

Beauties, Beasts, and Reviving Mythic Sensibility in

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Isn't it queer: there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before. (Cather 75)

[T]hese stories are from the other world, the invisible world, the world of life-giving spirit out of which these types of stories come clicking and clanking as bare bony frames of themselves until the storyteller, the "word maker," . . . refreshes each story, "remembering" it back to life using the everyday life of the village world to dress the bones. . . . After becoming an adult, one realizes that there really is only a single, huge, hidden story trunk of which all the others are only magnificent branches, leaves or fruit. (Prechtel 2)

I. MYTH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Karen Armstrong suggests that the evolution of the pragmatic spirit from 1500 to the present has resulted in the death of myth. An attempt to explain the world factually and scientifically and the pursuit of material progress through reason have brought with them, gradually

but certainly, loss of the meaning and value of life that myth fosters in its changing shapes from culture to culture and age to age. Focusing on twentieth-century novelists like Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, and Malcolm Lowry, Armstrong gently argues that art, particularly fiction, in its un-factual and impractical nature attempts to provide a viable means to cope with modern malaise, that creative writers may serve a “priestly role” to move people away from their excessive reliance on *logos* toward a rediscovery of *mythos*. Reading fiction is a religious ritual, the reenactment and thus the recreation of a myth, the effect of which is “compassion,” the illogical but essential core of the life of the spirit, where “self” admits “other”:

the experience of reading a novel has certain qualities that remind us of the traditional apprehension of mythology. It can be seen as a form of meditation. Readers have to live with the novel for days or even weeks. It projects them into another world, parallel to but apart from their ordinary lives. . . . A powerful novel becomes part of the backdrop of our lives, long after we have laid the book aside. It is an exercise of make-believe that, like yoga or a religious festival, breaks down barriers of space and time and extends our sympathies, so that we are able to empathise with other lives and sorrows. . . . And, like mythology, an important novel is transformative. If we allow it to do so, it can change us forever. (153–54)

Similarly, Joseph Campbell argues that “[c]ompassion is the awakening of the heart from bestial self-interest to humanity”: “I think of compassion as the fundamental religious experience and, unless that is there, you have nothing” (200). Compassion is the primary act of the mythic hero, the first step of the “ascent of the spirit” (265), the way to bring a wasteland back to life, and the beginning “of the properly religious way of life and experience” (262). Armstrong’s and Campbell’s point is certainly evident in nineteenth-century novels where stories create a partial mythology for the age. In their imaginary protagonists and experiences, novelists offer readers an opportunity to respond imaginatively and compassionately, thereby challenging in a small, personal way the vast effects

of self-interest. Their role is to reveal the extraordinary in everyday experience, to slow the progress of and offer an alternative to the valueless vacuum first encountered in the twentieth century and now faced in the twenty-first.

The rediscovery of mythic sensibility begins with the need to rediscover life's "mystery"—"related to the Greek verb [*myein*] meaning 'to close the eyes or the mouth'" (Armstrong 114)—the conventional doors of logical perception. The earliest appreciation of mystery occurs in childhood when one accepts without question the wonder and inexplicable truth of fairy tales. Many nineteenth-century writers retell classic fairy tales and in reshaping them make them accessible in new forms to adult readers, who are most in need of rediscovering the child within themselves through a language which appeals to their experience in the adult external world. Charles Dickens, for example, retells the fairy tales of Cinderella and Pinocchio in *Great Expectations* (1861), subtitled "A Social Fable," to recreate for the reader the discovery of self-worth in sacrifice, the link to the past in common humanity, and the redefinition of the gospel of success in terms other than economic. Further, Dickens's time-bound work leaps beyond Victorian topical issues by addressing and recreating a timeless action, a universal "now" that embraces past, present, and future. In this way fiction, including fairy tales retold in fictional form, may offer a means for readers of all times to rekindle the mythic in themselves.

Another popular fairy tale is Madame Leprince de Beaumont's famous "Beauty and the Beast," which rewrites the story of Cupid and Psyche, among other sources, but subsequently takes innumerable shapes in many nineteenth-century works. Anne Thackeray Ritchie, for example, most closely retells de Beaumont's tale in her "Beauty and the Beast," setting the novella in contemporary England and shifting its magical elements to more domestic and naturally probable incidents, thereby infusing the fairy tale into her story to romanticize the real. Matthew Arnold's "The Forsaken Mermaid" and Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" are poetic renditions of the same tale, but the Mermaid/Beast in Arnold's poem is more sympathetic and attractive than Margaret/Beauty, the human consort who abandons him and their chil-

dren. Arnold's poem mourns the loss of reverence for physical reality and nature and the substitution of spiritless conventional religion in its place. Similarly, Rossetti's fictional sisters, Laura and Lizzie, marry and settle for conventional lives, but they cannot forget the forbidden but genuine attraction of goblin men and repeatedly and enthusiastically retell to their children their encounter with these untransformed beasts. Other nineteenth-century variations of de Beaumont's fairy tale include Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), two novels which act as opening and closing chapters in the nineteenth century's mythic history, reflecting its evolving spirit, witnessing the death of myth, and attempting to revitalize it.

Despite the shared billing in its title, "Beauty and the Beast" is really Beauty's story. It is Beauty who must undergo initiation, grow from childhood to adulthood, and learn compassion through her experience with Beast. She must come to terms with her emotional attachments and divided loyalties to father and potential husband. On one level, then, the tale is a story of sexual maturation, the coming to terms with forbidden sensuality in the shape of Beast, Beauty's would-be husband. As Bruno Bettelheim observes, "the marriage of Beauty and the Beast is the humanization and socialization of the id by the superego" (309). On another level, the fairy tale can be read as a response to an obsession with material possessions and success, an expression of the need to temper one's attachment to "things," to see the material world as a necessary but only partial aspect of oneself. Beauty's task in accepting Beast's worth is to see value in the material, whereas her sisters overvalue their wealthy marriages and themselves regress into things, transformed literally into statues condemned to witness Beauty's happiness. On a broader scale, "Beauty and the Beast" is about sanity, wholeness, and the integration of one's psyche: "The marriage of Beauty to the former Beast is a symbolic expression of the healing of the pernicious break between the animal and the higher aspects of man—a separation which is described as a sickness" (Bettelheim 308–09).

