Adoption, Tragedy, and the Failed Search for Origins in *Frankenstein*

ELLEN PEEL

ABSTRACT: *Frankenstein* is, metaphorically, a tragic adoption story about the creature's failed search for origins. Shelley's novel also sucks readers into a failed search for the ultimate origin of unbearable events. I present a new theory of tragedy, showing *Frankenstein* as an allegory about the "overdetermined" nature of tragedy in general.

KEYWORDS: adoption, *Frankenstein*, tragedy, kinship, origin

I'LL BEGIN BY telling you a tragic adoption story, one that brings to life the worst fears of the major figures in the adoption process—birth family, adoptee, and adoptive family.[1]

Once upon a time an unmarried man named Victor eagerly looked forward to being a father, but, faced with his actual son, was horrified—with some justification—and abandoned him, without even giving him a name (I'll refer to him as "Nameless"). Sometimes birth parents relinquish their children reluctantly, out of a loving wish to find the children a better life—not the case here. Victor tried to forget the existence of his son. Nameless—tall and mature for his age and the opposite of cute—had trouble finding a new home. No orphanage or adoption agency helped him. Looking like no one else, he suffered the stigma of otherness. Having taught himself to read, he read documents never meant for his eyes: Victor's account of his extreme efforts to become a father and "the minutest description

Adoption & Culture Vol. 7, Issue 2 (2019)

of [the child's] odious and loathsome person" (chapter 15, 124).[2] So, while many adoptees long to know their origins, for Nameless, learning about his origins only made him feel worse.

In an attempt to belong to a family, or at least originate a friendship, he approached a man named De Lacey. This adoptive father did welcome him, yet only briefly, for Nameless's adoptive siblings were horrified by what they perceived as an intruder and drove him away. He then burned down their house. Afterward, though Nameless was never to bring a child of his own to life, he did rescue a young girl from drowning, as if bringing her back to life, only to be shot for his efforts.

Many adoptees go on a roots journey; Nameless too set out in search of his birth father and, on the way, attempted to form his own family by trying to take in a younger boy—an informal adoption. Nameless wanted to "educate him as [his] companion and friend" (chapter 16, 136). Resisting, the boy happened to mention his own father's name, revealing himself to be related to Victor (and thus related to Nameless). Not understanding the relationship, the boy spurned Nameless, who became enraged and killed him. Later, in a poignant Alpine scene at the physical and emotional center of the book, Nameless found his birth father and pleaded for recognition and acceptance, only to meet with a second rejection from Victor. The child also asked the father to help in his quest for a companion—another attempt at creating his own family, this time of outcasts like himself. The father reluctantly assented but then changed his mind and destroyed the companion before Nameless's eyes. In response, Nameless killed his father's best friend and his father's new bride. Father and son quested after each other through the Arctic—largely out of hatred but also out of a sort of yearning—until the father died and the son vowed to kill himself.

This of course is the story of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* first published in 1818. Unusually fertile in metaphorical meanings, it has invited many readings over the centuries but has not yet, to my knowledge, been read as an adoption story.[3] Marianne Novy says, "European and American culture has typically used three mythic stories to imagine adoption"; I claim that, on a metaphorical level, *Frankenstein* fits roughly into Novy's first pattern, "the disastrous adoption and search for birth parents, as in *Oedipus*" (7).

