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NIETZSCHE AND THE FRANKENSTEIN CREATURE

TO COMPARE NIETZSCHE with Dr. Frankenstein's Creature is not meant as a deprecatory gesture, for to those familiar with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* it is clear that the Creature is, in spite of his physical ugliness, a very noble being, conceived in the grand tradition of European romanticism. This is the tradition of Byron, Shelley, and Keats, and in fact *Frankenstein* was written with the encouragement of Lord Byron while he and the Shelleys were visiting Switzerland in the summer of 1816. Nietzsche, himself an admirer of Byron, lies within this same romanticist tradition, and in spite of his critical attitude toward the Romantics, owes much to them. Thus the view of Nietzsche taken here is what Crane Brinton calls that of a "gentle Nietzschean," seeing the Master as a soul who longed for goodness, truth, and beauty, but found the world bad, false, and ugly. Disillusioned and filled with condemnation for the world, the philosopher turned a disdainful and critical face to the sham of it all. Rather to be a failure successfully than a false success, Nietzsche brought about his own ruin, feeling that none other was possessed of the right *virtu* to tear down so grand an edifice. How he would have liked to have heard spoken of himself the words praising Dr. Frankenstein as he lay at death's door, worn and sick from his efforts to kill his Monster: "What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin! He seems to feel his own worth and the greatness of his fall" (p. 228)¹. But no one spoke these words at the asylum in Jena, where confined as incurably insane Nietzsche was too out of contact with the world to know that George Brandes' lectures at Copenhagen marked the beginning of the rash of Nietzsche scholarship that during the next fifty years would bring him the public acclaim that he so longed for and needed.

Just as Dr. Victor Frankenstein created a monster that ultimately destroyed him, so Dr. Friedrich Nietzsche created within himself a monster that ultimately consumed the quiet, shy, pious, and scholarly son of Pastor Ludwig Nietzsche, the son who at the tender age of twenty-four attained a chair in philology at the Uni-

versity of Basel. In both cases the creature took complete control of the creator and mastered him. Thus the Monster says to Dr. Frankenstein, "You are my creator, but I am your master;—obey!" (p. 179).

What was it that moved the Creature to such a will to power, such violence of destruction? It was a simple and yet terrifying fact of human psychology, for the Creature was human, all too human. Spinoza enunciated it coldly in the precise terminology of his *Ethics* (Part III: LIX). Nietzsche lived out the fact in its full fever of agony. Love and hate are mirror images of one another. When love is frustrated, it turns into hate. We learn to hate that which we love and which in turn does not love us. Further, we hate that the most passionately of which we feel that we have a right to receive love and from which none is forthcoming.

Thus the Creature approached Dr. Frankenstein with these words of entreaty:

Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. . . . Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. . . . Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? . . . Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness (pp. 102-2).

Could Nietzsche have spoken the clear truth without the veil of poetic imagery, he would not have spoken any differently. Bertrand Russell, in his *History of Western Philosophy*, sums up Nietzsche by quoting the words of King Lear: "I will do such things—/What they are yet I know not—but they shall be/The terror of the earth.' This is Nietzsche's philosophy in a nutshell" (p. 767). Lear and Frankenstein's Creature, both wanting to be loved, to be cared for, to have the warm affection of those near and dear, are yet both doomed to loneliness and isolation in misery, suffering, and a madness of jealousy and despair that consumes them.

Thus we find the mad lament of the Creature running throughout Nietzsche's autobiographical sketch, *Ecce Homo*. The madness, however, is not simply the pathological type induced by a sick body, but rather that sickness unto death of a tortured soul. Thus speaks Nietzsche:

. . . the disparity between the greatness of my task and the smallness of my contemporaries is made plain by the fact that people have neither heard me nor seen me. . . . Under these circumstances, it is a duty—and one against which my customary reserve and still more the pride of my instincts, rebel—to say: 'Listen! for I am such and such a person. For Heaven's sake do not confuse me with any one else!' (Preface, *Ecce Homo*, p. v).²

So too the Creature implored his creator to understand what sort of a person he was

and to give him companionship and understanding. When this was denied to the Monster, he hammered his way into Frankenstein's life and found companionship in the joy of destruction. Thus the Philosopher with the Hammer wrote:

Ah, ye men, within the stone slumbereth an image for me, the image of my visions!
Ah, that it should slumber in the hardest, ugliest stone!