While Shelley and Wells borrow elements of "Beauty and the Beast" to create their unique myths of psychic fragmentation, in their retellings

“Beast,” not “Beauty,” is focal. True to the spirit of the Romantic Age, *Frankenstein* retells the fairy tale as a tragedy, an indictment of a culture which worships Reason at the expense of Imagination and so creates a Beast/Monster, a composite of Victor Frankenstein and his creature, who destroys beauty and disintegrates the sacred union of soul and body. At the end of the century, Wells echoes Shelley and rewrites “Beauty and the Beast” with the Time Traveller/Morlocks as a variation of Victor Frankenstein/Beast and the Eloi/Weena as Beauty. Wells indicts a have-and-have-not society and a culture of obsessive faith in technology. Both novels accomplish all this, however, not as a pair of pessimistic social tracts in discursive prose, but imaginatively, fictionally, and positively, restoring for the reader, as myth does, a sense of life’s wonder and meaning. Shelley and Wells are prophets, realistic witnesses of the limits of their own times, mythmakers who leave the narrators and readers of their works with the burden of endurance and, perhaps, a new hope.

II. *FRANKENSTEIN*: WHERE IS BEAUTY?

Though *Frankenstein*, subtitled “The Modern Prometheus,” is very often read as a retelling of that classical story of hubris and punishment, Shelley’s masterpiece retells “Beauty and the Beast” as well. Unlike both its predecessors, however, the optimistic and hopeful marriage in Shelley’s version fails. Ironically, two years after the publication of *Frankenstein*, Shelley’s husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, published *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), an allegory in which Prometheus as a symbol of humankind breaks from the tyranny of the gods. Prometheus, who in some versions of the story is said to be “the creator of man, molding him of mud,” is punished by Zeus for his hubris, but in Shelley’s optimistic version, he is eventually reunited with Asia, his wife, who represents “ideal Love or Nature” and a “golden age, where love and beauty reign, begins” (Benet 820). The successful marriages of the human creator and his ideal spouse in the Prometheus myth and of the animal and spiritual in “Beauty and the Beast” fail in *Frankenstein*. Obsessed by reason and the pursuit of knowledge, Victor

Frankenstein creates a monster who mirrors his creator and is responsible for a series of murders, including that of his wife, Elizabeth Lavenza, on their wedding night. The deaths of so many of Victor's multiple doubles suggest a kind of metaphoric suicide, an enactment of Tolstoy's famous warning that "[i]f we admit that human life can be ruled by reason, the possibility of life is destroyed" (1256). In the fairy tale, Beauty, her father, and Beast must all "die" to their old selves, but the deaths in *Frankenstein* are literal and final. Tragically and contrary to both classical myth and Shelley's fairy tale, the combination of Victor and the monster dies as well, leaving only two survivors, Robert Walton, the novel's epistolary narrator, and the reader, to learn from the strange tale they have either told or listened to.

Like de Beaumont's Beast, who says of himself, "my heart is good, but still I am a monster" (147), Victor Frankenstein's primary virtue, his love and pursuit of knowledge, becomes obsessive, the flaw that ironically turns him into a monster, a mirror image of his own creation. The "double" is a standard motif in fiction, but it functions especially richly in *Frankenstein*. Victor's regression from brilliant scientist to Beast reverses the fate of de Beaumont's Beast who is transformed into a handsome prince at the end of her fairy tale. But Shelley's "double" is even more complex, first because of its multiple allusions to the creation story, as told in both the Bible and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), and second because the deaths of each of Victor's loved ones, caused indirectly by himself and directly by his monster, are the fatal consequences of his ambition. In creating his own double, the instrument of the deaths of those dearest to himself, Victor kills both his family and himself.

Shelley quotes Milton on the title page of the first edition of *Frankenstein*:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
To mould me Man, did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me. . . . (X, III. 743-45)

The speaker here is, of course, Adam, speaking to God, or for Shelley's

novel, the monster speaking to Victor. The many subsequent allusions to the creation story in *Frankenstein*, however, shift the roles of God, Adam, and Satan, so that both Victor and the monster play each role, reducing and finally eliminating the distinctions among all the figures: both Victor and the monster are God, Adam, and Satan.¹ Multiple equations further make Victor the monster and identify each member of the trinity of God, Adam, and Satan with each other. In these dizzying, multiple-character equations, Shelley defies ordinary logic. She also creates a new creation story, a new myth, by rewriting the two former best-known versions of it. In hers, divinity resides in Man, and so does evil. William Blake, Shelley's contemporary, offers a similar equation in his "The Divine Image," where the abstractions "Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love" are personified and equated with God, Man, and abstract virtues, humanizing divinity and rejecting logical abstraction in favor of human-divine agency and responsibility. The rich pattern of allusions in *Frankenstein* creates a spectrum of doubles which shifts Victor's identity from God to Adam to Satan—he "falls" in the course of the story—while the monster's identity shifts from Satan to Adam to vengeful God—he paradoxically "rises." Victor's decline and the monster's ascent both end in disaster, a paradox characteristic of the progress of any tragic hero's simultaneous rise and fall. Noticeably absent from this complex new creation story is Eve. The absence of the primal mother signals the absence of Beauty, an omission finalized in the death of Victor's wife,

¹For instance, when the monster says, "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen Angel" (88), Victor is God, and the monster is Satan. When Victor says, "the apple was already eaten" (163), he is Adam with the monster driving him from Eden like an avenging angel. Victor is Satan when he says, "like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell" (181). The monster becomes Adam when he complains that "no Eve soothed my sorrows" and asks Victor for a mate (114). The monster becomes a wrathful omnipotent God when he leads Victor on to his destruction in the icy North, immune from both the cold and Victor's efforts to stop him. Finally, almost verbatim speeches of Victor and the monster equate them both with Satan and with each other: Victor says, "*I bore a hell within me*, which nothing could extinguish," and the monster announces, "*I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me*" (79, 118, emphasis added).

Elizabeth.

