

# **In the Shadow of Frankenstein's Creature: Harriet Jacobs' Gothic Garret**

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For Mary Shelley and Harriet Jacobs, the paradigm of male authority and its connection with authorship as a primarily masculine act alters their identity as writers, as both hide their real names when publishing, either through anonymity or pseudonym. This was a common anxiety for a female author in a publishing world dominated by men, with similar choices being made by female authors to remain “unnamed” (Smith 214). Both Shelley and Jacobs, however, also embed a coded female authoring within their works, as in Frankenstein and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl central characters (the word is awkward in application to Brent/Jacobs) discover/recover their sense of self through the acts of being a third party listener and later writing their own story, with the first act being necessary in the development of the second. In the silence and physically restricted space of their hiding (the blank page), the creature and Brent/Jacobs come to redefine themselves and gain both an authority of voice and of self. Further, Frankenstein as a model of Gothic literature demonstrates an influence on specific aspects of Jacobs' writing.

For Shelley, the decision to publish anonymously was necessitated by the literary shadow in which she wrote, that of her father, her husband, and good friend Byron (although the novel was dedicated to her father and later published under her own name with a preface by her husband), but also because of the content of her novel. Shelley distinguishes between her privacy as an individual and her work in fiction when she writes in the introduction to the 1831 text, “It is true that I am very averse to bringing myself forward in print” (“Introduction” 259). On a more pressing level, editor Lydia Maria Child gives Jacobs, an escaped slave, the name “Linda Brent” in her work out of concern for the safety of those who protected her in the South and for her family who remained there—and out of concern for the interests and feelings of Mr. Willis, Jacobs's employer (Child 163). On Jacobs's own part, there may have been a wish for privacy concerning the

events of her past, particularly about the sexual aggression of her master and her resulting choice to have children out of wedlock with another white man. Her preface comments on her desire to remain silent: "I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history" (Jacobs, "Preface" 5). Here the desire she has for privacy regarding the events of her life is perhaps magnified by the sensitivities of her white female audience. Child recognizes the shock about to befall this audience when she introduces the work, indicating that "many will accuse [her] of indecorum" ("Introduction" 6).

The earlier of the two works, Frankenstein (1818) was received critically as being impious and "possibly absurd and atheistic" (Baldick 56). Part of this reaction may have been in response to the known advocacies of Shelley's father, William Godwin, to whom the work, though published anonymously, was dedicated. An 1818 review by John Wilson Croker did not mince words: "Our readers will guess from this summary, what a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity this work presents...The dreams of insanity are embodied in the strong and striking language of the insane, and the author, notwithstanding the rationality of his preface, often leaves us in doubt whether he is not as mad as his hero" (381). Readers perhaps were shocked by a work in which a man could create new life, although Percy Shelley found in the work a simple moral that seems beyond the grasp of slave owners: "Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked" (Baldick 57—citing The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. R.H. Shepherd, 2 vols. London 1888). This, of course, says nothing of the effect of such ill treatment on the soul of the one perpetuating it. Indeed, one wonders how apparent this moral was to readers of the time. Croker demonstrates this lack of sensitivity in his assertion that the novel "inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated -- it fatigues the feelings without interesting the understanding; it gratuitously harasses the heart, and wantonly adds to the store, already too great, of painful sensations" (385). Instead, the attention of the readers of the time was on the creature as monster, not on his creator.

The first stage adaptation of the book in 1823 silences the creature and encodes him, in an attempt to moralize the tale, as a monster raised with the help of the devil, a characterization that develops from stage to screen (Baldick 59-60). This attention on the creature as an infantile and incommunicative monster misses the mark of Percy Shelley's interpretation and does nothing to further the case of his humanity and need for social interdependence. Continuing the misinterpretation of the original, in 1824 the foreign secretary of the House of Commons introduced the novel into the debate on emancipation in the West Indies, linking the slave with the creature as mentally inferior: "To turn [the slave] loose

in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passion, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance” (Baldick 60, citing Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., x [London, 1824], col. 1103). In its third edition by 1861, the novel, which now included a more conservative and reinforced moral (Baldick 61) would have been familiar to the audiences that read Jacobs’ work. The novel entered its first American edition in 1833, published by Carey, Lea & Blanchard of Philadelphia. An American overview of general literature published a few years after Jacobs’ work summarizes Frankenstein as follows:

