victor's narration of the candlelit scene where he animates the creature and it takes its first breaths. We are told, indeed, that '[h]is limbs were in proportion' – but these five words, excerpted from the scene, and dislocated from the following scene of Victor's dream, give an incomplete description of the creature's general shape. It is necessary to re-examine some of the most quoted passages in the novel, starting with the moment of animation:

> [I]t breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.
>
> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to

> form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes (39).

Four points stand out here, with regard to the creature's proportions. First, that Shelley's paragraph contextualises the past tense of the limbs being 'in proportion' with Victor's pluperfect statements 'I *had* endeavoured' and '*had* selected'. When the phrase 'his limbs were in proportion' is quoted out of context, the past tense appears to belong in the first layer of the third-person past-tense narration, and to take on a continuous aspect: in other words, it seems that the creature was continuously well proportioned, before and after animation. In the text, however, the words are sandwiched between two pluperfect statements, imparting the sense of the limbs *having been* in proportion. After Victor's exclamation – 'Great God!' – we return to the first layer of the narrative's past tense, describing how the creature looks post-animation. My interpretation is that this passage ascribes the creature's proportion to his pre-animation state and to an earlier phase of Victor's process (perhaps even before the limbs were actually joined together).

The second point is that the creature's proportions are associated with Victor's attempted and unsuccessful process of *forming* – 'endeavoured to form' – not ascribed to a final, accomplished form; with the work of *choosing* – grouped with the features 'I had selected' and with the creature's multiple limbs rather than with the assembled whole of his body. Earlier in the novel, proportions are included in Victor's plan – 'I resolved [. . .] to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large' – and so associated explicitly with the first stages, of the months spent 'successfully collecting and arranging my materials' (35–6). The third point is that the narration reiterates several times the distorting effect of animation on the creature's arms and legs. The moment when 'a convulsive motion agitated its limbs' is echoed in the following scene, where Victor wakes from a nightmare with 'every limb convulsed' (39). Then the pluperfect returns: 'I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived' (40). Once the creature's body is made capable – its muscularity tense and its joints flexible – the ideal of proportion is unachievable. This could be interpreted as Victor's failure, when selecting pieces of the appropriate dimensions, to account for the impact of mobility and plasticity on the

entire figure's final proportions. We might imagine the creature's limbs (or segments of his limbs) as disproportioned not because they are the wrong length but because some segments of his body, like the 'shrivelled' and readily 'wrinkled' skin on his face (39, 119, 138), have failed to fatten over 'the work of muscles and arteries beneath' (39). Fourth, when Victor's 'Beautiful! —Great God!' signals a switch from before to after, from a selection of beautiful features and proportioned limbs to a body whose different parts generate an effect of 'horrid contrast', Shelley introduces the idea of mismatch and disparity into her descriptions of the creature's physique. After Victor's stated intention to create a being 'proportionably large', the creature is never again depicted as gigantic yet well proportioned.

Quite the opposite. Walton's last letter describes the creature as 'gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted in its proportions' (186–87), and Victor sees 'the distorted proportions of a well-known form' (176), aligning with the animation scene's representation of the creature's proportions as a failed project. While the word 'deformity' occasionally refers generally to the creature's form, when linked with more precise descriptions of the body it occurs with the words 'shape' and 'figure', suggesting a disproportioned outline. This association of the creature's deformity with his shape is reinforced in Shelley's draft notebooks of 1816–17, where Percy's revisions add the words 'shape', 'distorted' and 'proportions', and in one case attribute deformity to the creature's 'aspect'. This word, 'aspect', suggests a general 'look' or 'appearance', such that Percy's phrase 'deformity of its aspect' can also be consistent with a more technical definition, as in Burke, of a deformed body as internally disproportioned: the creature's 'aspect' is its general 'shape'. Mary's original draft reads:

> A flash of lightning illumined the object, and discovered to me its gigantic stature, deformity more hideous than belongs to humanity instantly informed me who it was.[6]

Percy adds a semi-colon that syntactically nudges the creature's 'deformity' away from its stature and towards the new word 'aspect'. He also adds the phrase 'human shape', amplifying Mary's original suggestion that there is something bestial or demonic about him, which exceeds the ugliness possible in a human, living or dead. Misshapenness, more than gigantic stature, is what disallows the creature's humanity. Edited by Percy, the passage reads:

> A flash of lightning illumined the object and discovered to me its gigantic stature; and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me who it was. Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child.

In the first published edition, this last sentence is moved later in the paragraph, but retained. The 1818 text also commits to 'shape', repeating the word in an addition to the first sentence:

> A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom I had given life (56).

Percy again adds the word 'shape' in another scene where the creature's body is illuminated, and also suggests the word 'distorted', a pairing that most explicitly aligns the creature's technical 'deformity' with disproportion. In the notebook draft, Mary writes:

> When suddenly the broard [sic] disk of the moon arose and shone fully upon the daemon who fled.[7]

With Percy's edits, this becomes:

> Suddenly the broard [sic] disk of the moon arose and shone fully upon his ghastly & distorted shape.

Anne K. Mellor has suggested that 'Percy Shelley on several occasions actually distorted the meaning of the text' [8] – here we see Percy actually adding the word 'distorted' to Mary's description of the creature.

The textual history of *Frankenstein* should not, however, credit Percy's revisions with introducing the novel's emphasis on the creature's proportions or its insistence on a technical definition of 'deformity' as disproportion or misshapenness. The key words and phrases in Mary's original descriptions of the creature's body, as just discussed, assume an educated reader's technical understanding of 'deformity', also assumed by Burke in his *Enquiry*. For example, in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) – which Mary had been rereading – Gulliver's meticulous accounting of new worlds continually distinguishes size from proportion, and ugly imperfections from 'actual' deformity. In Brobdingnag and Lilliput, extraordinarily large and small things are nevertheless 'all in proportion', 'all in the same proportion', 'of proportionable Magnitude', 'of a size proportionable', 'a proportionable quantity', 'an exact proportion', and so on. When Gulliver describes a Brobdingnagian nurse, he is careful to differentiate the ugliness of a magnified human being from grotesque disproportion, 'lest the Reader might think those vast Creatures were actually deformed'.[9] While it is generally true that Percy 'tended to see the creature as more monstrous and less human than did Mary',[10] the chain of revisions between Mary's notebooks and the 1818 text show wife and husband collaborating on

descriptions of the creature's 'actual deformity'. This is clearest in the textual history of the novel's final pages. In the scene where Victor spies the creature crossing the ice in a sledge, Mary's original draft reads:

> I strained my sight to view what it could be & uttered wild cry of extacy [sic] when I distinguished a sledge dogs & a hideous form moving away[11]

Percy alters this, substituting for the vaguer word 'hideous' a phrase corresponding with words – 'shape', 'proportion', 'deformity' – used earlier in the novel to describe the creature's physique more technically. As well as adding the word 'distorted' for the second time, he refers to the creature's 'proportions', a word not used since the account of Victor's plans for the creature's size. The draft becomes:

> I strained my sight to discover what it could be & uttered a wild cry of extacy [sic] when I distinguished a sledge dogs & the distorted proportions of a wellknown [sic] form within.

Continuing her notebook draft, in the scene of Walton's encounter with the creature, Mary reiterates the word 'distorted' (which now appears in the text for the third time) and re-uses the formula of distinguishing the extraordinary size of gigantism from the disproportion of technical deformity. The creature is huge *yet* deformed:

> Over him hung a form – which I cannot find words to describe, gigantic in stature – yet uncouth & distorted.[12]

In the fair copy, Mary further tweaks Walton's phrase, adding the word 'proportions' suggested by Percy for Victor's earlier remark about the creature's 'distorted proportions':

> Over him hung a form which I cannot find words to describe gigantic in stature, yet uncouth & distorted in its proportions.[13]

The 1818 text contains three further references to the creature's deformity in relation to his proportions, two of which use the word 'figure' as a synonym for 'shape'. The creature hopes that learning language will 'enable me to make [the cottagers] overlook the deformity of my figure; for with this also the contrast perpetually presented to my eyes had made me acquainted' (90); and he acknowledges that he possesses 'a figure hideously deformed' (96). The phrase 'this miserable deformity' (90), used when the creature recounts seeing himself reflected in a pool, and coming soon after the phrase 'deformity of my figure', incorporates the Burkean definition of deformity as 'an unusual figure' and 'the want of common proportions'.[14] The creature then recalls, 'From my earliest remembrance

I had been as I then was in height and proportion' (97), corroborating the implication that Victor's statement '[h]is limbs were in proportion' does not refer to the creature's body once assembled and animated, and affirming the consistency of the many descriptions of his body as deformed in the sense of being disproportioned.

While there is no record of whether these phrases were in Mary's original draft or were Percy's edits adopted by Mary in later versions – the draft notebooks for these chapters do not survive – their account of the creature's deformity as a matter of shape, figure and proportion is consistent with the definition of deformity agreed and reiterated by the Shelleys in the textual evolution discussed previously. Changes suggested by Percy, and agreed and re-applied by Mary in later drafts, create a consistent picture of the creature as being deformed, in Burke's technical sense of the word, because he is distorted in his proportions.