The second way that the double motif contributes to the richness and complexity of *Frankenstein* lies in the manner in which it echoes many first-person narratives whose titles are the names of the hero. Human identity, one's personal "story" and character, is to a large extent dependent upon whom one knows, is related to, and interacts with. The narrators of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), for instance, discover who they are by telling of all the "others" in their lives. Rochester and St. John Rivers

²Karen E. Rowe discusses how Brontë's novel rewrites "Beauty and the Beast," as well as Charles Perrault's stories, "Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," and "The Blue Beard": "that Brontë would find Beaumont's literary folktale a suggestive analogue seems hardly surprising, since her fiction shares the same fascination with conflicts between virtue and bestiality, deceptive appearances and underlying realities, and focuses comparably on the 'release' of a bewitched hero and education of an innocent maiden" (79). Additionally, like Mary Shelley and her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, Brontë's narrator explicitly rejects the conventional role of the female protagonist as a passive Beauty: "Women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties . . . and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" (Brontë 125–26). Rochester's mansion, the Beast's palace, literally houses the secret of his past, his mad, Beast-like wife, Bertha Mason, a mirror of Rochester's own insanity and bestial nature: "A figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal . . . and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face" (327–28). The realistic marriage of Jane and Rochester as equals comes only after Jane's maturation and Rochester's literal purging by fire. As Rowe points out, "Jane Eyre's saga may begin like a fairy tale, but Brontë transforms the paradigmatic into a personal history, investing her *Bildungsroman* with a realistic understanding of female needs for assertive choices and an individuality far different from that of acquiescent romantic heroines" (87).

Similarly, Christine Butterworth-McDermott traces the retelling of "Beauty and the Beast" and *Jane Eyre* in Louisa May Alcott's novella, *Behind a Mask* (1866): "in *Behind a Mask*, Alcott's heavy reliance [on] fairy tale themes, specifically those of 'Beauty and the Beast,' force[s] the reader to

are not only other separate characters but parts of Jane's multifaceted self as well; Micawber and Steerforth are likewise mirror agents of David's identity.² These and other narrators, the titular heroes of life stories composed of the stories of others, are, literally, the totality of their respective novels. Thus, in *Frankenstein* Victor recognizes in "others" the values he aspires to: he "has no thought nor sense of joy, except as it is mirrored also in . . . dear countenances" (79). Yet he rejects them all and becomes an indirect agent of their deaths. Victor is the monster, the Beast, but his identity is also interwoven with those of his family and friends, the "others" whose lives are inextricably bound to his. By extension *Frankenstein* itself is very literally Victor Frankenstein, the ink-and-paper composite of all the novel's characters.

Unlike Jane and David who come to know, accept, and come to terms with the others in themselves and so grow to selfhood, Victor repeatedly denies that what he sees in others is actually a mirror of himself, cutting off limb after limb of his own self until he dies. Risking his physical and mental health, he severs his relations with family, friends, and his adopted sister/fiancée Elizabeth, as he steeps himself further and further into the pursuit of science, his resultant illness, and eventual death:

My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. . . . I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection. . . . Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and . . . I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime. (50–52)

Victor's pursuit of knowledge is the noble pursuit of Beauty, but his obsession with it transforms the beautiful into the bestial.

question nineteenth-century British and American ideals of womanhood. . . . A close textual analysis of *Behind a Mask* reveals that the 'Beauty and the Beast' themes evident in *Jane Eyre* are deliberately echoed and revised throughout Alcott's novella" (26).

His murdered victims all reflect his feminine/beautiful/spiritual aspects, his Anima, which rejects in his over-reliance on his Animus his male/physical/material self. For example, according to Victor, Henry Clerval “had never sympathised in my tastes for natural science; and his literary pursuits differed wholly from those which had occupied me. . . . Clerval called forth the better feelings of my heart; he again taught me to love the aspect of nature, and the cheerful faces of children” (62–63). Victor also blames himself for the deaths of his brother William (“bright and joyous in his young beauty” [66]), his adopted sister Justine Moritz (“exquisitely beautiful” [73]), his father (“a protecting spirit” [32]), and Elizabeth, the novel’s Beauty: as he says, “I am the assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations” (160). In the range of his victims—a friend, a child brother, an innocent young woman, a parent, and a wife—Victor severs himself from all that makes life whole and brings upon himself a fatal illness. Haggard in appearance and declining in health, floating on an island of ice, Victor fittingly meets his bestly death in the coldness and isolation of the North Pole after telling his story to Robert Walton, another of his doubles.

What Victor intended to be “beautiful,” he names “monster” at its first sign of life, when “the beauty of the dream vanished” (52): “Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath. . . . I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created” (52–53). Ironically, moments after the monster first comes to life, Victor sleeps and dreams of Elizabeth and his mother, dead:

I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health. . . . I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death . . . and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms. (53)

Victor’s dream is the unconscious capsule expression of his gradual fall, the elimination of beauty from his life. His dream-kiss kills rather than awakens his Beauty. Moreover, he creates a “child” without the agency of a woman, and in so doing he symbolically kills the most important females in his life—his mother and his future wife, the past

and future sources of his life. Ironically, as Wordsworth puts it, “the Child is father of the Man” (62): the Monster is Victor’s double, both his child and his “parent,” the Beast offspring who will enjoy no life-giving transformation, but will instead beget Victor’s monstrous self and destroy Beauty in all those around him.³

In separating himself from the feminine, the Anima, his own soul, Victor fragments and reduces himself solely to his masculine power, the Animus, and the creation of life from dead, material body parts. Victor’s name, then, is ironic: he is the male aggressor and “victor,” but such hubris changes him into the Beast at the expense of Beauty. Furthermore, on this level, Shelley’s novel is prophetic of the “Victo-rian” (an apt pun) Age, when the death of spirit, witnessed and deplored by Romantic writers, became even more a reality. Like Wordsworth, Shelley saw a diminishing of wonder in human experience as a result of an excessive reliance on Reason: “That there hath past away a glory from the earth” (Wordsworth “Ode” 460), and, like Dickens after them, her fiction witnesses and reacts to a literary dark age in “these real times, when all the Fairies are dead and buried” (*Barnaby* 237). Instead of marrying Elizabeth/Beauty, Victor kills her, reversing the comic ending of the fairy tale.

Elizabeth, whose name means “heaven sent,” is repeatedly characterized as spirit, “a cherub,” “bearing a celestial stamp . . . fairer than a garden rose,” the flower associated with Beauty in the fairy tale: “The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp. [T]he sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us. She was the living spirit of love” (Shelley 34–36). Victor literally possesses his parents’ “present” of Elizabeth to him (34), just as the Beast holds Beauty, her father’s “gift” to him, captive. Whereas the Beast falls in love with Beauty and gradually eases his hold on her, Victor’s vampiric obsession leeches Elizabeth’s spiritual beauty. He sees

³Linda Gill reads the dream scene as a further instance of the novel’s repetitive doubling, this time equating women, ideal femininity, with the Monster, the “monstrous Other” created by men: “in a dream Victor has subsequent to his creation of the monster, Elizabeth metamorphosizes into his dead mother’s corpse and then upon his awakening is literalized in the appearance

this side of himself, a dead and death-bringing spirit, in his monster, “nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (69). Elizabeth too recognizes the vampiric nature of human ambition: “men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other’s blood” (82). In the fairy tale, Beauty’s compassion for Beast grows until she is able to profess her love for him and so transform him into the handsome prince. Despite Elizabeth’s selfless love, and unlike the marriage in de Beaumont’s fairy tale, however, *Frankenstein* ends in the failed marriage of rational creator, creature, and spirit, all fragments of a disintegrated self. Shelley’s novel, written in a literary world dominated by men, rewrites “Beauty and the Beast” to raise questions about individual “sanity,” the need to integrate male reason and female imagination, a focal concern of her Romantic contemporaries.