[A] young student of physiology succeeds in constructing, out of the horrid remnants of the church-yard and dissecting room, a kind of monster, to which he afterwards gives, apparently by the agency of galvanism, a kind of spectral and convulsive life. This existence, rendered insupportable to the monster by his vain cravings after human sympathy, and by his consciousness of his own deformity, is employed in inflicting (in some cases involuntarily) the most dreadful retribution on the guilty philosopher; and some of the chief appearances of the monster, particularly the moment when he begins to move for the first time, and towards the end of the book, among the eternal snows of the arctic circle, are managed with striking and breathless effect, that makes us for a moment forget the childish improbability and melodramatic extravagance of the tale. (Shaw 371-372 Chap. XIX)

Given the excitement the novel caused, one might speculate on the awareness of Jacobs’ American readers and of Lydia Maria Child, editor of Jacobs’ work, regarding the Gothic elements of Frankenstein that parallel Jacobs’s writing.

Connections between early slave narratives and elements of Romantic literature suggest an awareness of the tastes of an upper middleclass white audience and reveal the guiding hand of white editors. However, there is also an appeal in the Gothic to the needs and experiences of the black author. As James Smethurst reflects on the ideas of Teresa Goddu in Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation, the fabric of the Gothic includes “a past event involving an unrightful and violent usurpation which constrains the actions of succeeding generations,” “patriarchal tyranny, transgressive sexuality which generally accompanies relations of power, and an instability of markers of social identity, such as family, class, race, gender, and nationality” (29-30).

These power shifts and imbalances parallel those found within the American master-slave structure. The patriarchal tyranny of the gothic mirrors the warped world of slavery in which master and father are often one and the same and in which, in any case, master posits himself in the role of father (disciplinarian,

provider, decision maker) and the slave as child (powerless, dependent, without thought). Smethurst indicates that this gothic connection can be found in the work of Jacobs, as well as that of Frederick Douglass and Francis Harper, in their recording a patriarchal tyranny as well as “a concomitant transgressive sexuality in which the slave master coerces or attempts to coerce female slaves into unwanted sexual relations” (30). We see the first of this within the second chapter of Jacobs’s work, when Dr. Flint in one paragraph, after disliking a meal, orders the cook “to be whipped, or compel[led] to eat every mouthful of it in his presence” and in the next orders a male slave whipped for accusing him of being the father of his wife’s fair-skinned child (Jacobs, Incidents15).

Recognizing the link between slaveowner and Victor Frankenstein within this role, H.L. Malchow discusses this shirked responsibility of parent to child, asking, “Can any parent, slave-master, patron or employer escape, without retribution, the moral obligation of providing for the welfare and education of those who are dependent upon him and who have, in some sense at least, been called into being, shaped and perhaps deformed to serve his needs?” (114). If the relationship between the creature and Frankenstein is also one of parent-child, one might wonder if Frankenstein is a perversion of a mother-figure in his unnatural birthing of a creature he deems a monster, or a father-figure who cannot see himself in his son.

Much can be made of Frankenstein’s “unnatural” creation of another human being; some see Shelley offering proto-feminist commentary on the scientific world’s appropriation of the natural world as condemnation of masculine denigration of feminine power and ways of knowing (think medical doctors supplanting midwives). Gilbert and Gubar claim that Victor Frankenstein’s “single most self-defining act transforms him definitively into Eve” (232). Thus, Frankenstein is more than mother; he is first mother and first fallen, tempted by a knowledge outside human bounds. In reflection, Frankenstein begs the reader, “Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (Shelley 313). Unlike most mothers who revel in the birth of their long-awaited child after arduous labor, Frankenstein is repulsed by his efforts and runs from the room. The dreams that follow during the course of the night conflate feminine beauty and health with death: he kisses his fiancée, and she dies; her body then turns into that of his dead mother: “I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel” (Shelley 319). It is from this dream of a dead maternal figure that he awakens to meet the eye of his creation: “I beheld the

wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created” (Shelley 319). His creation certainly feels the loss of a familial bond, as he laments,

I had heard of...the birth and growth of children; how the father doated [sic] on the smiles of the infant, and the lively sallies of the older child; how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up in the precious charge...But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses. (Shelley 387)

There are no happy memories of “infancy” for either party.

