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Obstetric Violence vs. The Insubordination of Eve's Daughters: Embers of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in Elizabeth Baines's *The Birth Machine*

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Abstract

Frankenstein can be understood as Mary Shelley's accusation of the usurpation of women's reproductive capacity by a scientific father and has become a myth nurturing a 'hideous progeny' of multifarious literary expressions. Through the lens of Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, this essay explores *Frankenstein*'s inspiration for Elizabeth Baines's *The Birth Machine* to unravel the intergenerational rage of Eve's daughters against patriarchal science, and the timelessness of Shelley's rewriting of the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, transfused from the nineteenth century to contemporary times of obstetric technology and violence against women. In *sisterly* unison, Shelley and Baines reveal how, yesterday and today, overreachers ravage pregnant/birthing patients and a Gothic son not 'of woman born', all of them converted into malleable matter in male hands. However, this essay examines how women reach power to avenge the law of the Mother, violated by unethical scientists.

Keywords: Childbirth, Cyborg, Obstetric Technology, Violence.

Introduction

Literature has been a bastion of male creativity, not of female procreativity. Throughout history, literature has traditionally silenced women and obliterated the written expression of female biological processes, like pregnancy and childbirth. Indeed, men have disempowered women's physiological reality and their right to transcribe their bodily experiences. Nina Auerbach observes the timeless symbolical equation between creativity and childbirth (1980, 506). From the Bible, Greek mythology and Plato's *Symposium* to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759), male authors have tended to confiscate the language of sexual reproduction and created myths or metaphors of male pregnancy and childbirth to allude to their own philosophical and artistic accomplishments, all of them stemming from their unique motherless genius and denoting their individual talent, not natural impositions. To compensate for both their one-shot intervention and women's natural powers in sexual reproduction, men have developed a sense of superior mental pregnancy, grounded upon their greater intellectual powers and sanctioned by patriarchal institutions, like marriage and family. Therefore, men have often undermined the physical advantage of women's biological pregnancy by asserting the supremacy of their mental pregnancy of

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creative thoughts. From antiquity to Shakespeare or Romantic poets in Anglo-Saxon countries, literature has conceived that a man's brain can be viewed as a womb, pregnant with ideas. Such ideas can be aborted, prematurely labored, or successfully delivered with(out) pains, during the birthing process of writing an artwork into being, and the *postnatal* outcome of its publication, which is vital for the immortality of the proud expectant father and his progeny made only of words. Namely, men have created life out of knowledge, like science and literature, as an elevated mental offspring. In the meantime, patriarchal pressures have restricted women to illiteracy, blank pages, and the silent burden of gestational discomfort and painful or mortal childbirth since Eve's Original Sin in the Bible. Indeed, male birth metaphors within the context of the writer's larger vision perpetuate women's confinement to procreate babies, without any authority to create an art of their own (Friedman 1987, 64). Consequently, women's writings about the maternal body have been mostly a mute tongue.

Adrienne Rich contends that formerly, the envy and dread of men for a woman's reproductive powers have taken the form of prohibition and hatred for her intellectual capabilities, which have been perceived as inappropriate or deviant, because they could divert her from the real duties in her life: marriage and biological maternity (1986, 40). Susan Friedman also posits that in the essential dilemma of artistic identity, female writers are imposed a "binary system that conceives woman and writer; motherhood and authorhood, babies and books, as mutually exclusive" (1987, 52). This paradigm has not concerned men or their labors with pen and ink, so male authors have been entitled to claim the superiority of their intellectual and scientific production. From Greek philosophy to Christian religion, western patriarchal tradition also reflects how men have innately had the impetuous need to conquer or to deprecate female biological reproduction. In Greek culture, the platonic insemination is the metaphor of birth to transmit wisdom and virtue between two men, from the fatherly professor to his favorite younger pupils, or as David Leitao explains, the seeds of wisdom from the master, as a "full" male individual, are planted into the soil of his students, who are still "empty" (2012, 134, 218). Teaching and learning, only from man to man, discredited the importance of women's procreative capabilities. In other words, the Greeks believed that their own legacy to the world was bound to men's impregnation of their intellectual skills to later generations. Moreover, Plato's assumption in *Symposium* is that, unlike intellectual reproduction, maternity creates merely mortal beings connected with imperfection and death, so true life would be intellectual, not physical (Coe 2013, 31, 34). The male mind could, thus, gestate and deliver an unlimited spectrum of knowledge and artistic power, not the limited capacity of the female body, only viewed as the container of human life for nine months, with the only mission to perpetuate human race. This is complemented by Aristotle's notion of women's anatomy as an aberration of nature: a monster or the failed version of the male organism (Haslem 2011, 41). Meanwhile, the Bible's Book of Genesis interweaves the creation myth with the birth myth. Without maternal intervention, God is the only parent, capable of conceiving Adam on his own image, while Eve is 'not of woman born' like her male partner. She is also secondary to men, because as the Bible records, she is created out of Adam's bone, not directly from her divine father, God: "(He) made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to man. The man said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be