Frankenstein is thus a “Beauty and the Beast” story without Beauty, i. e., without an Anima. As in any classical tragedy, the burden of filling any empty space lies with the survivors, the remaining characters in the play, and the audience. The hope of *Frankenstein* similarly rests in the hands of Robert Walton and the reader, onlookers to the novel’s action, who are left to make sense of and act upon Victor’s story. Walton hungers for glory. Self-educated, he had once wanted to be a great poet, to “obtain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated,” but, like Victor, his strongest drives lie in the direction of scientific discovery and exploration, “mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science from which a naval adventurer might derive the greatest practical advantage” (18).

Shelley paints Walton’s ambition in images of cold and ice and equates it with lack of compassion, the result of intellectual ambition and a primary contributor to the wasteland of rationalism. As he pursues his dream more single-mindedly, he becomes more “ice-olated,” colder to the needs and requests of his men, and more conscious of his loneliness: “I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me. . . . I bitterly feel the want of a friend” (20). Eventually, Walton enters a region of “floating sheets of ice” and becomes “nearly surrounded by” it (23–24). When he first meets his secret sharer-to-be, Victor is on a

sledge “on a large fragment of ice. . . . His limbs [are] nearly frozen” (25). Hence, in his worship of reason, lack of compassion, and cold detachment, Walton is himself another Beast figure.

Joseph Campbell posits that the virgin birth, the progress from a solely animal existence to an awakening of spirit, occurs when one feels compassion, as Beast does prior to his physical transformation, and Beauty does before her more internal change.⁴ As Victor relates his story, Walton begins “to love him as a brother; and his constant and deep grief fills [him] with sympathy and compassion” (Shelley 27). Walton stops short, however, of extending his newly found compassion to his ship’s crew. He fears failure but has yielded reluctantly to the requests of his men to return home: “We were immured in ice. . . . I have consented to return if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision. . . . I am wafted towards England” (183–85). Such lukewarm reform and the abrupt ending of the novel when the monster springs from the window and vanishes leave both Walton’s and readers’ fates unresolved. Like Fortinbras, Richmond, or Macduff, readers are forced to start anew alone with only dead bodies filling the stage and no guarantee that they will necessarily be better for having read the novel or

⁴According to Campbell, the virgin birth is “the birth of spiritual man out of the animal man. . . . It happens when you awaken at the level of the heart to compassion, shared suffering; experienced participation in the suffering of another person. That’s the beginning of humanity” (219).

⁵Mary Lowe-Evans offers an interesting and optimistic discussion of the reader’s role as it is created by the letters that begin *Frankenstein*. Walton’s “correspondence” with his sister, Margaret, “suggests the cooperative nature of reading, the sympathy that must arise between reader and text if the reading is to continue. ‘Respondent’ insists on a reply, an active giving back of both meaning and moral to the story” (218–19). A contract is formed between reader and text, and the reader is asked to assume the role of Margaret, a “sisterly attitude toward the words on the page: loving, kind, and generally affirming” (219). Such respondent sympathy is extended to Victor as well: “I suggest that Margaret (and the reader) are expected also to see the stranger as a brother. The bond of kinship established between Walton and his sister-reader now begins to stretch so as to accommodate this interesting new ‘sibling’” (222). Such imaginative identification at the beginning of the book signals the overall transformation the reader may undergo as a result of the reading ritual.

feel the compassion or sympathy that is the first step toward the awakening of spirit. They are, instead, left with their experience, free to become heroes in their own choices, having been shown a dark way and given an ominous roadmap.⁵

Frankenstein has a rich and varied mythic genealogy. It retells the myth of Prometheus, the Book of Genesis, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* and even echoes some of Blake's and Wordsworth's poetry. Furthermore, as a retelling of "Beauty and the Beast," it reaffirms the Romantic interest in the child and the power and beauty of passion, emotion, and imagination. Shelley's sources are themselves all myths, products of creative imagination rather than the dead material body parts that Victor relies on for the creation of his monster. Her accomplishment, however, does not guarantee that myth shall be revived in her readers. Like all mythmakers, religious and literary, her role is priestly. She offers an animating force, an opportunity for a virgin birth through her novel's own virgin birth, the potential birth of spirit out of animal. Like all artists, she is a solitary parent reaching out to a solitary reader. Though her husband wrote the Preface to her novel, Shelley assures readers that the book itself is solely her creation, i.e., she created it without male agency, and so Percy Bysshe Shelley becomes "Joseph" to Mary, the book's mother in this literary Holy Family: "I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband" (Introduction 15). In the Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley concludes by offering her "child" to the reader in the book they are about to read: "And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days" (15). It thus rests with readers to adopt her divine/spiritual child, a fatherless orphan, or perhaps more strongly to merge the Beauty of her imaginative creation with the Beast of their own real and overly pragmatic lives. *Frankenstein's* popularity for almost two centuries suggests that scores of readers have accepted Shelley's invitation.

III. *THE TIME MACHINE*: BEAUTY DESTROYED, AGAIN

Like *Frankenstein* almost eighty years earlier, H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* is its author's first novel, an instant popular success which has since been cloned into numerous works of fiction and film.⁶ Its narrator is a nameless storyteller, an acquaintance of the Time Traveller, as the protagonist is called, who, like Robert Walton, serves as mediator for the reader and frames the Time Traveller's tale into three journeys: the first to the year 802,701 involves encounters with the descendants of the human race, the Eloi and the Morlocks; in an apocalyptic second journey into the far distant future, the Time Traveller witnesses the disappearance of the human race and the entropy of the natural world, prelude to the earth's falling into the sun; and, finally, in a third journey, the Time Traveller himself disappears, leaving both narrator and reader to speculate about the significance of the novel, which is precisely the case with *Frankenstein*.