Shelley goes on to link the term 'deformity' consistently with misshapenness and disproportion in 'Transformation', a short story written in 1830 for the 1831 issue of the literary gift annual *The Keepsake*, around the time that she was preparing the third revised edition of *Frankenstein*. Whereas Frankenstein's creature is a disproportioned giant, the object of horror in 'Transformation' is a disproportioned dwarf. Shelley's descriptions of the dwarf's body participate in the 'gigantic dwarf' of nineteenth-century literature, a grotesque type that Scott influentially adapted to the realist novel – first in *The Black Dwarf* (1816), then in *The Pirate* (1822) and *The Talisman* (1825), and to a lesser extent in *Peveril of the Peak* (1823) and *Rob Roy* (1818). A keen reader of Scott, and influenced by him in her historical romance of *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), Shelley had the opportunity to notice the emphasis on disproportion in Scott's evocative descriptions of characters strongly associated with folklore and the supernatural, and to contribute to a new novelistic tradition of visualising these characters. In the next section of the chapter, which focuses on the descriptive techniques of the 'horrid realism' used in nineteenth-century literature to present disproportioned bodies as grotesque, I will look in more detail at the language and imagery that Shelley and Scott use in characterising 'gigantic' and 'dwarfish' bodies. Here, I define the aesthetic type of the 'gigantic dwarf', whose physical disproportion is grotesqued as a chimerical combination of gigantic with dwarfish features, and where the author imagines the disturbing co-existence of the beautiful, the sublime, the ugly and/or the ludicrous. I show how authors' efforts to describe this aesthetic type generate a particular way of seeing, one that repeatedly drains the power of reason and sympathy, and which creates the

conditions for the obsessive, objectifying focus of horrid realism. Shelley and Scott fantasise the gigantic/dwarfish being, with its disruptions to scale and proportion, as a test object for a realist mode that is concerned with the repetitive subdivision and detailing of material objects, and conscious of these descriptive techniques as horror writing.

Human gigantism and dwarfism were important cases in eighteenth-century aesthetics for thinking about perceptions of size, scale and proportion. In his inscription for *The Bench* (1758), Hogarth takes 'a Giant or a Dwarf' as a metaphor for the *outré* in art. Whereas a 'caricature', for Hogarth, is an inadvertently and comically simplistic drawing of the human form, resembling 'the early scrawlings of a child', a figure *outré* is an artistic distortion that still represents the human body accurately: *outré* 'signifies [. . .] the exaggerated outlines of a figure, all the parts of which may be in other respects, a perfect and true picture of nature. A Giant or a Dwarf may be called a common man *Outré*'. (The phrase 'or a Dwarf' is added in superscript, an afterthought, suggesting the bias towards gigantism in our concepts of exaggeration.) Hogarth does not distinguish the aesthetic effects of the giant versus the dwarf, or discuss the internal proportions of these figures: being extraordinarily small or extraordinarily large is enough for either the giant or the dwarf to serve as an illustration of the *outré*. Theorising the distinct aesthetic effects of giants and dwarfs, however, Burke's *Enquiry* (1757) separates the extraordinarily large from the extraordinarily small figure, and makes room for the type of the 'gigantic dwarf', which combines smallness of stature with gigantism of feature. Gigantism is sublime, smallness more or less neutral – but a combination of the two creates an effect of deformity that repulses and discomfits rather than terrify the viewer.

The gigantic dwarf illustrates both Burke's definition of deformity as disproportion (82) and his association of beauty with 'gradual variation' and 'no sudden protuberance through the whole' (93–4). In delineating his ideal dwarf – extraordinarily small yet well proportioned – Burke may have had in mind particular court dwarfs such as Nicholas Ferry (1741–64) and Józef Boruwłaski (1739–1837), who was said by contemporaries to be 'perfectly straight, upright, well formed and proportioned'.[15] These curious miniatures of humanity, according to Burke, are outnumbered by dwarfs whose body parts are not proportionately small:

> Littleness, merely as such, has nothing contrary to the idea of beauty. The humming bird both in shape and colouring yields to none of the winged species, of which it is the least; and perhaps his beauty is enhanced by its smallness. But there are animals, which when they are extremely small are

> rarely (if ever) beautiful. There is a dwarfish size of men and women, which is almost constantly so gross and massive in comparison of their height, that they present us with a very disagreeable image. But should a man be found not above two or three feet high, supposing such a person to have all the parts of his body of a delicacy suitable to such a size, and otherwise endued with the common qualities of other beautiful bodies, I am pretty well convinced that a person of such stature might be considered as beautiful; might be the object of love; might give us very pleasing ideas on viewing him (126).

Nineteenth-century fiction featuring dwarf characters devotes considerable space to visualising disproportion and explaining its aesthetic effect on an imagined viewer. In *Peveril of the Peak*, Scott's fictionalisation of Jeffrey Hudson (1619–82), the court dwarf of Queen Henrietta Maria, includes a detailed description that searches through the dwarf's physical features for potential sources of beauty, ugliness and the grotesque. Scott fixes on disproportion as the factor that dehumanises the character, supposedly undermining the attractiveness of his face and making him an object of wonder and ridicule:

> Geoffrey Hudson [. . .] although a dwarf of the least possible size, had nothing positively ugly in his countenance, or actually distorted in his limbs. His head, hands, and feet were indeed large, and disproportioned to the height of his body, and his body itself much thicker than was consistent with symmetry, but in a degree which was rather ludicrous than disagreeable to look upon. His countenance, in particular, had he been a little taller, would have been accounted, in youth, handsome, and now, in age, striking and expressive; it was but the uncommon disproportion betwixt the head and the trunk which made the features seem whimsical and bizarre—an effect which was considerably increased by dwarf's moustaches, which it was his pleasure to wear so large, that they almost twisted back amongst, and mingled with, his grizzled hair.[16]

Geoffrey is one of Burke's gigantic dwarfs, 'gross and massive in comparison of their height'. Asymmetry and disproportion prevent him from being taken seriously, either in valour or in virility: he inspires neither love nor fear. In Burke's *Enquiry*, it is implied that the disproportioned dwarf's gigantism of feature does not share the sublimity of gigantism of stature. 'It is impossible', claims Burke, 'to suppose a giant the object of love. When we let our imaginations loose in romance, the ideas we naturally annex to that size are those of tyranny, cruelty, injustice, and every thing horrid and abominable' (126).

The creature in *Frankenstein*, originally designed to be 'proportionately large', is doubly impossible to love: a figure that combines distortion and

disproportion with terrifying stature and strength. In 'Transformation', the immensely powerful dwarf necromancer is similarly suspended between ugliness and sublimity. The body associated with both dwarfism and gigantism – a gigantic dwarf, or a dwarfish giant – emerges as a special aesthetic type, exceeding the human form *outré*. It possesses elements of ugliness and deformity alongside elements of beauty and/or sublimity, which destabilise but do not eclipse each other. The defining characteristic of the gigantic dwarf is the confounding of aesthetic categories by a body not in scale with its size.

The aesthetic type of the gigantic dwarf is applied many times over in Scott's descriptions of grotesque characters. The first is the fictionalisation of David Ritchie, who is portrayed on his first appearance in *The Black Dwarf* as an object 'nearly as broad as long, or rather of a spherical shape, which could only be occasioned by some strange personal deformity' (21). A few pages later, this description is filled out with the disproportion of specific features: a head 'of immense size', a body 'thick and square', arms 'long and brawny', and legs 'so very short as to be hidden by the dress which he wore' (29). Scott explicitly assigns the Black Dwarf to the gigantic dwarf category, summarising the aesthetic impression of his size and disproportion: 'It seemed as if nature had originally intended the separate parts of his body to be the members of a giant, but had afterward capriciously assigned them to the person of a dwarf, so ill did the length of his arms and the iron strength of his frame correspond with the shortness of his stature' (29). (Dickens uses a similar formula in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, describing Quilp as 'so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant'.[17]) In *Rob Roy*, Scott elaborates the anecdote about Rob's being able to tie his garters without stooping into a detailed account of how his body evocatively combines the dwarfish with the gigantic:

> Two points in his person interfered with the rules of symmetry—his shoulders were so broad in proportion to his height, as, notwithstanding the lean and lathy appearance of his frame, gave him something the air of being too square in respect to his stature; and his arms, though round, sinewy, and strong, were so very long as to be rather a deformity.[18]

The disproportioned 'squareness' of the dwarfish body is remarked in several of Scott's characterisations, from the Black Dwarf being 'thick and square', to Trolld and Nick Strumpfer in *The Pirate* – respectively a 'square and mis-shaped bulk' and 'a square-made dwarf'[19] – to Rob Roy's 'air of being too square', like the marauding Picts known for 'the length of

their arms, and the squareness of their shoulders' (187). Long arms are another recurring feature: as well as Rob's arms and the Black Dwarf's, we have the 'long, skinny arm' of the court dwarf in *The Talisman*. Overlong arms are particularly marked as a non-human attribute, associated with goblins in *Rob Roy* and with apes in *The Black Dwarf*, where Sir Edward Mauley describes his body as 'more odious, by bearing that distorted resemblance to humanity which we observe in the animal tribes that are more hateful to man because they seem his caricature' (104). Shelley, in 'Transformation', assigns the dwarf necromancer 'two long lank arms, that looked like spider's claws' (28). The disproportion of the gigantic dwarf confronts the viewer simultaneously with an animal's form becoming uncomfortably close to human and a human's form becoming uncomfortably close to animal. Resemblance, not difference, is the source of disgust. In the *Frankenstein* notebooks of 1816–17, the creature muses that 'God in pity made man beautiful & alluring – I am more hateful to the sight than the bitter apples of Hell to the taste.'[20] At some point in the revision process this sentence was altered to focus on the creature's relation to an ideal human form, so that the 1818 text reads: 'God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid from its very resemblance' (105). Echoing Sir Edward Mauley's self-loathing in *The Black Dwarf*, the creature accuses Frankenstein of caricaturing corporeal humanity. Disproportion carries the gigantic/dwarfish body beyond the merely ugly and into an ugly uncanny, alike yet not alike.

