
Reply

Natalie Dandekar and Edward Zlotkowski

Professor Westra raises a number of interesting points. In this response we attempt only to address those four which seem to reflect a misunderstanding of our immediate enterprise.

First, there is apparently a misunderstanding of the project undertaken in writing this paper, for she points to the differences distinguishing Frankenstein's lonely enterprise and the current state of bioengineering research as a business-driven group enterprise, as if these differences disqualify our efforts. However, exactitude was neither our primary criterion nor concern. Analogies can serve many purposes. In the case of finding an analogy between Frankenstein and bioengineering, "resonance" or "evocativeness" was what we saw as important. Had we given "exactitude" first priority we would hardly have chosen to work with an early 19th-century gothic fiction "commenced partly as a source of amusement and partly as an expedient for exercising any untried resources of mind." In making this choice, we certainly meant no offense to those whose sensibilities run in a more literal and less literary direction.

What fascinated us about *Frankenstein* and hence led to our paper, was the way in which this work, unexpectedly and even inadvertently, incorporates so many of the psychocultural blind spots that have helped precipitate the current environmental crisis (of which bioengineering is but one component). Indeed, the novel does more. In Dr. Frankenstein's belated attempts to resolve the crisis *he* stumbled into, it anticipates several contemporary responses to traditional anthropocentrism. Pronouncing the doctor a hero, Mary Shelley seems to come down on the side of "stewardship,"



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supporting the answer that to resolve the crises involving human-nonhuman relationships, humans need to adopt a conscious, more responsible, more benevolent anthropocentrism. But her creature surprises us. As it is given the words eloquently to deny the validity of Dr. Frankenstein's logic, it opens the door to an inherently more radical vision of ecological justice. The creature asks to enter the biotic web in its own way, without continued human stewardship. Thus, the novel anticipates a profound moral choice that humans have till now been able to evade or even deny, a choice that the development of biogenetics, AI, and other technologies may not allow us to evade in the future. This we thought worth exploring.

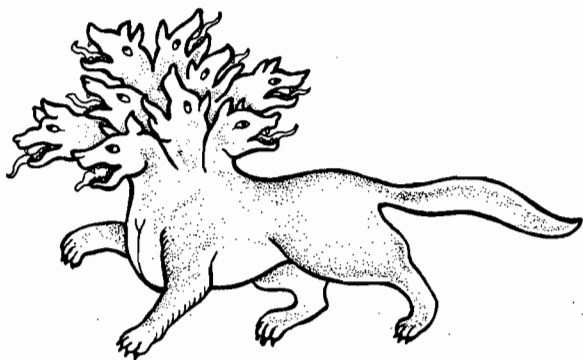
Second, when Westra attributes to us a confusion between the presumed willingness of the creature to accept Dr. Frankenstein's anthropocentrism and the creature's desire to be free of stewardship, she is misreading our paper—possibly because she assumes here, as she asserts later, that one must seek to privilege either individual rights or holistic ecological concerns. This assumption is stated openly when she characterizes ecofeminism as essentially a form of feminism and as such so committed to the pursuit of individual rights that "if a question of priorities arose," rights would be sought *before* ecological concerns. Presuming the necessity of a battle between those who favor individual rights and those who seek ecological good, Westra apparently aligns herself with ecologists.

We reject this either/or dualism. We think it is the great strength of ecofeminism that it recognizes, and realizes, the connection between the roots of the environmental crisis and the reified roles women have been assigned throughout history. The writings of Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, Susan Griffin, Ynestra King, and others all in various ways document a set of ecofeminist premises very different from Westra's presumption of ultimately opposed priorities. For these writers, and for us, merely insisting on rights for women alongside rights for men would be to promote a patchwork approach to a system that demands transformation along the holistically aware, ecologically sensitive lines Westra presumably approves.

Third, Westra maintains that our analogy between today's bioengineering specialists and Dr. Frankenstein is mistaken especially with regard to the motivation of the scientists who today seek to feed the hungry. However, as the novel repeatedly makes clear, Dr. Frankenstein is not a malevolent being. He is

contemptuous of the superstitious who trammel the free thinking of others, and in pursuing science, he acts from the conviction that all knowledge, and all success, ultimately serve humanity. He himself is seeking to "pour a torrent of light into our dark world." The usual understanding of bringing light is that it will benefit humanity. The problem with his good intentions is the way they are sheltered by the three evasions we have described. As Westra notes, these evasions are paralleled in the activity of the bioengineering community today. The value of exploring the fictive growth of Dr. Frankenstein through his forced resolution of two of these evasions, while the third remains unchallenged, lies precisely in recognizing that what he does is not enough. Even had he taken such thought before adventuring in science, even had he consulted with the artificial community of his scientific peers, his judgement would not thereby have been adequate to the undertaking.

Finally, Westra criticizes what she sees as our presumption that some principle for decision-making emerges from discussion of the novel. Our ambition was never so grandiose. Rather, we thought that discussion of the novel would promote recognition of the three evasions practiced by Dr. Frankenstein, coupled with the further recognition that as long as he remains within the hierarchic, scientific paradigm, only two of these evasions are remediable. If remedy for the third requires a paradigm shift, and our paper helps to demonstrate this need, then we hope this paper does not constitute too mean a contribution to ecological discourse.



Richard Huber, *Treasury of Fantastic and Mythological Creatures*. New York: Dover, 1981.

Announcement

The Second Annual University of Chicago Conference on Human/Animal Interaction

Theme: "Creating the Humane University"

Date: Friday, April 30, 1993

Time: Registration begins at 8:30 A.M.
Conference 9:00–5:30 P.M.

Location: Ida Noyes Hall, The University of Chicago, 1212 E. 59th St., Chicago, IL

Activities: Speakers, Information Tables, Vegan/Vegetarian Buffet Lunch (Catered by Ahimsa of the Jain Society)

Speakers: Dr. Alan Beck (Purdue University); Ms. Zoe Weil (AAVS); Reed Millsaps, Esq.; Ms. Linda Nidelkoff (Roosevelt University and the Chicago School of Professional Psychology); Dr. Roger Ulrich (Western Michigan University); Ms. Sandy Delery.

Tables From: Elsa Wild Animal Appeal; The Chicago Vegetarian Society; Academicians for the Advancement of Animal Advocacy; The Milwaukee Vegetarian Society; Students for Animal Rights; Ahimsa; American Anti-Vivisection Society; Concerned Citizens for Ethical Research; Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals; and others

Cost: Students with ID – \$2 (pay at door)
Others – \$15 advance registration, \$20 at door
Buffet lunch – \$6 (payable at buffet line)

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