⁶On July 27, 1895, an early reviewer in the *Daily Chronicle*, credited Wells with complete originality: "For his central idea Mr. Wells may be indebted to some previously unpublished narrative suggestion, but if so we must confess ourselves entirely unacquainted with it, and so far as our knowledge goes he has produced that rarity which Solomon declared to be not merely rare but non-existent—'a new thing under the sun'" (qtd. in Bergonzi 41). Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843) might be considered a work of time travel in part, assisted more by supernatural force than scientific technology. Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) offers a mechanic protagonist, transported back in time, who enjoys brief power in Arthur's England by using nineteenth-century technology. Twentieth-century descendants abound. Fictional spin-offs include Egon Freidell's *The Return of the Time Machine* (1972), Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine* (1976), and Stephen Baxter's *The Time Ships* (1995). Film versions of *The Time Machine* were made in 1960 (directed by George Pal), 1993 (a sequel/documentary directed by Clyde Lucas), and 2002 (directed by Simon Wells, Wells's great-grandson). In *Idaho Transfer* (directed by Peter Fonda), young time-travellers discover "the failed ancestors of a race that will remain unborn." The survivors "share with their progenitors a blind, suicidal faith, not only in science, but also in the righteousness of anything that is called progress" (Cocks). Popular time-travel films include *Back to the Future* and *Kate and Leopold*. Television series include "The Time Tunnel" and "Quantum Leap."

The appeal of Wells's novel is certainly in large part due to its suggestion, the basic premise of the book, that one might use a machine to escape the limits of time and travel into the past or future at will, as well as to the engaging adventures of the Time Traveller, a nameless, nineteenth-century scientific explorer whose successful experiment and discoveries, like Victor Frankenstein's, lead him to question the Victorian assumption of continuous human progress through science. After his travels, the Time Traveller "thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end" (125). The Time Traveller tells his story on two separate evenings, pre- and post-travels, to a group of dinner guests, including the narrator and some representative educated friends—the Editor, the Medical Man, the Psychologist, the Provincial Mayor, the Journalist, and the Silent Man ("a quiet, shy man with a beard" [22] who perhaps is Wells himself). His narration, however, fails to impress all but the narrator. Like the men who listen to Marlow's story in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), the Time Traveller's audience remains deaf to his insight, unmoved by his fascinating tale, sceptical, complacent, and "in the dark" (120). Beyond its science-fiction

⁷The novel has been read, among other ways, as a social allegory of "haves" and "have-nots," an allegory of Victorian pragmatism and the art for art's sake movement of the 1890s, and a "romantic and pessimistic variant of orthodox Marxist thought" (Bergonzi 42, 50, 52). Bernard Bergonzi discusses the range of polarities suggested by the Eloi and Morlocks, though he does not explicitly link them with the fairy tale: "The opposition of Eloi and Morlocks can be interpreted in terms of the late nineteenth-century class-struggle, but it also reflects an opposition between aestheticism and utilitarianism, pastoralism and technology, contemplation and action, and ultimately, and least specifically, between beauty and ugliness, and light and darkness" (61). Paul A. Cantor and Peter Hufnagel explore the novel as a nineteenth-century imperialist romance, a parable of the decline of the British Empire. J. R. Hammond calls attention to the multiple echoes of earlier and subsequent works in *The Time Machine*, including "Sleeping Beauty," Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and John Fowles's *The Magus* (1965). All these interpretations have merit. The wonder of Wells's novel is that it evades any single perspective as wholly adequate.

thriller appeal and basic indictment of blind over-confidence in science and reason, however, *The Time Machine* endures because it is a rich blend of ironically reshaped myths, among them Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx, and, like Shelley's novel before it, the myth of Prometheus and the tale of "Beauty and the Beast."⁷

First, *The Time Machine* combines in part both Plato and Sophocles. It reverses Plato's idealistic belief in the ascent of the soul through intellect to ultimate Truth, Goodness, and Beauty and reshapes the story of Oedipus but without the certainty of the protagonist's fate. Like Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, the Time Traveller's story is related as an unfolding puzzle, a mystery, which the Time Traveller attempts to solve, like the true scientist he is, by observing, by gathering data, and by making inferences about the foreign world he has newly entered. At first, he concludes that the future world is "intelligent, educated, and co-operating . . . a social paradise" (46-47). Later, as he emerges from the Under-World caves of the Morlocks, however, the answers he finds promise no ideal world such as Plato's emerging cave-dweller discovers in the light of the sun. Instead, he sees a cannibalistic, horrific, dying universe where the "sky was absolutely black" (116). The story's central riddle, therefore, keeps the Time Traveller literally and figuratively in the dark. In his continual reliance on so simple and primitive a tool as "matches" as his only source of light and his defense against the Morlocks, the Time Traveller resembles both Prometheus, whose elemental theft of fire from the gods brings both illumination and suffering to humankind, and Oedipus in his early presumptuous self-satisfaction that he has indeed slain the Sphinx and therefore solved the mystery of human destiny. The Time Traveller's experience, however, brings him closer to Oedipus in his later knowledge of human limitation and his realization that the cost of such knowledge is the loss of what the world minimally offers of beauty and wonder, despite its underlying horror. Finally, in the Time Traveller's creation of the time machine itself, his discovery of the beautiful Eloi, his strange romance with Weena (the book's only female character), and his confrontation with the beastly Morlocks, Wells's novel retells the story of "Beauty

and the Beast.” Like Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, *The Time Machine* suggests that reason and science have sacrificed Beauty and given the race over to the Beast latent in human nature.

Physically, the Time Traveller resembles Oedipus in his lameness: he himself laments, “a nail was working through the sole [of my shoe] . . . so that I was lame” (82). Moreover, on first arriving in the year 802,701, similar to Oedipus when he returns to Thebes, the Time Traveller encounters a large marble figure of a “Sphinx,” the first of the novel’s ominous “Beasts.” In the course of his first journey he confronts this Sphinx at two other key moments: when he loses his Time Machine into the pedestal of the statue, and when he later recovers it and escapes the world of the Eloi and Morlocks. The description of his initial encounter, so rich in visual diction and imagery, is both a prophetic and highly ironic suggestion of the Time Traveller’s own Oedipus-like blindness:

A colossal figure, carved apparently in some white stone, loomed indistinctly . . . through the hazy downpour. But all else of the world was invisible. . . . As the columns of hail grew thinner, I saw the white figure more distinctly . . . in shape something like a winged sphinx . . . the sightless eyes seemed to watch me; there was the faint shadow of a smile on the lips. . . . At last I tore my eyes from it for a moment, and saw that the hail curtain had worn threadbare, and that the sky was lightening with the promise of the sun. (32–33)