The gigantic/dwarfish body generates a particular rhythm of seeing, where the body is pulled close by description then suppressed from view repeatedly throughout the text. In the narrative, a strong compulsion to look away allows characters to escape the most intense reaction of disgust and hatred – but they are then compelled in some way to look again, in a cycle of revulsion and fascination. There is a compressed version of this cycle in 'Transformation', where Guido sees 'a misshapen dwarf, with squinting eyes, distorted features, and body deformed, till it became a horror to behold' (27–8). Detailed examination of the dwarf's separate features gives way to revulsion, the desire not to look and not to touch. Persuaded by the necromancer's sublime power, however, the ambitious young cavalier overcomes one compulsion with another – '[a]we, curiosity, a clinging fascination, drew me towards him' (28) – and Guido makes further observations on the dwarf's physical features and 'contortions' (29). In an echo of Victor repulsing his creature's physical touch (*F* 79), Guido rejects the dwarf's physical advances – 'he held out his hand; I could not

touch it' – but then closes the distance again: 'I drew near him' (29). When Guido is himself transformed into the dwarf's body – 'a shape of horror' (31) – he suppresses the sight, 'turn[ing] my face to the sun, that I might not see my shadow' (32). Victor's first rejection of the creature, rushing from his laboratory '[u]nable to endure the aspect of the being I had created' (*F* 39), similarly begins a pattern of seeing the creature, then banishing the sight of him, then seeing him again. Individual characters' interactions with the creature in the narrative create, through repetition, the reader's rhythmic experience of fascinated seeing that is continually interrupted by moments of suppression and abjection. Passages of detailed description, analysing the aesthetic effects of the body's various attributes, are swiftly followed by suppression or removal, sometimes accompanied by emphatic not-looking: 'Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance' (40), 'almost too horrible for human eyes' (76), '"Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form' (79), 'contortions too horrible for human eyes to behold' (119), 'I shut my eyes involuntarily' (187). The tension between looking and not looking at the creature is acted out with violence when the creature forces William Frankenstein to look at him: 'I seized on the boy as he passed, and drew him towards me. As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream: I drew his hand forcibly from his face' (117). In another scene, Victor's narration spells out the fact that the aesthetic effect of the creature's physical appearance overpowers sympathy and moral reasoning, making him impossible to love even in the mildest sense of pity: 'I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred. I tried to stifle these sensations' (121). Real horror freezes the mental faculties along with the blood, counteracting the essentially imaginative work of compassion, as in Radcliffe's meditation on the difference between sublime, expansive terror and earthly, prosaic horror: '"They must be men of very cold imaginations," said W——, "with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them."'[21]

Shelley's cynicism about the possibility of loving a disgusting 'mass' in this scene contrasts with the episode in Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) where the heroine cuddles the body of her dead baby even as it rots: 'It soon became a mass of putridity, and to every eye was a loathsome and disgusting Object; To every eye, but a Mother's. [. . .] I endeavoured to

retrace its features through the livid corruption, with which they were over-spread' (412–13). There is no such suggestion, in *Frankenstein*, that parents might possess superhuman powers of loving, or that deformity and distortion might be overlooked. Some readings of the novel point to the framing of Victor's narrative within Walton's, and the creature's narrative within Victor's, to argue that descriptions of the creature's body are unreliable: that Walton sees the creature through Victor's eyes, for example. There is no inconsistency or change in the creature's body throughout the novel; he has the same effect on everyone who sees him, even an inexperienced child, and the only hope of breaking the cycle lies in De Lacey's blindness. The pragmatic solution would be to find or make blind companions for the creature, as Victor Hugo arranges for the facially disfigured Gwynplaine in *L'Homme qui rit* (1869). That this does not occur to Victor Frankenstein might be rationalised by the idea that, having once seen the creature, it is impossible to imagine *not* seeing him.

In 'Transformation', horrid realism is a representation technique used within a romantic tale, a narrative in which the bond between self and body is tenuous, magical: Guido and the dwarf exchange bodies, and re-exchange them when their blood mingles in a duel. In *Frankenstein*, the realism of the creature's body extends beyond descriptive technique, to the narrative and to our sense of the novel as a 'world' or a 'reality'. Shelley's novel insists on the prosaic materiality of the creature's body, consistently described and universally hated. Forbidden the transformative power of imagination, the creature's body is caught in a realism that extends through the novel's narrative structure to its existential propositions: 'I was in reality the monster that I am' (90).

The Prosaic Grotesque: Against Critical Readings of *Frankenstein*

The grotesquing of disproportioned bodies serves, for Shelley and for Scott, as a site of innovation for a realist mode conscious of its potential for horror writing. Techniques and tropes developed from this horrid realism have become more universally deployed in modern realist fiction, across the genres of crime, thriller, fantasy and science fiction as well as in works conceived and marketed as horror fiction. While these tropes and techniques can be, and are, applied to the description of any object – landscapes, food, human-made objects – and to descriptions of the ordinary human body, they are most strongly associated with the extreme grotesques of the 'body horror' subgenre, and in other fictive works with localised moments of body horror, highly visually realised.

In Scott's fiction, horrid realism is localised to the description of dwarf characters and associated very specifically with hostility to the kinds of non-normative bodies that Scott's grotesques are intended to represent. In *Frankenstein*, the tropes and techniques of horrid realism are deployed more often and more generally, though still primarily in association with the creature's body, such that they constitute a sustained mode of representation – granular, vivid and prosaic – alongside the modes of narration and description that otherwise dominate the text. Romanticising, idealising, psychologising, moralising and reasoning: these modes offer frameworks through which the creature's body can emerge as something other than itself: a symbol, an example, a moral. As George Levine observes, *Frankenstein* 'exercises its appeal in part because it fails to explain so much. The narrative has a plausibility of images, and the images themselves, not really reflective of a world divinely ordered and intelligible or susceptible to the mind, lend themselves to proliferating and unrestricted interpretations, and can be assimilated to almost any powerful mythology'.[22] Accordingly, as Joshua points out, '[m]uch of the commentary on monstrosity in *Frankenstein* centres on the idea that [physical] monstrosity is in some sense a projection of something else'.[23]

Here, pulling comparisons from Scott's horrid realist descriptions of dwarf characters, and from Shelley's story 'Transformation', I argue that *Frankenstein*'s moments of 'body horror' use a distinctive set of tropes and techniques that work to literalise the monstrous body; and which, being reiterated throughout the text, continually puzzle, interrupt and destabilise critical readings of the novel.

Horrid realism is repetitive because it describes the grotesque body every time it appears in the narrative, suggesting that the reader, like Victor Frankenstein, should never lose sight of the character's ugliness and inhumanity for too long. Rather than being described when they are first introduced and then referred to simply as 'the monster' or 'the dwarf' in subsequent scenes, such characters are continually re-visualised, often using the same words repeated from previous descriptions. In horror realisms, writers regularly take the opportunity to provoke a shudder, a moment of disgust and hatred that interrupts any more coherent thoughts and sympathetic feelings that the reader might be developing about the character. *Frankenstein* not only carries out that strategy, but also thematises it by having the creature literally read Victor's 'minutest' written description of his body. Earlier I discussed the consistency of descriptions of the creature's body in *Frankenstein*, with the Shelleys' revisions to the text repeating, with variations and elaborations, words and ideas from Victor's original

description. Midway through the novel, the reader is asked to imagine reading a fuller and more detailed account of that first experience, when the creature reads Victor's journal: 'the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors, and rendered mine ineffaceable. I sickened as I read' (105).