Now rageth my hammer ruthlessly against its prison. From the stone fly the fragments: what's that to me? . . .

The beauty of the Superman came unto me as a shadow. Ah, my brethren! Of what account are—the Gods to me! (*Ecce Homo*, "Thus Spake Zarathustra," S 8, p. 112).

And in explanation of these visions Nietzsche continues with one last observation upon the italicized line: "To the Dionysian life-task belongs the hardness of the hammer, and one of its prime conditions is a definite *joy even in destruction.*"

Yet alas, the Creature laments over his destructive act when he stands beside the lifeless form of Dr. Frankenstein. Thomas Mann draws upon Shakespeare, as did Russell, in characterizing Nietzsche. These words of sympathy might well have been written by Mary Shelley of Frankenstein's Creature:

It is the tragic pity for an overloaded, overcharged soul which was only called to knowledge, not really born to it and like Hamlet, was destroyed by it; for a dainty, fine, good soul for which love was a necessity, which inclined toward noble friendship and was never meant for loneliness, and which was condemned to just this: the most profound, the most frigid loneliness, the aloneness of the criminal. . . .³

What brought the Creature to such a horrible state? He says of himself that his heart was born to love and sympathy, but that misery turned it to vice and hatred—a twisting of a noble nature which produced "torture such as you cannot imagine." What brought the Creature to the decision to "cast off all feeling, . . . all anguish, to riot in the excess of . . . despair"? And after having made the decision, what led him to say of his life, "Evil thenceforth became my good" (pp. 238 and 239)? The "Transvaluation of all Values" was Nietzsche's cry, and it brought him to revile all those things he really loved and to reject all that he really wanted and admired—Wagner, *Vaterland*, religion, morality, friendship, love, and affection (Mann, p. 10). As Crane Brinton says, the philosopher's hates are so greatly mixed with love, almost to the point of being indistinguishable, that he might have written, *odi, ergo amo.*⁴

The story of each creature's transvaluation of values is long and complex, yet the outlines are clear. In the Monster's early life, after Dr. Frankenstein had abandoned him, he roamed aimlessly, living the life of an animal lacking in speech, craft, and science. One day he wandered into a village in quest of the creature comforts, only to be stoned and forced to seek shelter in a miserable hovel attached to a cottage

situated in the open countryside. Here he observed the peaceful idyllic life of the cottagers as they lived in rustic bliss. The Creature learned to love this family and to feel a part of it. How like Nietzsche's sojourns with Richard and Cosima Wagner at Tribschen, near Lucerne, when in the warmth of their friendship he felt that he had found a home and a love. Little by little Frankenstein's monster came to understand the language of the cottagers, their habits, their values, their joys and sorrows. How he longed to join more intimately with them, but dared not, remembering the rebuff he had suffered at the hands of the villagers. Early in his life Nietzsche too had felt the rebuffs of the crowd, during school days at Pforta and later at the universities of Bonn and Leipzig, where the rough-and-tumble man's world had injured his sensibilities and brought the taint of sin and wickedness to his conscience. At school and at the university he had struggled to be "one of the boys" by engaging in the sport and caprice of his contemporaries. But far from the crowd bringing him comfort, it brought him loneliness, the loneliness of being so far ahead of his time as to have no true contemporaries. Even in writing *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche could not quite bring himself to admit that "the incontestable lack of sufficient companionship" had brought him unhappiness. He prefers to blame the matter on the less personal element of the horrid climate of the North, professing just short months before his mental collapse to be cheerful and brave, though still quite lacking in companionship (*Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever," S 2, pp. 29-30).