The scene suggests what the Time Traveller, like Oedipus, at first has difficulty seeing but ultimately sees clearly: that the world is an indifferent mystery that scoffs at puny human efforts to comprehend its riddle of beauty and decay; that the sky promises light, but what little light there is quickly fades; and that the only clear vision one has is the enigmatic vision of the Sphinx itself, the unanswerable mystery. During both of his other encounters with the Sphinx, the Time Traveller experiences the same contemptuous derision that he at first merely imagined: “It seemed to smile in mockery of my dismay . . . I thought I

heard something stir inside . . . a sound like a chuckle” (51, 55); later, he says, “I was in the dark—trapped. . . I could already hear their murmuring laughter” (110). A parody of a popular inspirational poem captures the Time Traveller’s situation accurately:

You are a fluke
Of the universe.
You have no right to be here.
And whether you know it or not
The universe is laughing behind your back. (Hendra)⁸

As in Sophocles’s play, the Sphinx in *The Time Machine* recalls the simplistic but essential riddle of Oedipus: “What creature . . . goes on four feet in the morning, on two at noonday, on three in the evening?” and its answer, “Man” (Hamilton 257). The riddle, even though Oedipus “solves” it, leads to his fall, blindness, and exile, since he proudly assumes he knows what the nature of human nature is. Similarly, the puzzle of the future world teases both the Time Traveller and the reader to answer the questions, What is a human? What is a Man? Oedipus must answer these same questions to solve the riddle to slay the Sphinx, save Thebes, and earn a kingly crown. Like Oedipus, too, however, the Time Traveller’s initial confidence in scientific inquiry and in the power of his time machine gives way to disillusionment as his discoveries lead him from one speculative theory to the next, only to discover in the end that the human race and all its accomplishments have degenerated, disappeared in fact, and that the physical universe itself is headed for the same fate. Ironically, the riddle’s answer leads the Time Traveller, as it did Oedipus, to a new knowledge, a realistic sense of his own ignorance, a new consciousness of his failure—the Sphinx is not slain, the city is not saved, and the Time-Traveller himself becomes an exile, his ideal belief in human progress destroyed.

⁸The original is Max Ehrmann’s “The Desiderata of Happiness”: “You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars, you have a right to be here. / And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is un-

As in *Frankenstein*, *The Time Machine* also offers multiple doubles for the roles of Beauty and Beast in its retelling of the fairy tale. In one sense the relation of the Time Traveller to the time machine itself, of the creator to his creation, suggests that the machine is his monster/Beast. The Time Traveller, initially a well-intentioned pure scientist, platonically interested in exploring and observing the future for the sake of knowledge alone, is temporarily the novel's Beauty, just as Victor Frankenstein begins his scientific studies with the pure curiosity to know. At the start of his travels, the Time Traveller wrestles his machine to submission, as if it were a wild beast which he is idealistically taming: "I took a breathing space, set my teeth, and . . . grappled fiercely, wrist and knee, with the machine. It gave under my desperate onset and turned over. It struck my chin violently. One hand on the saddle, the other on the lever, I stood panting heavily in attitude to mount again" (34). The passage contains sexual overtones as well, its violence suggesting a forced animal union, the first indication of the Time Traveller's other role as Beast. Ironically, his relation to his machine is much more intimate than is his later platonic relationship with Weena, who for five nights "slept with her head pillowed on [his] arm" (62). The machine is also closely associated with the Sphinx, on whose pedestal it rests, almost like an animal child in its mother's arms or womb, excluding the Time Traveller who reacts like a child whose toy has been taken from him: "'Where is my Time Machine?' I began, bawling like an angry child, laying hands upon them [the Eloi] and shaking them up together" (52). The Time Machine, like Victor's monster, acts as the agent of its creator's obsession and his ultimate disappearance, an emblem of the power of science and reason to consume its disciples, ultimately transforming them from Beauties into Beasts.

In his innocence and naïveté, the Time Traveller resembles the Eloi, the book's most obvious counterparts of Beauty in a fairy-tale Eden. Though the Eloi are both male and female, they tend to appear unisexual, though perhaps more feminine than masculine: "all had the same form of costume, the same soft hairless visage, and the same girlish rotundity of limb" (43). They are "pretty little people," only

four feet tall and childish, having the “intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children” (36–37). Despite their beauty, the Eloi also seem sickly, “clad in rich soft robes . . . very beautiful and graceful . . . but indescribably frail”; the Time Traveller sees them as “the more beautiful kind of consumptive” (34–35). Thus, the Eloi, though beautiful, are wholly vulnerable, futuristic flower-children without care, living an impractical, idyllic life, victims of the luxury of their own progress. To all appearances, animal life is extinct in this future world, but later the Time Traveller discovers that the Eloi are themselves mere fatted cattle, food for the beastly Morlocks. He concludes that their species “had decayed to a mere beautiful futility” (81). Nevertheless, he forms a somewhat strange, almost entirely platonic romantic relationship with one of the Eloi, the novel’s sole female, Weena, a specific Beauty among the collective Beauty figures of the Eloi.

Weena’s role in *The Time Machine*, like Elizabeth Lavenza’s in *Frankenstein*, is primarily symbolic, and her function is to humanize the Time Traveller, to reintroduce him to a side of himself that he has ignored: “She always seemed to me, I fancy, more human than she was, perhaps because her affection was so human” (89). She is the feminine, the Anima, the Beauty which the Time Traveller loses and replaces with the Beast of his machine. She evokes the emotional character of the Time Traveller, his affection from the time he first saves her life until he loses her later, fighting to save her from the Morlocks, the two most selfless acts he performs. Weena is repeatedly described as “small”: “a little thing,” a “poor mite,” “my little woman,” a “little doll of a creature . . . like a child” (60–62). Such diminution is characteristic of the Victorian attitude toward women and their depiction in nineteenth-century fiction,⁹ but it functions further in Wells’s novel to emphasize not femininity, but the vulnerability of the feminine, the fragility of the spirit and its easy loss. Positively as well, the image of the Time Traveller’s carrying the child-like Weena on his shoulder, a St. Christopher icon, suggests her function as a divine child, an agent of

⁹Dickens’s novels, for instance, are filled with “little women,” e.g., Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), Little (Amy) Dorrit in *Little Dorrit* (1857),

the spirit who will ultimately be sacrificed.