This language might be interpreted as implausibly similar to the language that different characters (Victor, Walton, the creature) use to describe the creature's body, and/or as a sign of Victor's and Walton's unreliability as narrators; it might be seen as bad writing on Shelley's part. It is the language of horror writing: I attribute its consistency to a realism that uses repetition to maintain the visual impact of the horror object. The conventionality of horror writing's 'flesh-caricatures' is especially obvious in Scott's writing, with its many dwarf characters. In extended and brief descriptions that grotesque dwarfs' bodies, Scott uses the same words again and again. 'Misshapen' occurs five times in *The Black Dwarf*, six times in *Pirate*, once in *Talisman*, and twice in the Magnum Introduction to *Dwarf* – as well as 'unshapely', 'ill-shaped' and 'shapeless' in *Pirate*. 'Discordant' is used in *Dwarf*, *Pirate* and *Talisman*, as well as 'dissonant', 'loud' and 'shrill', which is used four times in *Dwarf*, three times in *Talisman*, once in *Peveril* and once more in the Magnum *Dwarf*: for example, the 'harsh and dissonant sounds of the dwarf's enunciation' in *Peveril*.[24] Dwarf characters are described as having dark 'shaggy' hair or 'beetle-brows' overhanging deep-set and dark yet brilliant eyes in *Dwarf*, *Kenilworth*, *Pirate* and *Talisman*. In *Talisman* and *Peveril*, dwarfs have 'shrivelled' features. Dwarf characters are likened to animals, including primates (*Dwarf*, *Peveril*), a bulldog and a reptile (*Pirate*) and a toad (*Talisman*). The phrase 'wretched abortion of nature' occurs in *Peveril*, and 'abortion-seeming' in *Talisman*. As in *Frankenstein*, variants of the words 'disproportion', 'distortion' and 'deformity' – as well as 'absurdity', 'extravagance', 'peculiarity', 'ugliness', 'bizarre', 'fantastic' etc. – appear in numerous descriptions of dwarf characters, and in other characters' dialogue about the dwarfs. This descriptive mode, generally characterised by reiteration, consistency and repetition to the point of conventionalising, reifies the grotesque body as a horror object.

Pressuring critical readings of the creature, horrid realism insists on the impact of what is 'really there', in spite of what the being might think or feel, in spite of what else it might represent. After reading Victor's journal, the creature asks a question that no character in the novel ever answers: 'My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean?' (104). Every possible critical reading of the creature's body – what his

person 'really means' and how it fits in the world as it is 'really like' – struggles with horrid realism's 'really there', a continually renewed representation of pure, meaningless horror.

Clarity is one of the more conspicuous tropes in horrid realist descriptions of grotesque bodies, aligning them with the fear of the known rather than the terror of darkness. Monsters are lit up so that they can be seen, either because a character is deliberately illuminating them (by lamplight or candlelight) or because horrid realism requires the character's body to be vividly re-described even when the plot would require only a statement that another character sees and recognises them. In *Talisman*, for example, Sir Kenneth first sees the court dwarfs by lamplight, and when he reencounters one of them, 'there stepped from the shadow into the moonlight, like an actor entering upon the stage, a stunted, decrepit creature, whom, by his fantastic dress and deformity, he recognized, even at a distance'.[25] There are several such instances in *Frankenstein*, starting with 'the glimmer of the half-extinguished light' (38) and the 'dim and yellow light of the moon' (39) that are sufficient to discern the creature's appearance at close range. On the next meeting with the creature, '[a] flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me' (56). Later, Victor sees the creature's face, again at close range, 'by the light of the moon' (138) and 'the pale yellow light of the moon' (166); and when the creature escapes him in Geneva, 'the broad disk of the moon arose, and shone full upon his ghastly and distorted shape' (172). The titular character of *The Black Dwarf* is first seen by the 'doubtful and occasional light' of the moon and mistaken for a ghost (20), but not revealed as a gigantic dwarf until a daylight scene, where his physical appearance is described fully (29).

Scott's and Shelley's grotesque characters thus violate one of Burke's key criteria for the sublime, obscurity. Whereas supernatural beings are seen imperfectly, monstrous humans are seen in unmysterious detail. In *The Pirate*, Norna recounts seeing the 'indistinct form' of Trolld, a demon dwarf featuring in a saga 'through the dim light which the upper aperture admitted'; contrastingly, every physical feature of Norna's servant, the dwarf Nick Strumpfer, is described, including his exact height in feet and inches.[26] Burke reasons that terror and apprehension rely not just on literal darkness but on uncertain visualisation more generally. He considers 'ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas' (48), and praises Milton's description of Death for its 'significant and expressive uncertainty of strokes and colouring' (49). Rather than being misshapen, Death has no certain form: 'If shape it might be called that shape had none

/ Distinguishable, in member, joint, or limb; / Or substance might be called that shadow seemed, / For each seemed either.' In contrast, the gigantic/dwarfish beings of Scott's and Shelley's horror writing – grotesquely opposed to both the sublime and the beautiful – are sized and shaped in every limb and feature. Their deformity, paradoxically, gives them more certain forms than the other characters.

In these clear views of the grotesque body, 'distinctly pictured forth' to produce 'positive horror' rather than imaginative suspense,[27] horrid realism divides its objects into parts (limbs, hands, heads, torsos, mouths) and details (colours, textures, measurements). Shelley and Scott both seem to reflect on the relative precision of physical description in the horror realism they are developing, in *Frankenstein* when the creature 'sickens' at the 'minutest description' of his body in Victor's journal (105), and in *The Talisman* when the court dwarfs, ordered by Queen Berengaria to make an attack on Sir Kenneth's 'nerves' by displaying their bodies to him, repeatedly illuminate themselves with lamps. Rather than holding his lamp in a fixed position, Nectabanus moves it to display each part of his body in turn. This deliberate attempt to horrify Sir Kenneth dramatises horrid realism's technique of partitioning the grotesque body into features and details, which are gradually revealed through extended descriptions:

> So soon as he had stepped from the aperture through which he arose, he stood still, and, as if to show himself more distinctly, moved the lamp which he held slowly over his face and person, successively illuminating his wild and fantastic features, and his misshapen but nervous limbs. Though disproportioned in person, the dwarf was not so distorted as to argue any want of strength or activity.[28]

The slow movement of the dwarf's lamp, and his gradual ascent from the chapel's subterranean vault, dramatise the descriptive technique that is used in the scene, of focusing on the grotesque body piece by piece. First we hear the dwarf's 'shrill whistle', then see 'a long, skinny arm' rising from the aperture, then 'a large head, a cap fantastically adorned'. The performance is repeated by the dwarf's wife:

> [I]t was a female form, much resembling the first in shape and proportions, which slowly emerged from the floor. Her dress was also of red samite, fantastically cut and flounced, as if she had been dressed for some exhibition of mimes or jugglers; and with the same minuteness which her predecessor had exhibited, she passed the lamp over her face and person, which seemed to rival the male's in ugliness.[29]

As well as being detailed and repetitious, the exhibition highlights two features that form horrid contrasts – first, the dwarfs' elaborate clothing,

'the richness of which rendered [their] ugliness more conspicuous'; second, their eyes, which have an element of beauty. Like the 'luxuriances' of Victor's creature – 'his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness' (*F* 39) – the dwarfs' eyes are represented as visually appealing, yet submerged in ugliness:

> But with all this unfavourable exterior, there was one trait in the features of both which argued alertness and intelligence in the most uncommon degree. This arose from the brilliancy of their eyes, which, deep-set beneath black and shaggy brows, gleamed with a lustre which, like that in the eye of a toad, seemed to make some amends for the extreme ugliness of countenance and person.

A single trait – shining hair, shining eyes – might promise the viewer some relief from the other parts of the grotesque body.

This suggestion is undercut, however, by the dwarfs' next action. They successively illuminate their bodies' features once more, 'so as to allow him distinctly [. . .] to observe' the feature that might offset or diminish the unpleasant impact of the rest:

> [P]lacing themselves side by side, directly opposite to Sir Kenneth, they again slowly shifted the lights which they held, so as to allow him distinctly to survey features which were not rendered more agreeable by being brought nearer, and to observe the extreme quickness and keenness with which their black and glittering eyes flashed back the light of the lamps.[30]

Masters of horrid realism, the dwarfs draw closer to Sir Kenneth and use light to enhance the feature with the best claim to beauty – or perhaps sublimity, given the eyes' rapid and potentially threatening movements. This fragment of 'lustre' actually heightens the horror-impact of the whole. Unable to appreciate the dwarfs' eyes or the creature's teeth in isolation from the grotesque body's succession of parts, the viewer experiences the jarring of aesthetic dissonance. It is not pleasurable to see a fragment of beauty joined to ugliness, supposedly. Scott could have borrowed this idea from *Frankenstein*'s first description of the creature's body, a description that spells out its own deliberate aesthetic incoherence: a 'horrid contrast' of gleaming black hair and white teeth – presenting a high contrast of dark and light – with 'watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set' – presenting a lack of contrast (39). Scott's earlier portrait of the Black Dwarf does not use aesthetic dissonance in this way, describing how Elshie's 'eye-brows, shaggy and prominent, overhung a pair of small, dark, piercing eyes, set far back in their sockets, that rolled with a portentous wildness, indicative of partial insanity' (29), making the eyes coherent with the rest of the portrait rather

than exploring, as in *Frankenstein* and *Talisman*, how a fragment of beauty or sublimity might create ambivalence in the viewer.