If the setting of the “birthing” scene and the attitude of the creator do not match our views of maternity, we could see Frankenstein instead as a father-figure who struggles in his role. Terry W. Thompson sees the creature as the prodigal son who seeks to return to his father, blaming the father in the Biblical account for the monster he has created. Thompson looks at the isolation in the hovel as part of the debased suffering the prodigal son must experience before the return, calling it not only a hovel, but “humble refuge” and “cramped shelter,” and pointing out that the creature is “an outcast, dirty, unloved, unwelcome, and penniless. He is far removed from his father, Victor” (191-192). The comparison here links the hovel with the pigsty of the Biblical story and opens up the possibility of a nadir being a moment of epiphany. However, Thompson’s comparison does not work when it comes to the reunion of the two, which for Frankenstein and his creature certainly is not joyous nor is it spurred by fond memories of an earlier life together.

Even if not of quite the same character as the Biblical tale, the low point of the hovel offers a turning point towards rebirth. The creature, in this passage, is given the opportunity to form the familial bonds denied to him by his maker/master. In watching Mr. DeLacey smile upon Agatha, the creature recalls, “I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature; they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced” (Shelley 373). The creature learns to identify emotions from watching the family interact, and even comes to put his own feelings in perspective (although that perspective involves denigrating himself in relation to others): “If such lovely creatures were miserable, it was less strange that I, an imperfect and solitary being, should be wretched” (Shelley 375). Moreover, the creature begins to move beyond a concern for his own needs and to demonstrate his care for the family by not stealing food from them and by assisting them in collecting wood. He comes to refer to them as “my friends.”

As a step toward expressing these newly identified feelings and this desire to interact with others, the creature becomes aware of language. In listening to the family through the cracks in the walls, he discerns speech: “I found that these

people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds...This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it" (Shelley 377). Listening becomes a form of learning, as the creature practices using his voice in solitude. His desire to communicate and become part of the social fabric is what compels him to continue: "These thoughts exhilarated me and led me to apply with fresh ardour to the acquiring the art of language. My organs were indeed harsh, but supple; and although my voice was very unlike the soft music of their tones, yet I pronounced such words as I understood with tolerable ease" (Shelley 380). It is the DeLacey family that teaches him language and a love of literature, a skill neatly demonstrated in the very recollection of the scene by the creature himself. The creature narrates chapters 11 through 16 directly, and his manner of speech is as educated and genteel as that of his creator. Baldick argues that the monster's finding his voice is what makes him most sympathetic to readers: "The decision to give the monster an articulate voice is Mary Shelley's most important subversion of the category of monstrosity" (45). A creature who was heretofore voiceless from the moment of his birth finds his voice through the quiet months of his isolation, who was earlier wandering in solitude and despair, rests now and finds himself a part of a family, even if they are unaware of his presence on the other side of the wall.

If it seems odd to compare the reality of the hidden life of Brent/Jacobs with that of a fictional monster, it is not unfathomable that Shelley allegorically intended a condemnation of slavery. H.L. Malchow notes the connection between the creature and the slave, asserting that "Shelley's portrayal of her monster drew upon contemporary attitudes towards non-whites, in particular on fears and hopes of the abolition of slavery in the West Indies" (90). Malchow spends time examining the physical description of the creature, but points out that there is no explicit proof that Shelley intended to pose this connection. However, he argues,

What is of interest here is how closely Shelley's fictional creation parallels in many respects the racial stereotypes of the age, and how her exploration of the limits of Rousseau and William Godwin on man and education...mirrors contemporary difficulties in maintaining universal humanistic ideals in the context of the slave economy of the West Indies and an expanding empire over non-white populations in Asia and Africa. (Malchow 92-93)

If Frankenstein has applications to the larger world of the slave trade, so it does to the specific world of slavery that Jacobs knows. Consider the alienation and inhumanity that was part of Jacobs's life. Child consolidates in chapter 9 the diverse accounts of the abuse of slaves Jacobs recalls precisely because of her

concern for the reaction of her audience to the horrors wrought on the bodies of slaves: being whipped, clubbed to death, tied half-naked to a tree in the winter, screwed into the cotton gin, shot through the head. Jacobs draws the chapter to a close in reflecting, “And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation” (*Incidents* 45). Jacobs has just spent several chapters recounting her master’s lusting after her own body and her escape plan of yielding herself to another man. Her personal hell involves sexual aggression and fear of rape. Whites’ ill treatment of the bodies of slaves through beatings and rapes denotes white thought about identity as indicated through the flesh.