called woman for she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2: 22-23). Despite being motherless, Eve becomes the first mother of humankind according to Christian dogmas, although her procreative powers, as well as those of her daughters, have been subordinated to male orders and dispossessed of sacred origins throughout western history. Creation myths without maternal intervention, or the biological stages of pregnancy and childbirth, both perceived as mental processes, not only have fascinated men and male authors, but some of them have used (scientific) knowledge to violate the supreme law of the Mother in human reproduction. The ultimate overthrow of nature's commandment has been to enable men to supplant women's roles in biological maternity, in real life and in fiction, by means of transgressive, artificial (re)productions of human life without female participation.

Frankenstein (1818) can be understood as the subversive rewriting of the creation myth in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1666) which is a version of the Bible's Book of Genesis. Its author, Mary Shelley, paradoxically, vindicates the postlapsarian curse on Eve: the female biological authority to gestate, give birth and become the mother of humankind alone without male intrusion after human conception. Joanna Russ posits that Shelley is "the first modern science-fiction novelist and the originator of the greatest myth of the industrial age" (1995, 121). Indeed, Shelley's *labor* of science fiction about the usurpation of women's unique reproductive capacity by an unloving scientific father has become a myth in itself, which has also nurtured a 'hideous progeny' of multifarious artistic expressions for two centuries. *Frankenstein*'s inspiration for Elizabeth Baines's *The Birth Machine* (1983) unravels the intergenerational rage of Eve's daughters against the patriarchal institution of science, as well as the timelessness of Shelley's *sinful* rewriting of the *Original* myth of male tyranny, transfused from the nineteenth century to times of medical technology and obstetric violence against women in the late twentieth century. As Anne Mellor notes, Frankenstein's scientific project of creating a new species "resonates with advances in biology, microbiology, and genetic engineering" in later times (2020, 825). This essay intends to demonstrate that, although Eve remains subdued to God's law and to Adam's authority in the Bible and in Milton's reinterpretation before and after her fall from grace, her literary daughters from different centuries –Shelley and Baines– accept the divine malediction of uncontrollable discomfort, suffering and death risk during childbearing and at childbirth. In the case of Baines, *The Birth Machine* is published within the context of second-wave feminism in which women highlight the importance of sexual reproduction and childbirth to fight for gender equality. Among others, Adrienne Rich contends that: "as long as birth remains an experience of passively handling over our minds and our bodies to male authority and technology, other kinds of social change can only minimally change our relationships to ourselves, to power, and to the world outside our bodies" (1986, 185). Meanwhile, Emily Martin claims that birthing mothers are less viewed as individuals, but as the "raw material" from which the product is extracted; thus, it is the physician, not her, who produces the baby (1992, 19). This study's research objective is to examine Shelley's and Baines's (proto-)feminist defense of women's natural power to procreate physically and create mentally without an authoritarian Adamic offspring of scientists and physicians, who has attempted to arrogate to themselves how and when human life is conceived, gestated and labored across time and space. Veronica Hollinger argues that science fiction written by

(feminist) women "has made frequent and significant use of two appropriately 'monstrous' figures: the alien and the cyborg, through which to explore the perspectives and experience of hegemonic culture's traditional 'others'" (2003, 131). As (proto-)science fiction authors, Shelley and Baines reflect their own anxiety about the violent interventionism of science and technology in human reproduction by conceiving monsters and/or monstrous narratives in *Frankenstein* and *Birth Machine*, respectively. Indeed, this essay's new contribution is to compare these two works by means of *A Cyborg Manifesto*, where Donna Haraway questions the antagonisms between animal and human, organism and machine, mind and body, while detecting the problem of women's repressed self-expression in art and literature. Haraway defines a cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (2016, 5). She equally argues how cyborg elements in fiction not only denounce gender inequality in patriarchal societies, but also open up new avenues of female rebellion and liberation from male machine owners, by means of new creative writings about sexual reproduction inked by women writers. Consequently, this essay attempts to prove that *The Birth Machine* is the reinterpretation of *Frankenstein* as a proto-cyborg myth, despite the differences between these two novels and their authors from different centuries. And finally, when focusing on the thematic similarities between Shelley's and Baines's works, this essay pays particular attention to the figures of the male scientist and the physician, both as patriarchal invaders and usurpers of women's reproductive and birthing power.