These techniques and tropes of horrid realism – repetition, clarity, partition, minute details and aesthetic dissonance – are obsessed with specifics, taking the post-classical preference for particularity to the extreme. Ian Watt points to Shaftesbury and Kames as advocates for the two opposing schools of thought, the former on the side of the general and universal in art and literature, the latter for particularity.[31] Shaftesbury's *Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709) expresses the opinion that artists and writers should take impressions of general forms rather than trying to copy real, singular objects accurately in every detail:

> Now the Variety of Nature is such, as to distinguish every thing she forms, by a *peculiar* original Character; which, if strictly observed, will make the Subject appear unlike to anything extant in the World besides. But this Effect the good Poet and Painter seek industriously to prevent. They hate *Minuteness*, and are afraid of *Singularity*.[32]

Kames, on the other hand, claims that 'abstract or general terms have no good effect in any composition for amusement; because it is only of particular objects that images can be formed'.[33] In their descriptions of grotesque bodies, Shelley and Scott experiment with details so 'strictly observed' that they could attract the now well-established criticisms of realist horror: 'gratuitous', 'sensational', 'in bad taste', 'leaving nothing to the imagination'. The dwarf Nick Strumpfer is not simply 'mute' or 'silent'; instead Scott describes how 'in the immense cavity of his mouth, there only remained the small shrivelled remnant of a tongue, capable, perhaps of assisting him in swallowing his food, but unequal to the formation of articulate sounds'.[34] Rather than a poetic prompting of the reader's ability to think and feel without visualising every detail, horrid realism offers a prosaic anatomy of sights, sounds and physiological sensations, from the bruises on the dead Frankensteins' necks (*F* 52, 166) to the unseen movement of fluid around Victor's body, 'the blood trickling in [his] veins and tingling in the extremities of my limbs' (165). When Victor exclaims, 'Oh! With what a burning gush did hope revisit my heart!' and describes the 'burning drops' of his 'warm tears' (176), the association with body heat and liquid movement associates the abstract 'hope' with the heart as a physical organ. This kind of physiological drama has become so commonplace in literary realisms that it is easy to overlook its importance in Shelley's writing: as well as an artefact of the nineteenth-century popularisation of vivisectional interest in the body's vascular system, it is remarkable as a writing technique.

In Elizabeth's death scene, instead of suggesting enough that the reader could form a mental concept of the tragedy – without needing to visualise it – Shelley tells 'every thing'. Victor quickly moves on from abstract and general terms such as 'destruction' and 'lifeless'. Not stopping at telling us that Elizabeth was dead, he describes the appearance of the dead body, its parts and qualities, the location of the body and the position of the limbs: he sees 'her head hanging down and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair'; he sees 'her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung' and 'thrown across the bed' (165). The reader is not allowed the freedom of abstractly contemplating Elizabeth's death, or idealising her body as a peacefully reclining form – we are shown, instead, how the body 'really' looks in death. When Victor runs back to the body, the people of the inn have repositioned it to give the comforting illusion that Elizabeth is resting. Again, Shelley specifies the arrangement of the limbs; and rather than suggesting that Elizabeth's face has been concealed, she makes the reader visualise a particular object covering it. It is also worth noting Shelley's choice to have Victor actually embrace Elizabeth, in a completed action. Rather than using suggestive and relatively indeterminate phrases such as 'rushed to embrace her' or 'rushed to her', Shelley provides a more highly visualised and detailed picture of a man holding a corpse closely enough to feel the slack muscles and cold skin in multiple limbs of the dead body:

> She had been moved from the posture in which I had first beheld her, and now, as she lay, her head upon her arm and a handkerchief thrown across her face and neck, I might have supposed her asleep. I rushed towards her and embraced her with ardour, but the deadly languor and coldness of the limbs told me that what I now held in my arms had ceased to be the Elizabeth whom I had loved and cherished. The murderous mark of the fiend's grasp was on her neck (165–66).

The unnamed and unlovable 'what' that Victor finds in Elizabeth's bed is characterised by prosaic details, creating an impression of a thing heavy with separable parts that recalls his destruction of the half-made female monster. There, the abstract phrase 'destroy the creature' is coupled with an account of Victor physically shaking and dismembering a fully objectified 'thing': 'trembling with passion, [I] tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged' (139). In the following pages, Shelley follows through on the practical consequences of Victor's act: he has to re-enter the room, clean his tools, pick up the separated flesh and dispose of it (142). He puts the 'scattered' and 'mangled' pieces in a basket, loads it with stones, and drops it into the sea, where it sinks with a 'gurgling sound' (142–43). This

is the 'what if' of realist horror and crime fiction, following through on its premise with prosaic detail.

Such exactness might be readily associated, by readers, with actual experience of situations and observation of objects described in the work, as opposed to the 'invention' and 'design' of imagination. The gruesome details in Shelley's and Scott's portraits of grotesque bodies, either congenitally deformed or distorted in death, prioritise the close-up detail in a way that recalls the popular (and spurious) anecdote about the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II and the painter Gentile Bellini. In Burke's telling, the sultan's 'exact knowledge' of the physical appearance of dead bodies and severed body parts suggests his advice to the painter:

> A fine piece of a decollated head of St. John the Baptist was shewn to a Turkish emperor; he praised many things, but he observed one defect; he observed that the skin did not shrink from the wounded part of the neck. The sultan on this occasion, though his observation was very just, discovered no more natural Taste than the painter who executed this piece, or than a thousand European connoisseurs who probably never would have made the same observation. His Turkish majesty had indeed been well acquainted with that terrible spectacle, which the others could only have represented in their imagination (*Enquiry* 20–1).

Burke leaves out the second half of the anecdote, where the sultan has a slave beheaded so that Bellini can observe the shrinking skin for himself. The important thing, for Burke, is that aesthetic judgement of the painting as a representation of John the Baptist and the story of his beheading does not require evaluation of the painting as a representation of a severed head. Horrid realism admits (or pretends) that the author has intimate knowledge of the body's flesh and its injuries, and calls on readers to recognise the material details of dead, diseased and wounded bodies, knowable through such common experiences as childbirth, stillbirth, miscarriage, surgery and wounds from accidents or deliberate violence. Horrid realism does not negate the body's claim to signify and symbolise, but it does pressure those meanings, continually and often repetitiously, with an excess of material detail; with a prosaic this-then-that of what is physically happening and how bodies and body parts move in relation to each other; with the body's thingness as most emphatically revealed by deformity, injury and death.

The short story 'Transformation' has a compressed version of the tension between the grotesque body's literalism and critical readings in which deformity serves as an image or projection of something else. Shelley begins with an epigraph from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, framing

Guido's narrative as a confession, and explicitly associating the tale's 'horrors' with his 'excess of fiendly pride' (18). The story concludes with Guido speculating that the dwarf necromancer was 'a good rather than an evil spirit, sent by my guardian angel, to show me the folly and misery of pride', satisfied that he has learned his 'lesson' (39). This pat conclusion, where the story provides its own moral, retrospectively casts the necromancer's gigantic/dwarfish body as an incarnation of the handsome young knight's moral decrepitude. The dwarf addresses him in words echoing lines from Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' – 'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, / So haggard and so woe-begone? [. . .] And this is why I sojourn here, / Alone and palely loitering' – 'Something does please me in your well-proportioned body and handsome face, though you do look a little woe-begone [. . .] And now [. . .] tell me why, young and gallant as you seem, you wander thus alone and downcast on this wild sea-shore' (29). A hedonist who has wasted his family's fortune, exchanging land for fine clothes, and who destroys his relationships and his reputation by attempting to abduct a young woman, Guido has betrayed the ideals of chivalry – and when he exchanges bodies with the dwarf, tempted by the prospect of returning to the city rich and powerful, he loses the external appearance of gentility and valour.

However, the story's attempted moral and its romantic literary antecedents are at odds with the literalism of the narrative. First, the shipwrecked dwarf has a history and an individualist motive: far from being a good or evil 'spirit' concerned with Guido's soul, he is a necromancer with his own agenda, tricking the knight into giving up his 'comely face and well-made limbs' to achieve his own goals, not to teach or punish Guido (30). The knight's fate is incidental to what the dwarf wants. Second, Shelley fully literalises the dwarf's body by demonstrating the practical consequences of Guido being grotesquely disproportioned. He has difficulty walking with 'distorted limbs [. . .] so ill adapted for a straight-forward movement' (33); and like Frankenstein's creature, he attempts to hide his ugliness, worried that 'mere boys would [. . .] stone me to death as I passed' (33). Third, the means of reclaiming Guido's body, the mingling of 'warm life-blood' in a simultaneous murder-suicide, is incoherent with moral allegory. By attempting to strangle the necromancer before stabbing him – 'I threw myself on him [. . .] I *felt* only my enemy, whose throat I grasped, and my dagger's hilt' – the dwarf-shaped Guido re-enacts an incident that happened when he was eleven years old, an attack on an older cousin who proposed marriage to Guido's eight-year-old friend Juliet: 'I threw myself on him—I strove to draw his sword—I clung to his neck with the

ferocious resolve to strangle him' (20, 37). Shelley's description of the 'death-blow' is detailed and relatively prosaic: 'We fell together, rolling over each other, and the tide of blood that flowed from the gaping wound of each mingled on the grass' (37). It is dwarf-Guido's quick thinking and physical effort that save him. Rather than reforming his character in order to shed the dwarf's deformed limbs, Guido learns his lesson *after* getting his body back, in the process of healing under Juliet's care: 'the work of my bodily cure and mental reform went on together' (38). Guido's encounter with the dwarf is only indirectly the cause of his reform, which actually results from the material fact of a near-fatal wound and the resulting physical weakness. With Guido rendered harmless and forced to convalesce in a domestic setting, Juliet's father has the opportunity to 's[i]t beside' him and convey 'such wisdom as might win friends to repentance' (38). In comparison with *Frankenstein*, 'Transformation', explicitly framed by the epigraph and Guido's talk of a 'guardian angel', might seem to be a relatively straightforward allegory where the grotesque body substitutes for moral deformity. Nevertheless, I argue, 'Transformation' revisits the techniques of *Frankenstein*'s horrid realism to present horrors for their own sake. The literalism of the gigantic/dwarfish body, and the incoherence between the prosaic narrative and Guido's 'lesson', tend to destabilise the story's 'moral' into an attempt, after-the-fact, to spiritualise bodies into souls.