When one reads in *Frankenstein* of how the Creature was horrified one day upon looking into a clear stream and beholding his own ugliness, the thought occurs of how the young professor of philology must have been horrified at the ugliness of life which he saw reflected in the crude indulgences in drunkenness, duelling, and women during his university days, and of how later he was horrified to find his ideals and aspirations mutilated and disfigured in the reflections of the mass-minded populace, as during the opening festival at Bayreuth. Thus speaks Zarathustra in the dream of "The Child and the Mirror":

But when I looked into the mirror, I shrieked, and my heart throbbed: for not myself did I see therein, but a devil's grimace and derision.

Verily, all too well do I understand the dream's portent and monition: my *doctrine* is in danger; tares want to be called *wheat*!

Mine enemies have grown powerful and have disfigured the likeness of my doctrine, so that my dearest ones have to blush for the gifts that I gave them (*Zarathustra* II, 23, p. 95).

Zarathustra straightway determines to go forth to his friends and to his enemies alike and to bestow his love upon them. "Too long have I longed and

situated in the open countryside. Here he observed the peaceful idyllic life of the cottagers as they lived in rustic bliss. The Creature learned to love this family and to feel a part of it. How like Nietzsche's sojourns with Richard and Cosima Wagner at Tribschen, near Lucerne, when in the warmth of their friendship he felt that he had found a home and a love. Little by little Frankenstein's monster came to understand the language of the cottagers, their habits, their values, their joys and sorrows. How he longed to join more intimately with them, but dared not, remembering the rebuff he had suffered at the hands of the villagers. Early in his life Nietzsche too had felt the rebuffs of the crowd, during school days at Pforta and later at the universities of Bonn and Leipzig, where the rough-and-tumble man's world had injured his sensibilities and brought the taint of sin and wickedness to his conscience. At school and at the university he had struggled to be "one of the boys" by engaging in the sport and caprice of his contemporaries. But far from the crowd bringing him comfort, it brought him loneliness, the loneliness of being so far ahead of his time as to have no true contemporaries. Even in writing *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche could not quite bring himself to admit that "the incontestable lack of sufficient companionship" had brought him unhappiness. He prefers to blame the matter on the less personal element of the horrid climate of the North, professing just short months before his mental collapse to be cheerful and brave, though still quite lacking in companionship (*Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever," S 2, pp. 29-30).

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Zarathustra straightway determines to go forth to his friends and to his enemies alike and to bestow his love upon them. "Too long have I longed and

had deprived him of that companionship and guidance which only a father can give. Reared in a female world, Nietzsche undoubtedly received his share of smiles and caresses from his mother, his aunts, and his sister. Yet, as he indicated himself, being the man of the family, he never had been a boy or enjoyed the delights of childhood, but had grown up too soon, so that from earliest remembrance he had been "of the same height and proportion." And there is ample evidence that no woman actually loved him, not even his mother and his sister Elizabeth, who seemed not to be able to distinguish love from possession and dominance. Thus Nietzsche wrote that woman is incapable of friendship, knowing only love—incapable of sharing, knowing only how to possess and dominate would be an equivalent expression of this (*Zarathustra* I, 14, p. 72). The Creature laments, "no Eve soothed my sorrows, nor shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam's supplication to his Creator. But where was mine? He had abandoned me: and, in the bitterness of my heart, I cursed him" (p. 137).