While the white master class based its separation and elevation on conditions of the body, falsely ascribing an inferior state of mind to a body different from the European model, the identity of slaves as individuals is not predicated on the world of the flesh. For Jacobs identity arises from an interior life: “Jacobs’ deepest argument is precisely the separation of personhood from the condition of the body rather than its dependence upon that condition. In fact, the arguments of pro-slavery forces work to demonstrate that the enslaved in body and name is subhuman in ‘nature’” (Perrault 104). Thus, whites forced blacks into a position of other/alien/monster in the same manner that Victor rejects his progeny: the body that seems less than beautiful to the accustomed standards of a limited mindset (that of the master) must, according to that thinking, house a soul that is equally substandard.

Perrault points out that for Harriet Jacobs, as for Mary Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, “The condition of the body is not the determining factor in selfhood—yet, the body as self’s own property informs their argument” (108). Even if identity cannot and should not be determined by one’s body, particularly in opposition to that of another, one should have the right to own one’s body. The creature and Jacobs do not, as the one is crafted piecemeal from the dead and thrust into a world in which he cannot belong, and the other is born into slavery. For the creature, wholeness will come only in owning his body and its actions and informing them with a rising intelligence and self-expression. Jacobs, too, seeks wholeness, in her case, legal ownership of self, beyond the freedom of mind, extending to the right to control her body.

Owning one’s body is one type of self-possession; another is knowing one’s identity. Perrault thus stresses “the significance of *possession* on a sense of self” that repeats in the works of Wollstonecraft and Jacobs (101). I would argue that possession is important to Shelley as well, as the creature, nameless and alone and with a mind foreign to the body he is given, seeks an identity and a sense of belonging that will give him self-possession. The DeLacey hovel is the first place in which he feels this sense of belonging, and even here, he is a cipher to the

family. They do not know that he lives with them and hears their every word, or that he studies their faces and feelings. They know only his actions: that there is extra help in the garden or with the haying. Thus, there is still no sense of identity for the creature here, only the stirrings of his humanity. Just as the creature, in his rejection, bides his time in the shelter of the hovel longing for a family and a future in which he can participate fully, so does Jacobs, forced by her white master into retreat, abide and wait.

Consider the description of the hovel itself, a place to which Frankenstein's creature escapes after being attacked by villagers: "My place of refuge was constructed of wood, but so low that I could with difficulty sit upright in it. No wood, however, was placed on the earth which formed the floor, but it was dry; and although the wind entered it by innumerable chinks, I found it an agreeable asylum from the snow and rain" (Shelley 371). The hovel first serves the same purpose as the garret as a means of escape. It is also similar in its confinement and lack of refinement to Jacobs's grandmother's garret: "The garret was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air" (Incidents 92). For both, the compact space offers little comfort beyond refuge from those who deny them full human rights. The space provides respite, retreat, a chance to reflect and reformulate plans. In light of the opening discussion of the phallic imagery of masculine authority, these small spaces serve as metaphoric wombs that allow their occupants the time to birth themselves as new beings.

When Jacobs conceals herself in the garret for seven years, she begins her journey to freedom. Valerie Smith's analysis of the three enclosed spaces in which Jacobs hides, which culminate in the garret, argues that "each moment of apparent enclosure actually empowers Jacobs to redirect her own and her children's destiny" (213). However, the freedom that she has from Flint's advances and his wrath is hindered by the fact that she is physically trapped. She has found a form of release, but it is not complete: it is only a beginning to establish her self. Even after she escapes to the North, physically removed from Flint, the South, and the constricting space of the garret, Jacobs will not be fully free until she legally is so: "Feeling one's self 'free,' naming one's self so, and owning one's self are set in a strange triangularity here" (Perrault 107). Thus, Jacobs's appropriation of her own body through hiding is a strange sort of freedom, a half-humanity, just as Frankenstein's creature finds himself alive but nameless and family-less, of human form but an outsider due to lack of language and social skill.

The protective quality of the garret is its first and foremost importance: "This home shields Linda Brent for the seven years that she hides in its garret to escape her master's sexual abuse, and it provides a daily refuge from the many forms of oppression and harassment which plague other blacks, free and slave"



(Kaplan 48). If for the creature, the hovel allows him to hide his body from the eyes of those who will not or cannot understand him, the garret keeps Jacobs's body safe from the eyes of a master who would ravish her if he had the chance. Yet this safety is modified from the earlier safety Jacobs felt within her grandmother's home. Kaplan points out that during the muster call, Jacobs feels confident enough within her grandmother's home to "taunt the country bullies" (48), but we must note that this confidence is affiliated with the voice she is allowed as a member of the public and familial portion of the building. It is not affiliated with the garret, in which she must remain mute and motionless.