Admittedly, in literal terms the story I just told is not about adoption, not even about a human child, for Nameless is constructed from parts of dead bodies by Victor Frankenstein, who is a scientist, not a father.[4] So Nameless is an adoptee only metaphorically.[5] While adoptees go from a "born" identity to a "made" one, Nameless is only "made." While some adoptees receive one name from their birth parents and another from their adoptive ones, Nameless never receives a name at all; nor does he name himself. While some adoptees notice they do not look like their adoptive parents, Nameless is more of an outsider than any literal adoptee: he does not look like his adoptive father or like his birth father or, given his con-

struction as a gigantic medley, like anyone else. While "adoptees can seem sole and only" (Hipchen 236), Nameless actually is sole and only. While some adoptees yearn to return to or at least learn about an original homeland, there exists no homeland for Nameless to return to or even learn about. For example, reading *Paradise Lost* and other texts considered canonical in the culture of his birth family teaches him nothing about his ancestors—he has none.[6] While some adoptees are sought by their birth parents in hopes of a loving reunion, Victor seeks Nameless only in hopes of destroying him.[7]

As my readers may have noticed, the elements just listed, which at first seem simply to differentiate the creature from literal adoptees, could also be read as traits that he shares with at least some of them—but in his case they are exaggerated, writ large, as if on the creature's super-sized body as well as in the novel's grand melodrama. And in his case, the traits are not only writ large but are negative. For instance, while looking different from one's adoptive parents does not necessarily have negative consequences, Nameless looks different from *everyone* else and in an ugly way, not through extreme beauty. Exaggerated otherness could be the stuff of dream, but his is the stuff of nightmare.

On the metaphorical and emotional level, the story resonates deeply with themes that can touch birth families, adoptees, and adoptive families: love, longing, and the wish to create and protect a family, along with some of the darker themes that can arise, such as fear, regret, jealousy, and betrayal. Metaphorically, *Frankenstein* recounts the worst nightmare of everyone in the adoption triad, not to mention a number of people outside it. This adoptee stumbles upon an account of his origins, only to learn that his birth father gave him up, not out of love, but out of repugnance. Then, when the child returns, educated and well-spoken, his birth father nevertheless rejects him a second time as well. Most of his adoptive family rejects him, and perhaps his adoptive father would too, if he were not blind. In *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama,* Novy analyzes some narratives that ask whether the birth family or the adoptive family is more nurturing or at least more important; in *Frankenstein,* though both are important, neither is ultimately nurturing. Nameless also is horribly defeated in his efforts to create his own, new kind of origin, with William or a mate. Meanwhile, things go terribly for the birth and adoptive families as well. Somewhat like the family in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child,* they feel invaded by a monster, an invasion that ultimately afflicts others, too (the creature kills William, Clerval, and Elizabeth, frames Justine for the capital crime of William's death, and burns down the adoptive family's house).

The novel explores kinship, particularly in nontraditional forms, through characters other than the creature as well. In fact, it is remarkable that, in such a short text, four other significant characters are explicitly or implicitly adopted: Caroline (having become "an orphan and a beggar" [chapter 1, 32]) is aided in finding new people to care for her by Frankenstein the elder, who later marries

her; he and she have several children, including Victor, but additionally adopt Elizabeth (also called "an orphan and a beggar" [chapter 1, 34]); the family takes in Justine, because she is mistreated by her widowed mother (chapter 6, 63); and the De Lacey family takes in Safie, whose mother has died and whose father has betrayed her (chapter 14, 117–21).[8] These adoptions go well: the lives of the girls all improve greatly when they are taken in by loving families.[9] Moreover, when Victor's mother is dying, she addresses him and Elizabeth, saying she wants them to marry and wants Elizabeth to "supply my place to my younger children" (chapter 3, 42); thus Victor and his "more than sister" (chapter 1, 35) in a sense adopt his younger siblings.

The novel's emphasis on adoption, be it nightmare or dream, means that it makes sense to read the text in this fresh way, through the lens of adoption. Below I will be making four points:

1. *Frankenstein* is an adoption story, largely a tragic one.
2. In particular, it is about a failed search for origins. Here I am drawing on the work of adoption theorists such as Novy, Barbara Yngvesson, and Margaret Homans, who question whether it is desirable, or even possible, for adoptees to find their *identity* by searching for their *origins.*
3. *Frankenstein* sucks *readers* into a failed origin search of another kind, a search for the root cause of its unbearable tragic events.
4. I am introducing a new theory of tragedy as overdetermined, claiming that tragedy in general compels readers and spectators into a search for the root cause of its unbearable events, an infinite regress that ultimately fails.