1. (No) Women, Offspring and Male Obstetricians

The origin of men's (re)productive violence against women is reflected in the Bible and in Milton's *Paradise Lost* which recreates passages from the book of Genesis: Satan's corruption of humans and Eve's deviation from God's authority, Original Sin and its painful aftermath in terms of procreativity. Tempted by Satan to devour the forbidden apple from Eden's tree of knowledge, Milton literally reproduces the Bible to narrate how Eve's transgression is punished by God with an eternal curse on her body: "Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply/ By thy conception; children thou shalt bring/ In sorrow forth, and to thy husband's will/ Thine shall submit, he over thee shall rule" (2008, 246). This sacred damnation inaugurates Adam's productive power of physical work as the family's breadwinner, and Eve's reproductive powerlessness as only the bearer of the children from her male owner, who is eternally jealous of her and mistrusts *his* woman for condemning him to mortality. Meanwhile, Eve admits that, despite the disgraceful punishment of labor pains, her subordination to Adam and her expulsion from Eden, she is empowered because God endows her with sexual fertility and the gift of maternity: "I who first brought death on all, am graced/ the source of life" (Milton 2008, 278). Becoming the first mother on earth according to Christian dogmas, the body of the motherless Eve reproduces generations of men and women until today. Nevertheless, she and her intergenerational daughters have been dispossessed of pen and ink by patriarchy and, thus, disabled to become scriveners of human history. Meanwhile, Adam and his symbolic sons, in their productive and creative abilities as workers and authors sanctioned by God after their fall from grace, have been obsessed by their need to compensate for the physical weakness of their own sex, and to subdue women's domain of power: the female superiority during the biological

processes of pregnancy and childbirth. There have been divergent interpretations on the myth in *Paradise Lost* and its treatment of Eve's curse on her procreative anatomy. For Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Milton is "the first of the masculinists" writing about woman's secondness and otherness, who demonizes her by sketching parallels between Satan and Eve's sinfulness (2000, 191, 196). Conversely, Diane McColley casts doubt on Eve's subjection to Adam in *Paradise Lost*, and believes that, without exonerating her from sin, Milton shows Eve's goodness and loving nature, her capacity for repentance and forgiveness, her spiritual completeness, responsibility, and peacemaking skills after the fall (2004, 189). Irrespective of scholarly discrepancies, in his anxious need for complete dominance over God and Earth, it is then Adam's turn to violate the divine law of the Father and Nature, not Eve's, after both had been expelled from paradise. Stripped of the power to give birth from their own ribs, Adam's sons have founded patriarchy take revenge against the mother's anatomy and the woman's intellect. Particularly, the Adamic progeny of science and medicine has been an invasive army which has penetrated, seized and despoiled the women's natural power of bearing and laboring human life, while contributing to institutionalize the female experience of motherhood to serve men's needs only.

Similar to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* or Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is impregnated with a satanic aura to urge later male inhabitants on Earth, denominated 'overreachers' by traditional literary criticism, to return to Eden by discovering and possessing the secret of life. These men aspire to heavenly power but, since their reach always exceeds their grasp, their projects are doomed to failure (Grande 1999, 40). In the management of childbirth, during the eighteenth-century, male physicians and their obstetric instruments replaced female midwives (Hanson 2004, 16), who had been traditionally associated with witchcraft and pacts with the devil to surpass God's and patriarchy's strength. Still, the industrialized England of the early nineteenth century ideologically hesitates between the knowledge of male scientists and the power of 'evil' women in human reproduction. Indeed, Shelley's *Frankenstein* is symptomatic of this oscillation between the survival of the supernatural and the rationalism emanating from the Enlightenment which problematizes men's creation of life. This cautionary Gothic tale intends to alert man-led science about the risks of conceiving monstrous experiments, which transgress unalienable human values, such as family love, compassion, morality, and ethics. Victor Frankenstein is a student of natural science, whose ambition unconsciously reveals his latent trauma: the death of his mother and his desire to make her return from the grave. As already mentioned, Frankenstein is an overreacher, or as Andy Mousley puts it more recently, a "posthuman human": a human who does not accept human limits and refuses to live within the boundaries of the human (2016, 161-162). In the novel, Frankenstein confesses his thirsty curiosity to defy the sacred laws of Father God and Mother Nature: "It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my enquires were directed to the metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world" (Shelley, 2003: 39). With that purpose, Victor leaves his loving family in Geneva to study at the University of Ingolstadt. There, he confines himself in a womb-like chamber to reproduce his mental skills, to reach immortality, and to position his name next to God.

His supposed victory resides in usurping birth and enabling rebirth, in completing the *original* Adamic vengeance and entering the patriarchal Olympus of natural philosophers, like Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus. Haraway contends that in "Western science and politics– the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other the relation between organism and machine has been a border war" (2016, 7). Hence, in his self-proclamation as the Adamic god on earth at war with the powers of his heavenly father God, Victor also creates the myth of a new son of Adam by merging life and death. He succeeds in conquering mortality, taming the procreative powers of nature in his favor as a male scientist, and obliterating the role of the mother in conception. Nonetheless, this *tour de force* results in his descent to hell, because Shelley's hybrid narrative of birth and murder later confronts Victor's portentous human mind with his mechanical progeny 'not of woman born', but of ambitious scientific interventionism in human reproduction.