In *Frankenstein*, the horrid realism used primarily to describe grotesque bodies exists alongside a romantic adaptation of physiognomic discourse to evoke the idealism of the Frankenstein family and the De Lacey family. The idealising language of these physiognomic portraits makes a contrast with Shelley's descriptions of grotesque bodies, not because the latter use demonising language, but because their horrid realism excludes physiognomic analysis. It is only late in the novel that the wrinkles in the creature's skin begin to settle into signs of his passions. Otherwise, the creature's body is unreadable, like the dead bodies of Elizabeth and of Victor's mother, infested by 'grave-worms crawling in the folds' of her shroud in Victor's dream (39). The creature's overall appearance often strikes Victor as demonic, certainly – but the details of his distinctive body exceed moral physiognomy's links between corporeal ugliness and moral evil. With the creature's skin, hair, eyes and disproportioned limbs consistent throughout the novel, the only physical characteristic explicitly linked with moral corruption is his facial expression. When Percy altered one of Victor's remarks on the creature's face to suggest that his physical appearance might not accurately reflect his moral or psychological self – 'his countenance

appeared to express the utmost extent of malice and barbarity' – Mary reinstated her original phrase.[35] The 1818 text accepts Percy's elevation of 'face' to 'countenance', but rejects the pivotal change from 'expressed' to 'appeared to express', instead unequivocally stating that 'his countenance expressed the utmost extent of malice and treachery' (139). On the other hand, we are never told that the creature's mummy-like skin *means* anything about his character.

This is a significant exception to the portrayals of ideal and ordinary non-ideal bodies across Shelley's novels, where she is adamant that body and mind are mutually constituted. Descriptions of the creature's facial expressions, later in *Frankenstein*, do fit with Shelley's physiognomic mode of description where physical details reliably convey what someone is thinking and feeling. In her later novels, Shelley uses the wrinkles in the human face as an index of violent and physically convulsive emotions.[36] A physiognomic system is applied xenophobically in *Lodore* (1835), where the passionate Neapolitan Clarinda has a face 'too pantomimely expressive [. . .] not to impress disagreeably one accustomed to the composure of the English', and in a moment of jealous rage her beauty is 'vanished, changed, melted away and awfully transformed into actual ugliness'.[37] *Falkner* (1837) has an extended physiognomic description of the protagonist's face, his forehead 'high and expansive, though somewhat distorted by various lines that spoke more of passion than of thought [. . .] his mouth, rather too large in its proportions, yet grew into beauty when he smiled'.[38] The static aspects of the creature's grotesque, misshapen body are not readable like Falkner's '*somewhat* distorted' forehead and his mouth '*rather* too large in its proportions' (my emphases). Only once the creature begins to experience other people's reactions to him, and to react violently, does his face become subject to the physiognomy applied to the other characters. In this, Frankenstein's creature conforms to two key ideas in Bacon's 'Of Deformity' theory, applied by Scott to the Black Dwarf and Geoffrey Hudson: that 'deformed persons' are inclined to misanthropy and driven to avenge the contempt they experience from others; and that deformity should thus be considered 'not as a sign, which is more deceivable, but as a cause, which seldom faileth of the effect'.[39] The creature's original and consistent deformity is the literal 'cause' of his later wrongdoing – neither a retrospective nor predictive 'sign' of it.

While the horrors of the creature's body exceed physiognomic analysis, the physiognomic portraits in *Frankenstein* do help to secure the literalism of that grotesque body, in one respect. For Shelley, the body is neither an arbitrary signifier of character, nor an unreliable image that might conceal

or misrepresent character; rather, there is an essential relationship between the two. She does not apply that interpretive framework in depicting the static aspects of the creature's body; outwith these localised deployments of horrid realism, however, she insists that body and mind share a single form. The unreadability of the creature's body exists in a fictional universe where bodies are people. The 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* adds a scene where Caroline Frankenstein retrieves Elizabeth from the family of Italian peasants who adopted her. Idealising physiognomic portraiture contrasts Elizabeth with the peasant children:

> She appeared of a different stock. The four others were dark-eyed, hardy little vagrants; this child was thin and very fair. Her hair was the brightest living gold, and despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and the lips and moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features.[40]

We might tie Shelley's evident credulity about physiognomic principles to *Frankenstein*'s fascination with the 'what' of a horrific, unmeaning body. I suggest that Shelley's mind-body equation – to which she makes the creature's static deformity an exception – supports horrid realism's literalisation of the creature, obstructing interpretations of the novel that understand the creature's body as a symbol, or as a deviation from a socially constructed norm, and/or as an 'image' or 'stereotype'.

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder see the creature's narrative as 'an allegorical moment in literary history where those constructed as physically deviant assail those who would create them in that image', and Paul Youngquist argues that the creature takes 'vengeance on the bodies that the norm so invisibly advantages'.[41] Lee Sterrenburg interprets Shelley's narrative as an allegory of political 'monstering': written in 'a postrevolutionary era when collective political movements no longer appear viable', the novel 'asks what it is like to be labelled, defined, and even physically distorted by a political stereotype'.[42] We can imagine Shelley's sympathy with her parents' experience of being targeted by anti-jacobin discourse.

Alternatively, we can read the creature's body as symbolic of political 'deformity', looking to the variety of monstrosity imagery in Wollstonecraft's and Godwin's writings, as well as in Burke's *Reflections* and Paine's *Rights of Man*.[43] Such readings of *Frankenstein* resonate with the political satirical prints of the 1790s, not because the novel was directly influenced by them, but because Gillray and the Cruikshanks were

participating in a common stream of spectral and monstrous imagery, some of which originated in literary and classical texts,[44] as well as textual sources such as Burke's *Reflections*, Barruel's *Mémoires* and the Austrian ambassador Count von Starhemberg's satirical pamphlet on Bonaparte, *Le Grand Homme*, printed by the *Anti-Jacobin* in 1801. Gillray's print *German-Nonchalence, or the Vexation of little-Boney* (1803), for example, depicts an undersized Bonaparte consumed with Rumpelstiltskin-like rage on the steps of the Palais de Tuileries as the ambassador speeds past in a carriage. Thereafter dwarfism, often coupled with disproportion, became common in the British satirical prints' depictions of Napoleon. Taken out of context, some of my observations about gigantic/dwarfish bodies might be subordinated to theories that the body of Frankenstein's creature contains an allegory of republicanism as political monstrosity, or that aspects of the creature's body encode Shelley's anxiety about the abolition of slavery in the West Indies. I am interested here in the ways that such perceptive readings of the creature's body as a constructed, symbolic or specious 'monstrosity' – valid readings essential to our understanding of *Frankenstein*'s unrestricted complexity and powerful legacy – stumble across *Frankenstein*'s bodies: both the essentialism of Shelley's mind-body equation, and the literalism of the prosaic grotesque body.

Straight Clothes and Mortal Faces: Non-fiction Precedents for Horror's Flesh-Caricatures

Frankenstein broke new ground for modern 'genre fiction' with a distinctive realist mode for representing a familiar premise – the Promethean creation of a human being – and the consequent events as though they were physical facts open to minute observation. Scholarship on *Frankenstein* has examined the scientific texts and theories influential on the novel's representation of Victor animating his creature with an electrical 'spark of being' (38); vivisections and experimental surgeries, perhaps including John Hunter's auto-transplants of the 1760s, would also have made *Frankenstein*'s premise seem more plausible to Shelley's first readers. In the last section of this chapter, I look at several non-fiction precedents for Victor's construction of a disproportioned, distorted and discoloured body, quoting from texts that created 'flesh-caricatures' as objects of lurid description between 1690 and 1818. Literature about the medical care of infants and the education of children popularised concepts of the human body's plasticity, explaining how the body could be literally 'caricatured' through constant physical pressure. Parents and caregivers were advised

that the physical convulsions caused by strong emotions could, with repetition, distort children's faces. General reference works as well as specialised medical texts conveyed Hippocrates's famously graphic description of diverse symptoms seen to distort the face of a person close to death. Thus grounded in medical and advice literature whose images are presented to readers as facts, the flesh-caricature cannot be safely bracketed as an extraordinary 'freak' or exiled to the realm of the fantastic. *Frankenstein*'s descriptions of distorted bodies and faces, I argue, would have activated nineteenth-century readers' awareness of swaddled, convulsed and moribund bodies as prosaic horror.