What is the significance of these four points? While Shelley's text is not primarily about adoption per se, the metaphorical adoption of a major character (along with the metaphorical or literal adoption of several other significant characters) encourages us to read the novel as an adoption narrative. In particular, it is an adoption narrative that expresses fear of everything that can go wrong, tragically wrong. One of the many things that go wrong here is the adoptee's failed search for origins, but I am not saying that origin searches necessarily fail. I am stressing that *Frankenstein* is itself a story of a (metaphorical) adoptee's failed origin search, and it is also an allegory about the nature of adoptees' failed origin searches in general.

Failed origin searches are structured like tragedies. But, in linking adoption to tragedy, I am not saying that adoption is tragic. I am making a more specific claim, that this novel employs a (metaphorical) adoptee's failed origin search to allegorize how readers and spectators of tragedy fail in their search for the origin of its events. I am stressing that *Frankenstein* is itself a tragedy, and it is also an allegory about the nature of tragedy in general.

I am using the lens of adoption theorists who explain the futility of searches for definitive *facts* about adoptees' origins, especially when the searches are actually for *understandings* about identity. Searches can be rewarding in certain ways but are bound to fail if driven by misguided expectations that define success in unattainable terms. Yngvesson, for example, writes of roots trips that fail to satisfy. Certain adoptees return to the area of their birth, seeking to find wholeness; yet these returns "unsettle the idea that such journeys of self-realization are likely to produce completion for the adoptee" (*Belonging* 163). To the extent that those returning find an identity, it is not a whole but a fragmented one ("Going 'Home'" 32). Similarly, Novy writes: "many adoptees . . . , like me, would testify that they did not find their identity when they found their birth parents. Glad as they were for the information, in many cases they were left with more questions to answer" (48). She adds, "Reunions . . . often frustrate any wish to find spiritual kin with whom communication is effortless" (85). Such quests can be worthwhile but cannot satisfy a longing for authenticity.

Homans describes the view that "such searches are valuable efforts that cannot, however, achieve the literal restoration that they were once expected to provide" (153). She explains: "Because western cultures tend to equate biological origins with identity, roots trips and searches [for birth families] are expected to provide what nothing can provide: certain knowledge of who you are" (113). In fact, Kimberly Leighton says of subjects in general that "identity (necessarily?) fails to satisfy the subject's (unsatisfiable) desire for self-certainty" (40, n. 3).

Homans is deconstructing the essentialist assumptions behind hopes that an origin search will yield Truth. She draws on analyses of the Oedipus narrative: "Building on the classical scholarship of Sandor Goodheart, . . . [J. Hillis] Miller emphasizes the implausibility of the coincidences on which the denouement—the recognition of the alleged truth—of *Oedipus the King* depends. . . . Miller generalizes about the elusiveness and constitutive fictionality of origins [and] writes: . . . '[An] antecedent foundation needs in its turn some prior foundation, in an infinite regress'" (115–16). Homans, however, adds: "But the adopted, including Oedipus, are haunted by the conviction that there is an origin. . . . Miller's magisterial view . . . does not sufficiently account for the imaginative work and emotional labor such [truth] claims can perform" (116–17), imaginative work that I will discuss at more length below.

There are also other ways that adoptees' searches for origins can be unsatisfying. Even when adoptees succeed in learning the names of birth parents, learning other facts about them, and travelling to meet them, the adoptees may find that their birth parents—or other family members—are not overjoyed at the reunion. Furthermore, children who are not adopted tend to grow up in the same context as their parents in terms of factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and nationality, whereas the chances are greater that an adoptee's adoptive family will differ from the birth family in one or more of these factors. If such a difference ex-

ists and if somebody is adopted at a young age, that person *grows up* surrounded by one context and at most *learns* by research about the earlier context. Though each experience can have its advantages, learning about the birth context may, for some people, not feel as satisfying as growing up within it.