Weena's increasing effect on the Time Traveller is like Beauty's humanizing influence on Beast in his palace. The Time Traveller discovers Weena shortly after he loses the time machine, but as his interaction with her increases, he simultaneously moves farther away from his machine and gradually comes to a new understanding about the limits of human ambition. When he and Weena explore the Palace of Green Porcelain, the remains of an archeological and historical museum, she is a companion and catalyst, a sign of his new insight into the limits of science's mastery over nature and, consequently, the lesser importance of his time machine: "Weena . . . very quietly took my hand and stood beside me. . . . Even my preoccupation about the Time Machine receded a little from my mind" (90). The Palace is a monument to mind, not the enchanted palace of "Beauty and the Beast," but a wasteland, "deserted and falling into ruin" (89), containing "blackened visages of what had once been stuffed animals, desiccated mummies," corroded and broken down machines, "tattered flags" (93), "the decaying vestiges of books" (94). The sight impresses him with its "enormous waste of labour" (94), the transience of all scientific, social, and intellectual progress.

The ruined displays in the Palace of Green Porcelain, the fruit of all previous human labor, gradually lead to and literally merge with a darkness inhabited by the Morlocks, the most explicit Beasts in the novel, the Under-World, mechanical, cannibalistic predators upon the Eloi. The Morlocks are equated with the human accomplishments displayed in the Palace and personify the animal nature of humanity, the logical consequence of rampant pragmatism: "Then I saw that the gallery ran down at last into a thick darkness. . . . My sense of the immediate presence of the Morlocks revived at that" (92-93).

Despite Weena's salutary effect on the Time Traveller, she eventually perishes when he violently struggles to regain his machine. Like Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*, Weena dies because of a conflict of the Time Traveller's own making, namely, his dependence on his machine and his need to fight the other Beasts in the novel, the Morlocks, who are his own descendants and the successors of a complacent and blindly

optimistic generation. The Time Traveller recovers the time machine very shortly after Weena's death, a coincidence which reverses the earlier coincidental discovery of Weena and loss of the machine. The exchange of the machine for Weena signals the reascendancy of the bestial in the Time Traveller's double nature. In the loss of Weena, the battle with the Morlocks, and the recovery of his time machine, he closely resembles the beastly Victor Frankenstein.

The Time Machine, like *Frankenstein*, reverses the fairy-tale transformation of the Beast into the handsome prince. As the Time Traveller learns more about the Morlocks, his own beastliness becomes more apparent, but, like Gulliver in his reaction to the Yahoos, he despises the Morlocks without recognizing that he is in many ways like them. The Morlocks are repeatedly compared to "beasts" of various sizes: "some white animal that, in the dim light, I took for a small deer" (52); any one of them is like "a sloth" (54), "ape-like" (63), "a human spider" (66), a "Lemur" (66), and later, less complimentarily, a "human rat" (102). The Time Traveller's first response to them is what he imagines any creature's reaction in a future world would be to himself: "I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness—a foul creature to be incontinently slain" (33). Initially, he only fears them, but after descending into the hell of their subterranean caves and learning of their cannibalism, he grows murderous as well: "I longed very much to kill a Morlock or so. Very inhuman, you may think, to want to go killing one's own descendants! But it was impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things" (193). Unlike Victor Frankenstein who accuses himself of murder by his creature/proxy, the Time Traveller murders several Morlocks, restrained, appropriately enough, only by his fears of losing Weena and his Time Machine: "Only my disinclination to leave Weena, and a persuasion that if I began to slake my thirst for murder my Time Machine might suffer, restrained me from going straight down the gallery and killing the brutes I heard" (93). In effect, the Time Traveller is himself gradually transformed into a Beast. The image of the Time Traveller before his final conflict with the Morlocks signals his compassionate but murderous double nature: "Upon my

left arm I carried my little one, in my right hand I had my iron bar” (100).

In his final struggle with the Morlocks, which leads to the death of Weena, the recovery of the Time Machine, and his escape from the world of 802,701, the Time Traveller avails himself of another primitive weapon to both his benefit and detriment, namely, fire. After his descent into the Morlock caves, the Time Traveller/Beast appears, matches in hand, transformed from modern scientist into primitive animal warrior: “I stood there with only the weapons and the powers that Nature had endowed me with—hands, feet, and teeth; these and four safety matches that still remained to me. . . . Now I felt like a beast in a trap, whose enemy would come upon him soon” (77, 80). The Time Traveller uses his matches to amuse the Eloi, to light his way into the caves of the Morlocks, and to defend himself against them, but the fire which he himself sets in staving off the Morlocks destroys Weena. Ironically, the Time Traveller, a Prometheus of the future, has stolen fire from the gods in his marvellous invention of the Time Machine, only to regress to dependence on fire in its most simple invented form, safety matches.

In Wells’s first essay for the *Fortnightly Review*, “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” he challenges, according to Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, “both the optimism and the assumptions of science”: “Did the growth of science promise an unlimited extension of knowledge about Nature and Man’s place in it—or did it merely demonstrate that the more that was known, the more plain it became that there were further unknowable mysteries?” (86). In the essay’s concluding paragraph, what becomes an elaborate “match motif” five years later in *The Time Machine* first appears as an insightful match metaphor:

Science is a match that man has just got alight. He thought he was in a room—in moments of devotion, a temple—and that his light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems wrought into harmony. It is a curious sensation, now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his hands lit

and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated—darkness still. (Wells “Rediscovery” 111)

Matches enable the Time Traveller to see indoors at night, and they are agents of brief insight and momentary defense, but they prove to offer only false security: “I had in my possession a thing that was, perhaps, the best of all defences against the Morlocks—I had matches!” (96). Like the match of science in Wells’s metaphor, the Time Traveller’s matches become signs of his ignorance and inadequacy, a reminder that he is still stuck in Plato’s cave: “striking another match, [I] saw that I had entered a vast arched cavern, which stretched into utter darkness beyond the range of my light. The view I had of it was as much as one could see in the burning of a match” (76).