In this sense, Jacobs reverses the process of the creature, who finds his voice through listening through the cracks of the hovel, the extreme of which is seen in the winter cold when Jacobs writes, "even my face and tongue stiffened, and I lost the power of speech" (*Incidents* 97). Ultimately Jacobs will find her voice once her journey to freedom is complete. Writing of her experiences, however reluctantly at first, becomes the truest demonstration of ownership of self. For Carla Kaplan, "The celebration of Jacobs's agency has often rested on valorizing the act of writing itself as a signal achievement of personal power" (52). Before such agency of voice can be achieved, there must be silence; before there can be ownership of one's own body, there must be restriction and discomfort. Protection, then, has a price—a price Jacobs is willing to pay.

Valerie Smith notes that as Jacobs's garret "renders the narrator spiritually independent of her master, and makes possible her ultimate escape to freedom [it] is thus hardly surprising that Jacobs finds her imprisonment, however uncomfortable, an improvement" (212). Like Frankenstein's creature, Jacobs takes comfort in the presence of family; like him, she becomes a voyeur on domesticity. Despite the physical discomfort, Jacobs reflects, "But I was not comfortless. I heard the voices of my children" (*Incidents* 92). Longing more than anything to see their faces, she patiently bores a row of holes to form an aperture one inch by one inch through which fresh air and sunlight can enter. Through this aperture, she can at last see her children. She suffers from insect bites, intense heat and cold, rain, and atrophying muscles, yet "I had my consolations. Through my peeping-hole I could watch the children, and when they were near enough, I could hear their talk" (*Incidents* 93). As the creature had, Jacobs takes comfort in what she sees and overhears, though she is denied the opportunity to interact. This vicarious socialization is sustenance.

For both, there is risk involved in revealing oneself to those one loves from a distance. After realizing his hideousness, the creature despairs of forming a friendship with his cottagers, but on reflecting on their benevolence, "I resolved, at least, not to despair, but in every way to fit myself for an interview with them which would decide my fate. I postponed this attempt for some months longer, for

the importance attached to its success inspired me with a dread lest I should fail” (Shelley 397). He craves the benefits of human interaction, but fears he will be rejected and cast out yet again. For Jacobs, to reveal herself to anyone besides her grandmother, brother or uncle would mean risking putting herself back into the hands of a further outraged and aroused Flint. She recalls being “warned to keep extremely quiet” when the town constable and a free “colored man [who] had spent many nights hunting” for her were invited to Christmas dinner (Jacobs, Incidents 95-96). When, out of desperation, she drags her weakened body to a rear window in order to beg Mr. Sands to emancipate her children, she is taking a great risk that someone else would see or overhear. Even he, while not knowing her place of concealment, questions the risk she takes in coming to her grandmother’s house. Her grandmother scolds her, “You’ve done wrong; but I can’t blame you, poor thing!” (Jacobs, Incidents 100).

If the garret requires restriction and silence, a self-effacement, then the act of narrating these events gives Jacobs back her voice. The placement of her recollection of the time spent in the garret recalls that of the creature within Frankenstein. The creature’s narration of his time in the hovel occurs rather centrally in the framed narrative of Frankenstein and gives the reader access to the creature’s voice for the first time, allowing him to own his version of the story. Michelle Burnham points out that the garret years also balance at the core of novel: “Yet its central location is by no means obvious, for ‘Loopholes of Retreat’ goes just as easily unnoticed in the middle of forty-one unnumbered chapters as it becomes—after careful enumeration—potentially quite prominent, as the hinge that balances the twenty chapters on either side” (278). For both, then, the act of narrating gives voice to time spent silent, and their central locations suggest the importance of that act. For both, to author is to have authority over their lives. The distinction is between the events that are narrated and the narration itself: “While acting remains, of course, crucial to agency, it is the discursive construction of action, the *narration* of resistance rather than its *narrated acts*, which allows us to register Jacobs’s resistance” (Kaplan 56). Thus, the time spent in confinement—a term used in the past for the last weeks of a woman’s pregnancy—ultimately allows Jacobs (more fully, Brent *and* Jacobs) to birth her narrative just as she births herself in forming a new identity.