In *Frankenstein* the creature is never satisfied by what he learns—not by the detailed facts in Victor's lab notes, nor by Victor's response when the child takes a roots trip to meet the father. Admittedly, none of us can completely know our ancestors, who stretch back in an almost infinite regress, beyond any written or oral accounts. Yet the creature's genealogy is even more daunting, for a thorough account of his origins would need to include the names of the corpses that supplied the parts that have been adapted, in a gruesome sense adopted, to form his body. And what about *their* origins?

Nor are the creature's efforts satisfying when he looks to the future and tries to create his own new intimate connections, when he himself tries to become an origin. He first seeks a "companion and friend" in William, a boy he thinks is too young to feel prejudice, but William immediately loads him "with epithets," starting with "monster" (chapter 16, 136). Upon learning the boy is a member of the Frankenstein family, the creature kills him and so feels "exultation and hellish triumph" (chapter 16, 136), but not the fulfilling human bond he originally sought. His more direct attempt to originate a family also fails traumatically. He asks Victor to make "a creature of another sex, but as hideous as" the creature himself (chapter 17, 139). The scientist begins to construct a female but then tears the body "to pieces" for various reasons, including fear that the couple will be an origin—parents of "a race of devils" (chapter 20, 158–59).

It might seem, though, that one origin search is wildly successful, for Victor finds the origin of life itself: "I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life" (chapter 4, 51); in fact, he himself can be the origin of life: "I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" (chapter 4, 51). He is temporarily satisfied; yet even this stupendously successful search for facts once again proves the futility of mere facts. As the rest of the novel shows, Victor's possession of facts without wisdom or insight leads only to disaster. Moreover, his search (futile in the long term) for the origin of life enables him to originate the life of the creature, who then goes on a search (futile in the long term) for the origin of his own life—like father, like son.

In short, roots trips and searches, when misguided, are futile in the novel, as for adoptees generally, both because one can never find all the *facts* (the trips and searches open up an infinite regress) and because, even with all the facts, one would still not have "certain knowledge" of one's *identity.* Earlier I called *Frankenstein* an allegory about the nature of adoptees' failed origin searches in general; here I should specify that, true to form as a nightmare melodrama, Shelley's novel illustrates only the worst possible outcomes of a search. In contrast, theorists I have quoted above say searches can be "valuable efforts" that make adoptees

"[g]lad . . . for the information"; unlike the creature's search, these can yield positive information, just not complete facts or identities.

I have been focusing on the futility of the search for origins, not only because *Frankenstein* illustrates the principle so vividly but also because the principle lies at the heart of my definition of tragedy as "overdetermined." I agree with Aristotle that tragedies evoke pity and fear (*Poetics* VI, 2, and passim), and Shelley's novel is certainly tragic in the sense that it evokes those feelings, in both characters and readers.[10] I am adding the element of overdetermination, the idea that there are more causes than are necessary to produce a given effect. If an effect is overdetermined, eliminating one of the causes will not eliminate the effect. In my view, the unbearable events in tragedies prompt us (and sometimes the characters) to ask endless questions in a search for the root causes, for the origins of those events.[11] We want to know why things have gone so terribly wrong. When the search reveals a cause, we feel like exclaiming: "If only this cause hadn't existed—then the outcome would have been better! No, wait; another cause would have produced the same event (or an equally horrific one). If only that cause hadn't existed!" and so on.[12] In a tragedy, taking a different road still brings the play to the same place; for Oedipus, all roads lead to Thebes.

Often the events do not occur in neat *xyz* sequence, causing us to think, "If only *x* had not happened then *y* would not have happened, and if only *y* had not happened, then *z* would not have." Rather, tragedy is commonly flung out from a perfect storm of wrenching forces in which everything goes wrong. One cannot find a definitive origin, yet the events are so intolerable that one feels compelled to—as in Samuel Beckett's *Unnamable,* "I can't go on. I'll go on" (n427).