Thus Nietzsche proclaims "God is dead!" Thomas Mann calls this proclamation "the hardest of all sacrifices" for Nietzsche (p. 36). Certainly it must have been hard for him to give up his Heavenly Father, having been bereft of his earthly father at so tender an age. One can well believe Eric Russell Bentley's contention that Nietzsche's rejection of God bore the agony of the loss of a lover.⁵ For although he goes to great lengths in *Ecce Homo* to deny that he had ever paid any attention to theological problems or that they had ever been a matter of concern with him, this is a patent self-deception (See *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Clever," S 1, pp. 23-4). This product of three generations of Protestant pastors had thought long and hard on what he came to call the "mere notions" of God, immorality, and salvation. When at last Nietzsche was forced to displace God from his heart, he felt the loss as one more rebuff in his search for love and understanding. Bentley beautifully sums up these conflicts of love and hate with this characterization of Nietzsche:

Society provided no man to father him, no woman to marry him, no credible God to protect him, no fame to flatter him. A thwarted Samson, he brought down the building on his own head. . . . Nietzsche would rather have been a Basel professor than God, would rather have won a woman's love and submitted to a woman's care than have sought out the secrets of heroic power and the mastery of the world. But turning in disgust first from common men, then from the élite, turning from leaders and friends and admirers, turning from mother and sister and sweetheart, turning from his home and his profession, in the end Nietzsche found no chair empty but that of the dispossessed deity, in which a man sits at his peril (p. 106).

In the case of Dr. Frankenstein's creature, the need for affection and com-

panionship boiled over when at length the humble cottagers, discovering his presence, violently rejected him; and the hurt was even more intense in view of his love and secret aid bestowed upon them, for he had been working at night, unseen and unknown, in order to bring them firewood to lighten their burden. In a similar way the Wagners rejected Nietzsche, who had jeopardized his reputation as a scholar with *The Birth of Tragedy*, written in effect to aid the composer's Bayreuth scheme. Whether they rejected him or he rejected them is a question of perspective, for the hurt was the same and the feeling of once more being alone was just as painful. At the opening Bayreuth festival the agony was so great that Nietzsche actually became sick and fled in panic from the glitter and sham of the façade which called itself "culture." Gone were the simple idyllic times when only the inner circle gathered to share the intimacies of the Wagners' home at Triebtschen. Now worldly fame and fortune had intruded their ugly defiling nature, separating Nietzsche from his hero and his beloved. Nietzsche could not but envy the successful Wagner, though he hated the world's perverted sense of values which had passed him by in silence while changing his Siegfried idol into a Parsifal and denying him the love and companionship of Cosima. Only in Nietzsche's fantasy did Cosima remain with him, even up to the doors of the asylum at Jena where he said, "It is my wife, Cosima Wagner, who brought me here." Denied in real life what he loved and longed for, Nietzsche, like Zarathustra, smashed his icons with a hammer and in this way hoped to find consolation. As Frankenstein's creature burned down the cottagers' dwelling after they left him, so years after the Wagners left Triebtschen for Bayreuth, Nietzsche "burned" his fallen idol in *The Case of Wagner*.

Like the Wagners, all of Nietzsche's friends seemed to have had a way of hurting him. Possibly this was the result of his demanding too much of friendship, which according to his sister he regarded as a sacred institution (Introduction to *Zarathustra*, p. 15). Yet his friends sometimes proved to be his worst enemies, just as those whom the Creature befriended turned against him, as in the case of the girl he saved from the torrents of the stream, only to be shot by her father when he found them together at the bank. Could Paul Rée's tearing of Lou Salomé away from Nietzsche have hurt any less than the bullet that entered the Creature's shoulder from the gun of the father? In telling the tale the Creature says, "The feelings of kindness and gentleness which I had entertained but a few minutes before gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind" (p. 149).

But in spite of past failures, the Creature tried once more to make a friendly

contact with humanity; this time he chose a little boy, who he hoped would have been unprejudiced by the world and would not reject him for his deformity. So too Nietzsche pictures the child as the final stage in the metamorphosis of the Superman: "Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first moment, a holy Yea" (*Zarathustra* I, S 1, p. 44). It will take a person unspotted and undeformed by the taboos of society to rise above the cultural barriers of right and wrong, to go beyond good and evil. The Transvaluation of all Values is only for the one who is capable of rising above the limitations of man, and what but a child best symbolizes the open and honest disregard for the false conventions of society?