Up to the eighteenth century, it was common practice in Britain, as elsewhere in Western Europe, to bind new-born children tightly in 'swaddling cloths' and 'stay bands', primarily with the intention of making the limbs grow straight. Physicians began to caution that swaddling actually caused physical deformities when done improperly, and that it prevented infants from exercising their limbs – but opinion was slow to change. John Locke, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), was one of the first publicly to advocate abandoning the practice altogether. Locke refers to 'straight clothes', grouping swaddling cloths with the highly structured and constrictive undergarments that in Britain were commonly worn by children as well as adults, and at all levels of society, to shape the upper body's proportions and posture: bodices, stays, jumps and (by the end of the eighteenth century, following French fashion) quilted waistcoats without bones, corsets. Cosmetological foundation garments, Locke warns, causes respiratory problems by compressing the chest, and by restricting blood circulation, make a person misshapen and disproportioned. Presenting his reader with the exotic image of 'a pair of China shoes', Locke seeks to defamiliarise the foundation garments then known in Britain as 'bodies':

> Narrow breasts, short and stinking breath, ill lungs, and crookedness, are natural and almost constant effects of hard bodice, and clothes that pinch. That way of making slender wastes, and fine shapes, serves but the more effectually to spoil them. Nor can there indeed but be disproportion in the parts, when the nourishment prepared in the several offices of the body cannot be distributed as nature designs. And therefore what wonder is it, if, it being laid where it can, on some part not so braced, it often makes a shoulder or hip higher or bigger than its just proportion? 'Tis generally known, that the women of China [. . .] by bracing and binding them hard from their infancy, have very little feet. I saw lately a pair of China shoes, which I was told were for a grown woman: they were so exceedingly disproportion'd to the feet of one of the same age among us, that they would scarce have been big enough for one of our little girls. Besides this,

> 'tis observed, that their women are also very little, and short-liv'd; whereas the men are of the ordinary stature of other men, and live to a proportionable age. These defects in the female sex in that country, are by some imputed to the unreasonable binding of their feet, whereby the free circulation of the blood is hinder'd, and the growth and health of the whole body suffers. And how often do we see, that some small part of the foot being injur'd by a wrench or blow, the whole leg or thigh thereby lose their strength and nourishment, and dwindle away? How much greater inconveniences may we expect, when the thorax, wherein is placed the heart and seat of life, is unnaturally compress'd, and hindr'd from its due expansion?[45]

Over the eighteenth century, and influenced by Locke's and Rousseau's criticism of swaddling bands and foundation garments, physicians begin to express the idea that the bracing and binding of growing bodies is inevitably harmful. William Cadogan, in his *Essay upon Nursing* (1748), not only rejects swaddling cloths but recommends loose clothing – 'a little Flannel Waistcoat without Sleeves, made to fit the Body' – and no stockings or shoes until the child is three years old. Like Locke, Cadogan reasons that circulation, 'restrained by the Compression of any one Part, must produce unnatural Swellings in some other; especially as the Fibres of Infants are so easily distended' – hence 'the many Distortions and Deformities we meet with every where'.[46]

Later in the eighteenth century, the horrid specifics of straight clothes' impact on growing bodies continue to fascinate writers in philosophical and political arguments where physical monstrosity serves to make a point about something else. In *Émile*, while the British mania for swaddling clothes and foundation garments illustrates Rousseau's argument that 'human nature' is distorted by 'irrational' customs and institutions, Rousseau is fascinated, in the first place, with the material facts of neonatal swaddling, and how the practice constricts the body to the point of moribundity:

> A new-born infant requires to be at liberty to move and stretch its limbs, to shake off that numbness in which, moulded together in a heap, they have remained so long. They are stretched out, it is true, but they are prevented from moving: Even the head itself is rendered immoveable by stay-bands: So that one would imagine the nurses were afraid the poor creature should have the appearance of being alive. [. . .] More compressed, more confined, and less at ease in his swaddling-cloaths than its mother's womb, I see not what it has gained by its birth (20).

Since, Rousseau observes, 'to live is not merely to breathe; it is to act, to make a proper use of our organs, our senses, our faculties, and of all those

parts of the human frame which contribute to the consciousness of our existence', swaddling imposes a kind of living death. He compares the child 'bound up in swaddling-cloaths' to a dead man 'nailed down in his coffin' (19). By immobilising the infant, the caregiver frustrates its physical efforts, congests its physiological processes, dampens its sensations and generally limits its corporeal experiences. Rousseau moves on to discuss the lasting physical deformities that result from swaddling and straight clothes:

> This state of inaction, and constraint, in which the limbs of infants are confined, cannot fail to prevent the free circulation of the blood [. . .]. In countries where no such extravagant precautions are taken, the people are tall, robust, and well-proportioned: [. . .] those where infants are thus treated, swarm with hunch-backed, crooked-legged, lame, rickety, and deformed persons of every kind.[47]

As he points out, in some countries, swaddling does not end with infancy: adults wear fashionable clothing that is supposed to improve the body's shape and posture, but which might actually deform their bodies. English women, says Rousseau, are notorious in Europe for their 'Gothic fetters [. . .] numerous ligatures, which check the circulation, and confine the different limbs'.[48] By the mid-eighteenth century, it was recognised that women typically wore more compressing foundation garments, with Cadogan noting that '[w]omen [. . .] suffer more in this Particular than the men';[49] and later in the century, Wollstonecraft, picking up Locke's reference to Chinese foot-binding customs, laments that '[t]o preserve personal beauty, woman's glory! the limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bands' (*Vindication* 41).

Thus, in the Romantic period, foundation garments could readily be seen by intellectuals and the well-read as an outdated practice of 'abortive' cosmetology with horrific effects.[50] Godwin's claim that a government 'fettered' by individual interests and failings produces a society 'distorted in every joint, abortive and monstrous' might seem to mix metaphors about chains and childbirth, presenting the reader with vague imagery and abstracted 'distortion' and 'monstrosity'.[51] But for readers familiar with Locke's and Rousseau's graphic passages of body horror about straight clothes, such language would have evoked the straight-laced body. Breathing but not living, it is immobilised by bands, bones and laces, reshaped by the blockage of vital fluid.

In terms of practical advice to parents and caregivers, one of the most authoritative voices on the physical care of children in the mid- to late eighteenth century was the Scottish physician William Buchan. His book

Domestic Medicine (1769) was in its seventeenth edition by 1800, and was followed by a sequel focused on childcare, *Advice to Mothers* (1804). Echoing Locke and Cadogan on the plasticity of the body, Buchan describes the infant as 'a bundle of soft pipes, replenished with fluids in constant motion'. [52] Whereas Rousseau imagines the womb as a confined space, Buchan instructs his reader that the womb actually protects the developing body from 'unequal pressure' by 'surround[ing] the foetus every where with fluids' (9). Swaddling does the opposite:

> Even the bones of an infant are so soft and cartilaginous, that they readily yield to the slightest pressure, and easily take on a bad shape, which can never after be remedied. Hence it is, that so many people appear with high shoulders, crooked spines and flat breasts, who were born with as good a shape as others, but had the misfortune to be squeezed into monsters by the application of stays and bandages.
>
> Pressure, by obstructing the circulation, prevents the equal distribution of nourishment to the different parts of the body, by which means the growth becomes unequal. One part of the body grows too large, while another remains too small, and thus in time the whole frame becomes disproportioned and misshapen (9–10).

According to Buchan, swaddling clothes also cause dangerous fevers (by making the infant too hot), respiratory diseases (by constricting the lungs), and convulsions (by piercing the child with pins used to secure the cloths). Buchan describes a horrific instance of pins 'found sticking above half an inch into the body of a child after it had died of convulsion-fits' (11). Whereas in *Domestic Medicine*, Buchan blames infant deformity on midwives, accusing them of promoting swaddling as a valuable professional skill (8), it is no coincidence that *Advice to Mothers* plays on maternal anxiety by blaming female parents for a remarkable 'ninety-nine' per cent of 'all cases of dwarfishness and deformity'.[53] Buchan claims that the majority of women in London are 'of a diminutive stature' and 'distorted either in body or limbs', deformed by 'the tightness of their dress [. . .] and the artificial moulding or pretended improvement of their shape when young' (262–63): women, themselves especially deformed, must be kept from passing on that deformity to the next generation.