Myriad points in *Frankenstein* may make readers feel like exclaiming "If only . . . !" These range from the profound ("If only Victor had not challenged God!") to the trivial ("If only Victor had followed his father's advice to avoid reading Cornelius Agrippa!" [chapter 2, 38–39]). And Victor is not the only subject: "If only the creature had not planted the picture on Justine!" "If only the younger De Laceys had come home *after* the creature had fully explained himself to their blind father!" And so on, ad infinitum. Yet nothing could have saved Shelley's characters.[13] What is the root cause of their tragedy? We can't find a singular, satisfying answer.

Similarly, consider *Oedipus the King,* Aristotle's major example and the father of all western tragedies.[14] We want to cry out: "If only Oedipus hadn't been abandoned by his parents early in life!" or "If only he hadn't been so stubborn late in life!" Yet nothing could have saved Oedipus. Our quest for origins of the unbearable events is futile—an infinite regress, and in that sense perhaps less cathartic than in Aristotle's theory of tragedy. *Oedipus* is an apt example not only because of its renown. To begin with, it is not just a tragedy but also an adoption narrative and has played an important, if surprisingly varied, role in recent adoption theory, as Novy recounts (37–55). In addition, this particular tragedy self-reflexively mirrors onstage what I assert occurs for all tragedies offstage, among readers and

spectators: Oedipus searches for the origins of unbearable events (in this case the deaths from plague in Thebes). And not only does that search mirror his search for his own origins: the two searches turn out to be identical, merging the tragedy quest with the adoption one. Thus the play's very search structure links tragedy and adoption. Aristotle's choice of this play to epitomize tragedy suggests that the failed search for causes—which in this play is identical to the failed search for adoptive origins—is intrinsic to the definition of tragedy.

A startling number of additional links join *Oedipus* to *Frankenstein* in particular, with the Theban king sometimes resembling Victor, sometimes the creature. A father causes his young son's body to be deformed, left with scars full of meaning; later the son clashes with the father; actual or near-incest occurs; a prophecy is fatally misunderstood; a protagonist's wife meets a violent death; and ignorance of a protagonist's guilt causes others to suffer. Throughout both narratives, insight is catastrophically shackled to blindness, casting a shadow over any quest for knowledge. *Frankenstein* brings *Oedipus the King* back to life, calling attention to the centrality of adoption searches in these two stories of tragic searches for original causes. Since I define tragedy as a failure to find origins and root causes, and since *Oedipus the King* is the paradigmatic tragic story, its similarity to *Frankenstein* helps us see that the failed search story (adoptive or otherwise) may be the paradigmatic tragic story.

In both texts, and in tragedy more broadly, it might seem that the regress is not infinite, that fate is the ultimate origin of everything that happens in the plot. Indeed, fate is a concept long associated with the genre. Fate, however, just sidesteps our question. It is not helpful to say fate is the ultimate cause. Instead of solving the regress, attributing everything to fate is almost tautological and simply gives the regress a name. The terms *fate* and *destiny* occur frequently in *Frankenstein,* but they explain nothing and just serve to enable Victor's rationalizations.

Percy Shelley, in a review of this novel published only long after his death, perceptively imagined readers' feelings: "The interest gradually accumulates, and advances towards the conclusion with the accelerated rapidity of a rock rolled down a mountain. We are held breathless with suspense and sympathy [an echo of Aristotle's fear and pity?], and the heaping up of incident on incident, and the working of passion out of passion. We cry 'hold, hold, enough'—but there is yet something to come, and like the victim whose history it relates we think we can bear no more, and yet more is to be borne." He is referring to plot in general rather than causality in particular, but he vividly conveys readers' anguish.