Regarding identity, while in the garret, Jacobs has forged another self and created a new life for that self (wheels within wheels, Jacobs as author names herself Brent, who within the text creates another Brent via writing letters—more text). Through this series of letters, she has contrived to throw Dr. Flint off her trail. This fictional Jacobs enjoys freedom while the real Jacobs remains waiting in the loophole. She writes, “I expressed a wish to have my children sent to me at the north, where I could teach them to respect themselves, and set them a virtuous

example...I asked [my grandmother] to direct her answer to a certain street in Boston, as I did not live in New York, though I went there sometimes” (Incidents 101-102). One day, of course, this freedom will be a reality for Jacobs, but for the time being, it exists only within the fiction she creates. However, the two freedoms, fictional and real, both grow out of Jacobs’ power as author.

Letters play another important part in establishing the truth of a story in both Incidents and Frankenstein. In Frankenstein, during his narration of his life in the hovel, the creature offers to Victor, “I have copies of these letters [from Safie to Felix]; for I found means, during my residence in the hovel, to procure the implements of writing; and the letters were often in the hands of Felix or Agatha. Before I depart I will give them to you; they will prove the truth of my tale” (Shelley 389). The presumption is that which is written is truth. Likewise, Jacobs’ text is bolstered by the introduction of her editor, attesting to the truth of the narrative, as well as by her recollection of letters sent and received. Ironically, the only letter she recreates in its entirety during the garret sequence is the false letter Flint has substituted for her own. Through her rewriting his words (which were rewriting *hers*), she asserts her authority over his. Jean Fagan Yellin points out the importance of letters in Jacobs’ progress to writing her life story. Frustrated in her attempts to get assistance from Harriet Beecher Stowe in writing, Jacobs published parts of her story in letters to newspapers. Yellin writes, “Encouraged by the publication of this [first] letter, Jacobs secretly composed others. Her correspondence during this period reveals that she was at once determined to write, apprehensive about her ability to do so, and fearful of being discovered [writing]” (208). That last phrase—“fearful of being discovered”—seems so apt as a *double entendre* for hiding/writing.

Writing or telling one’s story works to give agency to both Jacobs and the creature as a time of silence and of voyeurism is finally put into words. Authorship is authority, and each comes to own the self through this action of telling—and each is moved to tell by a desire to open the eyes of the audience to suffering. For Frankenstein’s creature, his words make plain his lonely life to a master who denied him and his pain. His very telling of his life, particularly in its central location within the narrative frame, gives meaning to the novel as a whole. Without the creature’s own words, the novel would be a much weaker tale (and one could argue that the removal of the creature’s voice has this effect in the novel’s popular renderings). Gilbert and Gubar go so far as to write that “the murderous monster’s single, carefully guarded narrative commands and controls Mary Shelley’s novel,” that “the drastic shift in point of view that the nameless monster’s monologue represents probably constitutes *Frankenstein*’s most striking technical *tour de force*” (235). Here, then, authority extends beyond self to one’s

maker/master, in that the creature makes his creator face the reality of his actions and recognize his guilt.

For Jacobs, authority extends over literary form. In “Loopholes of Retreat,” Valerie Smith argues that, “As Jacobs exercised authority over the limits of the male narrative, however, she triumphs as well over the limits of the sentimental novel,” pointing out that authority for Jacobs is one unique to her experience, not to be limited by gender, class or race in literary form. Jacobs may not recognize her authority as a writer, but she does as a teller of truth. Referring to a literary heavyweight of her day, Jacobs admits to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s limited rendering of the life of a slave even as she downplays her own skill as an author in comparison: “But in Uncle Tom’s Cabin she has not told the half. Would that I had one spark from her storehouse of genius and talent, I would tell you of my own sufferings” (Jacobs, “Letter from a Fugitive Slave” 170).

Pushed by what she reads in papers, Jacobs comes to realize that she *must* tell her story. Authority comes years after experience, although the effects of the experience stay with her. She reflects, “[M]y body still suffers from the effects of that long imprisonment, to say nothing of my soul” (Jacobs, Incidents 116). To tell her story now, and to tell it on her own terms, reiterates Perreault’s triangle of ownership of feeling, naming, and owning:

We could have told them a different story. We could have given them a chapter of wrongs and sufferings, that would have touched their hearts, if they had any hearts to feel for the colored people...We could also have told them of a poor, blighted young creature, shut up in a living grave for years, to avoid the tortures that would be inflicted on her...All this, and much more, I thought of, as I sat at my loophole, waiting. (Incidents 116)

It is all the better that her story did not become part of a Stowe work, for even under cover of pseudonym, the story is Jacobs’s own—and it is *Jacobs*. Jacobs is aware of the tale that will and must be told even as it is happening to her, and *telling* it fills the blank page, turning the grave of the garret to a womb that bears her story to fruition.

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