Still, the child rejected the Creature, who in turn killed the boy, Frankenstein's brother. And in his wanderings from the scene of the murder, he came upon a girl asleep on some straw in a barn. Here returned the passions stirred at the sight of a beautiful woman's picture in the locket he had snatched from about the boy's neck. When he gazed at the portrait a deep rage possessed him. He recalled his rage in these words: "I remembered that I was for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright" (p. 151). So when he bent over the form of the girl in the barn he vowed to leave the locket there and thus fix upon her the blame for the murder: robbed of all that she could have given him, he had committed in pursuit of affection a crime that really had its source in her.

One need not speculate in identifying the Creature's feelings with Nietzsche's on the matter of the thirst for love. To one reading the fifth section of "Why I Write Such Excellent Books" in *Ecce Homo*, it would appear that Nietzsche was quite a man with the ladies. He states in what is to us tragically transparent language, "May I venture to suggest, by the way, that I know women They all like me. . . . Fortunately I am not willing to let myself be torn to pieces!" No, not willing to be torn to pieces by women, but we know that this is what in effect happened. It was not, however, in the sense that Nietzsche means that women tore him to bits and made a shambles of him. His women—Frau Nietzsche, sister Elizabeth, Cosima Wagner, Lou Salomé, and Fraulein von Meysenbug—did not destroy him with their passionate, physical attentions. One might even excuse "those professional ladies," the "Daughters of the Desert" (*Zarathustra* IV, 76; Mann, pp. 6 and 7), the result of whose physical attentions *did* destroy him, except that they, like the more respectable quintet just mentioned, failed to give Nietzsche

the true love and devotion that he so desperately needed. Not that he would frankly admit that he felt the absence of a woman's love to be a defect in his life. On the contrary, in *Ecce Homo* ("Thus Spake Zarathustra," S 7, pp. 108-9) he quotes his "Night Song" from *Zarathustra* (II, 31), which he calls "the immortal lament of one who, because of his superabundance of light and power, because of his solar nature, is condemned never to love." This explanation of the absence of love is flattering to his wounded pride, but the song is much more revealing:

I know not the happiness of the receiver; and oft have I dreamed that stealing must be more blessed than receiving.

It is my poverty that my hand never ceaseth bestowing; it is mine envy that I see waiting eyes and brightened nights of longing.

Oh, the misery of all bestowers! Oh, the darkening of my sun! Oh, the craving to crave! Oh, the violent hunger in satiety!

They take from me; but do I yet touch their soul? There is a gap 'twixt giving and receiving; and the smallest gap hath finally to be bridged over.

A hunger ariseth out of my beauty; I should like to injure those I illumine; I should like to rob those I have gifted: — thus do I hunger for wickedness.

To injure those whom he would illumine, to rob those whom he would have gifted—these are sentiments of the Frankenstein creature when he vowed "if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear" (p. 154). Fear, however, was not the human sentiment that the Creature originally longed to inspire. He would have had love, and then, as he says, the love of another would have destroyed the cause of his crimes and he would have become a thing of whose existence everyone would have been ignorant (p. 156). For Nietzsche, alas, there was no love, and yet he felt that everyone was ignorant of what a great man he was. To have lost both love and greatness was unbearable, so if he could not have love, he would choose greatness. And if the path to greatness had to be hammered out through the Transvaluation of all Values, so be it!

NOTES

1. All quotations are from the Everyman's Library edition of *Frankenstein* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912).
2. Page references to Nietzsche's works are to *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: Random House), a Modern Library volume.
3. Thomas Mann, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events," an address delivered in and printed by the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 1947.
4. Crane Brinton, *Nietzsche* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), pp. 108 and 117.
5. Eric Russell Bentley, *A Century of Hero-Worship* (Philadelphia and New York: J. P. Lippincott Co., 1944), p. 87.