Here lies the analogy that is central to my argument: the yearning we feel when searching for the origin of agonizing events in this tragedy (and in many others) resembles the creature's yearning as he seeks his own origins, especially when confronting his creator in the Alps. More generally, *Frankenstein* helps us see that where our experience of tragedy overlaps with the roots searches of adoptees

seeking a definitive identity is in the yearnings evoked by both and in the structure of futile infinite regress that characterizes both. Each illuminates the other.

The futility of the creature's roots search and the futility of our search for causes in *Frankenstein* and other tragedies also resemble the elusiveness of two other origins in this novel. To begin with, the book never tells readers specifically how Victor constructs the creature or animates him. We learn, for example, that he collects "the instruments of life" in order to "infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing" (chapter 5, 56), but we do not know if he literally harnesses lightning as in so many Frankenstein films. Similar elusiveness haunts the origin of the novel itself. Shelley initially published it anonymously, in 1818, but later was recognized as the author and, in the 1831 edition, added an Introduction claiming in its first sentence that it would give "the origin of the story" (vii). Nevertheless, despite giving many preliminary details—including about the famous ghost story contest that motivated her—she ultimately ducks away from giving a clear explanation of the actual creative process and in effect attributes the story to a mysterious waking dream: "My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me" (x). (The author's and character's shared evasiveness about creation is only part of this novel's self-reflexivity, built on likening Victor's creature to her novel, which she even calls "my hideous progeny" [xii].) Both creators slide away from taking full responsibility, and their specific creative procedures are elided. In fact, although promising "the origin of the story," even the Introduction immediately admits to the infinite elusiveness of such a thing: "Everything must have a beginning, . . . ; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. The Hindus give the world an elephant to support it, but they make the elephant stand upon a tortoise" (x); and philosophers like to joke that it's tortoises all the way down.[15]

In the face of futile searches, Homans does give cause for hope. She draws on a number of novelists and recent theorists to note a countervailing force: in certain works "the search for an unavailable origin compels imaginative work that itself constitutes identity. . . . [T]he desire for origins generates a tremendous creative power even if fictions, and not some stable, singular truth about the past, are what that desire produces" (114, 155). Sometimes the created identity is constructed on loss or melancholy, but it is nevertheless generated. Does such imaginative work occur in Shelley's novel? In a sense, yes. The searches generate three nested stories: at the center of the book, having just found Victor, the creature narrates his life, a story so eloquent that it (temporarily) convinces Victor to make him a mate. Later a moribund Victor tells the creature's story, along with his own, to Robert Walton, the ship captain who finds him in the Arctic wastes. Ultimately Walton narrates all this in letters to his sister.[16] He is wise to save himself and his crew by abandoning his quest, but it is hard to find much to celebrate in Walton's retreat, Victor's hypocrisy and death, or the creature's declaring his identity as a "wretch" (chapter 24, 210), just before going off to kill himself. Once again, among the options for adoption narrative, this novel chooses a nightmare path. Nevertheless, even if

the narrators' imaginative work ends largely in retreat or despair, perhaps imaginative work is performed more successfully on another level, by readers. Since *Frankenstein* is a tragedy, it inspires pity and fear in us. The imaginative work we do is a form of creativity.

Before my argument concludes, some clarifications are in order. I am not saying birth parents are like mad scientists, adoptees are pathetic or monstrous, or adoptive families act cruelly unless they are blind to adoptees' flaws. I am saying *Frankenstein,* like many other works in the Gothic tradition to which it belongs, represents some of our worst fears, not reality. Nor, by calling Shelley's novel a tragedy, am I saying adoption is any more likely to be tragic than other kinds of kinship. I am making an analogy, not between tragedy as a whole and adoption as a whole, but between an aspect of one that is also an aspect of the other: the futile search for definitive origins. Adoptees who search for certain kinds of facts or even certain kinds of understanding may find what they are looking for, but they will not find some essential identity. I am claiming that the futility of origin searches undertaken by adoptees who seek an essential identity is analogous to the futility of origin searches undertaken by readers and viewers who seek a single essential cause for events in tragedy.

