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“Airy Flights of My Imagination: Mary Shelley’s Critique of Cultural Hegemony in *Frankenstein*”

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“Airy Flights of My Imagination: Mary Shelley’s Critique of Cultural Hegemony in *Frankenstein*”

In the 1831 introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein*, she writes about her time in Scotland and the feeling of freedom she felt while writing “beneath the trees of the grounds belonging to our house, or on the bleak sides of the woodless mountains near, that my true compositions, the airy flights of my imagination, were born and fostered” (Shelley 2). Shelley exposes the power of words, whether spoken and written, and their destructive consequences in order to critique and challenge this hegemony. Unlike Anne Mellor and Ellan Moers who focus on biographical readings, and others, like John Lamb and T. J. Lears, who focus on the ethical codes within the novel, I claim that Shelley uses an attractive white, Christian male of the upper class in order to challenge the hegemonic structure, a system of values and codes represented by the upper class of 19th century England. I examine the roles of Safie and the Creature, particularly their relationship to Victor, to argue that Shelley uses *Frankenstein* to critique language just as much as she uses it to support language, indicating that Shelley’s novel betrays an ambivalence towards language, particularly when it excludes people, like the Creature, who do not fit in.