It was also thought that children could become disproportioned when mothers sustained physical injuries or undertook certain physical activities. The Quaker-educated engraver James Peller Malcolm, in his *Historical Sketch of the Art of Caricaturing*, supposes that Quakers are 'well-made people' because Quaker women avoid 'mixing in the usual amusements of the world' and escape 'those accidents which would cause caricatured

lineaments in their offspring' by interfering with the infant's physical formation:

> Nature [. . .] being interrupted, makes a forehood too high or too low [. . .]. The causes of the interruptions alluded to cannot be inquired into at present: they more properly belong to the Surgeon; but they may safely, in most cases, be attributed to the want of due care and circumspection in the mothers of those persons whose features or limbs are thus distorted.[54]

Sexual intercourse is one of the 'interruptions' Malcolm alludes to. Buchan's *Advice to Mothers*, addressed to a general audience, refers delicately to mothers' 'folly and misconduct' causing physical deformity.[55] This idea is discussed more explicitly in medical texts: Walter Harris's *A Full View of All the Diseases Incident to Children* (1742) correlates rickets – a disease that distorts the bones of the legs – with the mother's having 'indulg[ed] herself in Indolence while with child' or 'an intemperate use of Venery, during the Time of Pregnancy'.[56] As David Turner has shown, eighteenth-century prescriptive writing about child-rearing was generally 'saturated with notions of parental guilt and blame, which began even before conception itself'.[57] The notion of Victor as parent to a deformed child, an 'abortion', can be made coherent with Ellen Moers's reading of the novel as 'a birth myth' representing 'the trauma of afterbirth' through 'the motif of revulsion against newborn life',[58] or with Anne K. Mellor's argument that '*Frankenstein* is a book about what happens when a man tries to have a baby without a woman.'[59] My analysis of *Frankenstein*'s horrid realism, as the set of tropes and techniques whereby Shelley presents grotesque bodies, offers a somewhat different interpretation: that in minutely exploring the prosaic ramifications of creating an exceptionally deformed being, Shelley re-purposes language, imagery and ideas from the 'flesh-caricatures' of influential prescriptive texts that imagine swaddling and straight clothes distorting and deadening the human body.

Shelley's descriptions of the creature's face, grimacing and wrinkled, suggest another commonly held idea about the physical deforming of children by parents and caregivers, that faces were permanently distorted by facial contortions in excited emotional states. As Malcolm puts it, by failing to subdue children's emotions, 'parents and guardians are too frequently Caricaturists'. More interesting, however, is the way that the creature's face – his original features as well as his impassioned grimaces later in the novel – might be physiologically associated with the dead or dying body. Echoing Rousseau's notion of the swaddled child as

suspended between life and death, Malcolm describes the body of a child exhausted by unchecked anger: 'the blood stagnating, the eyes flare, and the face becomes black, the body convulsed—and this is the caricature of Vexation'.[60] Lifeless, distorted and discoloured: the child flesh-caricatured by emotions recalls Browne's metaphorical association of caricature portraiture with the Hippocratic face. As described in the *Prognosticon* or *Book of Prognostics*, the dying face was supposed to appear misshapen by concavities, as well as discoloured: 'hollow eyes, the temples collapse, the ears cold and contracted, the lobes inverted, the skin about the forehead hard, tense, and dry, with the whole face of a palish green, black, livid, or leaden hue'.[61] It is to the prognosis of the Hippocratic face that Shakespeare refers in Mistress Quickly's account of Falstaff's face on his deathbed: 'his nose was as sharp as a pen' (*Henry V* act 2, scene 3). Browne elaborates on Hippocrates's description with an analogy to the graphic caricature portrait, emphasising changes in the body's proportions, as well as the shape and colour of the face, as presages of death:

> Some are so curious as to observe the depth of the Throat-pit, how the proportion varieth of the Small of the Legs unto the Calf, or the compass of the Neck unto the Circumference of the Head: but all these, with many more, were so drowned in a mortal Visage and last Face of *Hippocrates*, that a weak Physiognomist might say at first eye, This was a face of Earth, and that Morta had set her Hard-Seal upon his Temples, easily perceiving what *Caricatura* Draughts Death makes upon pined faces.[62]

In physical descriptions of the creature and of Elizabeth's dead body, Shelley's horrid realism substitutes the speaking faces of moral physiognomy with the diverse, incoherent details of mortal physiognomy, whose only meaning is death. While the creature has 'yellow skin', some of Shelley's readers, noticing the creature's 'straight black lips', would have associated his appearance with the Hippocratic face (*F* 39), partly explaining Thomas Cooke's choice of green or blue face paint when he played the creature onstage in the 1820s. The symptoms of the 'facies Hippocratica' or 'Hippocratic countenance' – also referred to as the 'moribund' or 'cadaverous face' – were common knowledge and were described in several general reference works, including the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, as well as specialised medical dictionaries, which usually transcribed a translation of the relevant passage in the *Prognostics*. Bartholomew Parr's *London Medical Dictionary* (1809), for example, describes a 'countenance pale, greenish, or dark'.[63] Shelley's descriptions of the creature's 'clouded eyes' *F* (154) refer to another of Hippocrates's prognostics of death, the cornea's loss of

transparency: Moffat's 1788 translation describes eyes 'of a nasty, dry, dull appearance'.[64] Overall, Shelley draws on numerous aspects of the *facies Hippocratica* by detailing the grotesque mortal face as an incoherent combination of still-beautiful features (hair, teeth), a distorted expression, unnatural and contrasting colours, and skin that is dry in texture and stretched over bone.

Victor and Walton both remark that the creature appears mummified, Frankenstein claiming that '[a] mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch' (*F* 40) and Walton noticing hands 'in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy' (187). Might this reference to mummies, wrapped in layers of linen to preserve the body's shape and upright posture, have recalled the distorting pressure of straight clothes? Noticing how Victor 'collected bones from charnel houses' (36) – presumably bones from which flesh has already rotted – and that the creature's 'yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath' (39), might readers have visualised skin pulled tight like swaddling bands? In Shelley's horrid realism, the prosaic horrors of straight clothes, physical convulsions and the Hippocratic face form a mesh of incoherent details that literalise the grotesque body into a flesh-caricature, continually pulling on the critical readings that would abstract it. Repetitively using highly visualised moments of fear and disgust, Shelley's techniques of horrid realism – and the horror realisms that followed – baffle the reader or viewer's ability to imagine the body as other than what it materially is.

In Shelley's fiction, as in Scott's, tropes and techniques of horrid realism are localised to descriptions of grotesquely distorted bodies. But whereas Scott's gigantic dwarfs – David Ritchie, Rob Roy MacGregor, Jeffrey Hudson and other court dwarfs – are historicised and subordinated to the novels' compendious realism, Shelley centres the grotesque body and its de-characterising power such that *Frankenstein* and 'Transformation' pioneer horror writing as a distinct genre. Shelley's creature and Scott's dwarfs, followed by Dickens's Quilp and Hugo's Quasimodo, provided key concepts, tropes and techniques for a horror tradition of disproportioned and partitioned characters. The narrator of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), for example, describes Moreau's creations as 'grotesque caricatures of humanity' and 'horrible caricatures of my Maker's image', echoing phrases from *The Black Dwarf* and *Frankenstein*; and in addition to graphic descriptions that partition the monsters into divergent features, Wells uses the words 'disproportion', 'misshapen' and 'distorted': the same shorthand Shelley and Scott use for their depictions of grotesque

bodies.[65] *Frankenstein*'s combination of horrid realism with a speculative narrative made another major contribution to the subject matter of 'body horror' fiction: the idea of flesh-caricatures being literally manufactured through human creativity, skill and perversity. 'Manufactured monster' narratives ground their premises in 'real' or historical precedents, sometimes fictionalised or sensationalised. The premise of *L'Homme qui Rit* (1869) is the fictional history of a nomadic society – the 'Comprachicos' – who make a living from buying and kidnapping children whom they physically deform and display for entertainment. Inspired by the Chinese practices of foot-binding and of miniaturised *penjing* (or *penzai*) trees, Hugo invents the practice of 'croissance en bouteille', whereby a growing infant is stunted and deformed by being confined, day and night, to a vase. 'C'est commode', the narrator comments sarcastically, 'on peut d'avance se commander son nain de la forme qu'on veut'.[66] Dr Moreau, in a one-sided dialogue with the novel's protagonist, gives a long list of precedents for the novel's flesh-caricaturing, including John Hunter's cock-spur experiments and 'those mediaeval practitioners who made dwarfs and beggar-cripples, show-monsters [. . .]. Victor Hugo gives an account of them'.[67] In twentieth-century body horror, flesh-caricatures can be explained by the redistribution of atoms (such as in George Langelaan's mystery-horror story 'The Fly', first published in *Playboy* in 1957) or the manipulation of DNA (such as in David Cronenburg's 1986 film interpretation of Langelaan's premise).

This strain of body horror follows *Frankenstein* in its convention of revealing the methods of flesh-caricaturing, explained and described prosaically rather than presented as an unsystematised magic. The first of many horror realisms in narrative fiction, Shelley's horrid realism assembles distinctive tropes and techniques in an effort to visualise grotesque bodies and flesh-caricatures, rather than leave the reader to imagine them (or not). In these bold moments of representing fictional characters' bodies more prosaically and literally, caricature is made flesh and 'character' is put in quotation marks. Whereas comic, compendious and historical realisms are understood, in the Romantic period, to elicit pseudo-sensory and parasocial pleasure through particularised and varied characters, Shelley's 'horrid realism' models a formal realism that elicits pseudo-sensory revulsion in ways new to novelistic fiction, through flesh-caricature's de-characterisation of the human.