I want to stress that *Frankenstein* is not an anti-adoption text. Ultimately Shelley's novel does not favor conventional ways of creating families any more than it favors adoption. Either can work out; either can go tragically wrong. Some birth parents, such as Safie's and Justine's, betray or reject their children; even nurturing birth parents, such as Caroline's and Elizabeth's, can die. Victor had nurturing birth parents and an edenic childhood, and look how he turned out. So birth parents are not necessarily better than adoptive ones, and even exemplary birth parents do not guarantee exemplary children. *Paradise Lost*—an explicit subtext for this novel[17]—reminds us that even being God's children, raised in Eden itself, does not make Adam and Eve exemplary children. So in this novel, kinship of any sort—conventional, adoptive, or divine—is radically uncertain.[18]

In conclusion, Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a tragic adoption story. Readers of this novel are like the creature and some adoptees, engaged in quests that fail to satisfy. The creature—like some adoptees—seeks fulfilling origins, and we seek the origins of the novel's devastating events, but both quests meet with failure through infinite regress. More broadly, *Frankenstein* is an allegory for the failure of searches by adoptees who quest after authentic wholeness. And Shelley's novel is an allegory for our experience of all tragedy, which drives us to ask questions that lead only to infinite regress in an unavailing quest to find the origins of tragedy's unbearable events.

Notes

I am grateful to Margaret Homans for her assistance with this essay, and to Lindsay Holmgren, Faye Halpern, and other audience members who responded to an earlier version of this paper delivered at the conference of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, Pamplona, Spain, 31 May 2019. I am also grateful to SF BUILD for its assistance through NIH Grant RL5GM118984.

1. Although scholars have rightly pointed out that the conventional "triad" does not represent all the people and institutions involved in adoption (recent examples of such scholars include Jacobs and Hipchen), I still use the triad as a basis because its three figures are usually necessary to adoption, if not sufficient. This paper will also complicate the triad: *Frankenstein* pays substantial attention to some characters outside the triad, and the novel focuses on unusual occupants of the triad's vertices (omitting birth and adoptive mothers, and emphasizing adoptive siblings as much as the adoptive father).
2. Since there are so many editions, I give chapter numbers as well as page numbers.
3. The creature has, however, been likened to an orphan, e.g., by Eileen Hunt Botting (viii and passim).
4. I refer to Victor as a "birth father," rather than a "first father," because he is as close as anyone comes to being the creature's physical creator. Actually, he is neither a birth nor a first father, for he is not a father of any sort, except metaphorically.
5. Marina Fedosik reads a human-looking robot as a different kind of metaphorical adoptee in her study of *A. I. Artificial Intelligence.*
6. A similar point can be made about birth mothers. While they have tended to be the most silenced members of the adoption triad until recently (e.g., see Ellerby), no birth mother even exists for Nameless.
7. Since searches are usually carried out by the adoptee, in the rest of this article I will for simplicity refer to the searcher as the adoptee, bearing in mind that others may search as well.
8. These families are welcoming, but even they reject the creature: the Frankensteins take in Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine, but not Victor's metaphorical son, and, although the creature resembles Safie (both are outsiders who learn together from the De Laceys how to speak and read), the De Lacey siblings take in Safie but not the creature. Except for one touching moment, he remains literally outside their cottage.
9. Note, however, that some of these young women are not sheltered long: the three cared for by the Frankensteins all meet an early death.
10. I realize of course that *Frankenstein* lacks many other traits of the works Aristotle was analyzing—for starters, a novel is not a play. But on a deeper level, Shelley's work is tragic.
11. I refer to the readers and spectators of tragedy as "we" but refer to adoptees as "they" because the former can include anyone with access to the genre, whereas the latter refers to people with specific experiences.
12. A tragedy is like a would-be counterfactual. Counterfactual speculation imagines how different an effect would be if a cause were different or eliminated (e.g., "What if World War II had never occurred?"). Readers and viewers of tragedies, however, desperately imagine the elimination of causes without being able to imagine substantially different

effects. Botting analyzes *Frankenstein* as a "cascade of [counterfactual] thought experiments," but she uses the term differently than I do (15).