The Time Traveller literally plays with fire, amusing the Eloi, and burns his fingers on several occasions in the novel. In the Under-World caves of the Morlocks, matches reveal the true state of their cannibal relationship with the Eloi, but much like the match-lit room/temple in Wells’s essay, the light in the caverns is threatened both by his short supply of matches and the Morlocks’ attempts to snatch them from him. Though the matches enable him to escape temporarily, he is soon left in darkness:

I determined to strike another match and escape under the protection of its glare. I did so, and eking out the flicker with a scrap of paper from my pocket, I made good my retreat to the narrow tunnel. But I had scarce entered this when my light was blown out, and in the blackness I could hear the Morlocks rustling . . . as they hurried after me. . . . I lit my last match . . . and it incontinently went out. (77)

When the Time Traveller and Weena leave the Palace of Green Porcelain, he finds a box of matches and camphor, a promise of light and a protective fire for the night, as well as a defense during their flight. Night, sleeplessness, and the fire which the Time Traveller originally thought a defensive weapon, however, all threaten to destroy

both him and Weena. While the Time Traveller sleeps, his match box is stolen, his fire goes out, he sees “the burning forest . . . my first fire coming after me” (103), and Weena is lost in the flames. Like Victor Frankenstein and his Monster’s role in the death of Elizabeth, the Time Traveller and his fire cause the death of Weena, and like Victor, Robert Walton, and Prometheus, the Time Traveller suffers in isolation as a result: “I felt the intensest wretchedness for the horrible death of little Weena. . . . [I]t left me absolutely lonely again—terribly alone” (106).

In his dependence on fire and his invention of the time machine, the Time Traveller resembles Prometheus, an ambivalent savior of mankind. But the story of Prometheus also involves his meeting with Io, a wandering young girl whom Zeus changes into a heifer to hide her from his jealous wife, Hera. When Hera condemns Io to endless wandering, Prometheus can only comfort Io by looking into her future and foretelling that Zeus would eventually restore her to human form, that the Ionian Sea would preserve her name and memory, and that her descendant would be Hercules, who in turn would set Prometheus free, a relatively hopeful fate (Hamilton 76). Unlike Prometheus and Io, the Time Traveller’s experience with Weena is less fortunate. Although he sees into the future, his attempts to comfort Weena, to save her, and to bring her back to his own time fail. Weena is left behind as a literal burnt offering to the greater power of the Morlocks. The Time Traveller himself is not freed but remains a prisoner of his own invention, travelling thirty million years into the future, only to see the human race succeeded by more beasts, large crab-like creatures, “foul, slow stirring monsters” (114), and a darkness that is absolute. Beauty has been killed, and the Time Traveller, his machine, and a nameless monster, “a moving thing . . . hopping fitfully about” (117), are the sole bestial survivors in the last long night of creation: “The sky was absolutely black” (116). As with *Frankenstein*, whatever hope *The Time Machine* offers rests with the novel’s narrator and the reader.

The Time Traveller’s most valuable redeeming act is to tell his story, but seeing that it is not well received, he half yields to the unbelief of his audience: “Take it as a lie—or a prophecy. Say I dreamed it in the

workshop. Consider I have been speculating upon the destinies of our race until I have hatched this fiction . . . a mere stroke of art” (120). In choosing to take his last journey and subsequently vanishing, the Time Traveller resembles Victor Frankenstein in his pursuit of his Monster; both remain obsessively attached to their creations. For his part the narrator remains a modest believer who holds on to the match of the Time Traveller’s story, confident, like Sir Bedivere after King Arthur’s disappearance, that the future is “a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story” (125). What further affords the narrator hope are the flowers given to the Time Traveller by Weena, the only signs of beauty and human compassion from a bleak future world: “I have by me, for my comfort, two strange white flowers . . . to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man” (125–26). *The Time Machine* itself is such a flower, left in the hands of the reader, an imaginative, not a mechanical, time machine, a vehicle which takes the reader into the future, educates his emotional intelligence, and advises courage in the face of calamity.¹⁰ These flowers, much like Beauty’s rose taken from Beast, are the fragile lifelines that remain to both narrator and reader. Speaking about how many New Yorkers responded to 9/11 through poetry, photography, and song as early as the next day, Arthur Danto, art critic and curator of a show called “The Art of 9/11,” said,

I was gripped by all the little shrines that had sprung up all over the city of New York. . . . The spontaneity, the way in which everybody seemed to do it to express their feelings . . . through these little shrines. It taught me something about how people respond to devastation: through beauty. (49)

IV. CONCLUSION

¹⁰Paul Cantor and Peter Hufnagel discuss Wells’s novel as itself being a time machine: “The time machine uses the raw materials of empire to leap into the future; in doing the same, Wells’s *The Time Machine* reveals the profound connection between imperialism and modernism” (54). Robert Philmus also sees the time machine as “a vehicle for transporting its readers . . . outside their ‘temporal’ mindset” (51).

Mary Shelley retells the Prometheus myth, creates a creation story, and remodels “Beauty and the Beast” from a female perspective, and Wells complements his predecessor, retelling the Oedipus story as well. Both *Frankenstein* and *The Time Machine* anticipate psychological novels of the next century with their Jungian suggestions of feminine Beauties and masculine Beasts as complementary psychic symbols. Furthermore, the nineteenth-century British worship of childhood innocence and its sense of its loss because of adult preoccupation with material progress, scientific advancement, and obsessive success remain familiar issues in contemporary culture. A reviewer of the film *The Brothers Grimm* comments, “In an age when beauty has been separated from art . . . we still hunger, especially in times of social and cultural crisis for . . . the emotional experience delivered by narratives like the ones told by our ancestors. There is transformative power in terror” (Tatar). In *The Lady in the Water* M. Night Shyamalan presents another retelling of “Beauty and the Beast”: the fairy-like water nymph “Lady,” aptly named “Story,” risks losing her life to a wolfish beast (a “scrunt”) unless she is rescued by a number of ordinary people who serve as “guide,” “interpreter,” “guild,” and “healer.” Finally, in *Pan’s Labyrinth* Guillermo del Toro offers a complex fairy tale of young beauty confronting monsters, both human and fantastic, in the realistic world of post-Civil War Spain. Clearly, “Beauty and the Beast” spans the centuries, repeating itself “fiercely,” as Willa Cather remarks that “human stories” do, as if it had never been told before.

For children a century ago, writers like Lewis Carroll in his Alice books and James M. Barrie in *Peter Pan* (1900) helped keep the light of wonder, amazement, and even terror alive, much as J. K. Rowling has done with her Harry Potter books for twenty-first-century young readers. But adults, too, need such wonder and terror. As Bettelheim says, “at each age we seek, and must be able to find, some modicum of meaning congruent with how our minds and understanding have already developed” (3). What myths and fairy tales like “Beauty and the Beast” do for the child of any age, Shelley, Wells, and many other

nineteenth-century novelists do for their readers by transposing myth and fairy tale into more complex forms of narrative fiction, supplying readers with vehicles for sorting through the shifting values of their culture.¹¹

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