13. Since Robert Walton survives by ceasing to explore the Arctic, perhaps we could see him as the one major character saved from tragedy—significantly, by abandoning a quest.

14. Another telling example is Aeschylus's tragic trilogy *The Oresteia,* which regresses back through the whole house of Atreus and beyond. (And, especially in the house of Atreus, note how many of the events involve appalling actions by family members, some of whom kill or even eat each other.)

15. Homans attributes the joke to "Native cosmology" (134).

16. Homans herself speculates that the "imaginative work" in *Frankenstein* would be "the Arctic quest part, which includes narrating the story to Walton, and so turning the terrible events into a story" (personal communication 9 Apr. 2018).

17. The creature reads and talks about *Paradise Lost,* and the novel's title page quotes it.

18. The novel echoes the turbulent pain of kinship in Shelley's own life and in the lives of those around her. To mention only some instances: Mary's birth caused the death of her own mother; Percy Shelley's first wife committed suicide after he eloped with Mary; and several of Mary's children died young, one before she wrote *Frankenstein.*

Works Cited

Aeschylus. *Aeschylus I: Oresteia.* Translated by Richmond Lattimore. *The Complete Greek Tragedies.* Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. U of Chicago P, 1953.

Aristotle. *Poetics.* Translated by S. H. Butcher. *Critical Theory since Plato.* Edited by Hazard Adams, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, pp. 48–66.

Beckett, Samuel. *The Unnamable.* Adapted by Beckett. 1958. *Three Novels*: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable. Public Resource, in.eret.dli.2015.125753. Accessed 7 July 2019.

Botting, Eileen Hunt. *Mary Shelley and the Rights of the Child: Political Philosophy in* Frankenstein. U of Pennsylvania P, 2018.

Ellerby, Janet Mason. "Birthmothers: Their Rightful Place in Critical Adoption Studies." *Adoption & Culture,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 9–11.

Fedosik, Marina. "Adoption in Stephen Spielberg's *A. I. Artificial Intelligence*: Kinship in the Posthuman Context." *Adoption & Culture,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 182–205.

Hipchen, Emily. "Adoption Geometries." *Adoption & Culture,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 229–47.

Homans, Margaret. *The Imprint of Another Life: Adoption Narratives and Human Possibility.* U of Michigan P, 2013.

Jacobs, Margaret D. "From Triangles to Stars: How Indigenous Adoptions Expand the Adoption Triad." *Adoption & Culture,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 162–81.

Leighton, Kimberly. "Adoption and Critical Models of Identity: 'Searching' for Adoptees' Rights to Know beyond an Ideology of Authenticity." *Adoption & Culture,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 37–41.

Lessing, Doris. *The Fifth Child.* Knopf, 1988.

Novy, Marianne. *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama.* U of Michigan P, 2005.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus.* 1818, 1831. Signet-New American Library, 1983.

Shelley, Percy. "On *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus.*" *Athenaeum*, 10 Nov. 1832. Knarf.english.upenn.edu/PShelley/frankrev.html. Accessed 7 July 2019.

Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*. Translated by David Grene. *Sophocles I. The Complete Greek Tragedies.* Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. U of Chicago P, 1954, pp. 9–76.

Yngvesson, Barbara. *Belonging in an Adopted World: Race, Identity, and Transnational Adoption.* U of Chicago P, 2010.

———. "Going 'Home': Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Roots." *Social Text*, vol. 74, Spring 2003, pp. 7–27.