Margarete Sandelowski reviews the common psychosomatic view of gynaecologists and obstetricians during the mid and late twentieth century: childbearing was not a wholly normal state, but an emotional condition that required medical treatment and surveillance (1984, 60). Such a medical approach contributed to convert pregnancy into a physically and mentally debilitating pathology, and expectant mothers into powerless patients in the expert hands of the (male) medical profession in hospitalized childbirths. Within this clinical context and that of second-wave feminism, Elizabeth Baines modernizes and recreates Frankenstein's myth of expropriation of woman's procreativity thanks to Dr. McGuirk, who is ravenous to walk the same steps of fame as Shelley's ambitious scientist. Baines's professor is an overreacher in the era of twentieth-century obstetric technology, and the Platonian inseminator of knowledge to his students and audience in international conferences on Induction to Labor. He is the father of this breakthrough *advance* in obstetrics conceived by himself and his qualified team of physicians at the Centre for Medical Research. As a postindustrial Frankenstein, McGuirk overreaches contemporary medicine with his revolutionary high-tech *child* to "imitate labour before the time it would have occurred spontaneously" (Baines 2010, 12). His professional expertise exemplifies the fatal flaw of a man of science, who intrudes the secrets of pregnancy and childbirth, to deprive the sovereignty of Mother Nature and women over the natural act of bringing babies into the world. He publicly discloses that he can mechanize the birthing body: "This machine will revolutionise care on these wards […] What we are using here is not one machine, but two. One for controlling the drug flow, another for monitoring the progress of the patient" (2). His treasurable target would not be the mother, but the unborn baby, to be protected by his technological *progeny* with a metallic body of engines, as he explains to his students, who attentively listen to their god-like Master: "by continuous monitoring of the uterine contractions and of the foetal heart sounds, it may be possible to obtain advance warning of foetal distress– which, as we have seen […] can result in permanent damage or death to the foetus" (60). The Professor justifies his *pregnant* intrusion by accusing the maternal anatomy of fallibility, when he diagnoses its potential condition of Post-maturity: the "Decrease in Placental Efficiency" (14). Under this firm assumption, he declares that "the foetus […] is at risk due to prolonged pregnancy" (14), requiring his expert intercession

to detect and correct female *errors*. McGuirk proves that the placenta, as the temporary organ tied to the fetus through the umbilical cord, is a defective tissue susceptible to deterioration or aging, which potentially jeopardizes the manufacturing (male) process of delivering babies. The Professor cannot perfect the biological mother as his experimental subject, so for the sake of hospital management, his patented birth artefact becomes the technical repair to artificially disrupt the process of pregnancy, *born* from the *flaws* of nature to fabricate and assemble the female apparatus of sexual reproduction: the uterus and its accessories, like the *defective* placenta. McGuirk is a contemporary overreacher 'pregnant with the idea' of mechanizing the mother's body. However, Baines's novel voyages from the objectivity of this scientist, as the self-proclaimed hero of the birth experience, to the subjectivity of the future mother, who incarnates the cyborg victim fastened to the bestial machine ejaculated by a man's brain.

Both Victor Frankenstein and Professor McGuirk break the waters of their own experiments after their scientific male pregnancy. Haraway contends that cyborgs are the offspring of patriarchal capitalism, which are often "unfaithful to their origins" (2016, 9-10); yet, the Creature in Shelley's science fiction and the birth machine in Baines's novel of science are conceived as industrial instruments for their Adamic fathers to transgress the limits of procreative knowledge, and to write their names in official history. Frankenstein initiates his cerebral gestation after the lecture of Prof. Waldman, who had a great impact on the protagonist to "explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (Shelley 2003, 49). Victor's monomaniacal wish to (re)create life from death leads him to the study of corpses and the organic processes of decomposition, while stealing and collecting anatomical parts from morgues and dissecting rooms. His scientific quest aims to surpass God's might and to (re)produce sexual reproduction without maternal intervention. To restore the spark of life to inert human matter, Frankenstein mechanizes his experiment by means of Galvanism: he applies electrical charges to reanimate dead limbs. As a result, he conceives a creature that crosses the limits of life and death, or an aberration of amputated body pieces, which defies reason and is ignorant of maternal nurturance and love. The abject emanates from a state of in-betweenness in Gothic fiction, so Julia Kristeva contends that the corpse is the "utmost of abjection" whereby death infects life (1982, 4). Nevertheless, Victor's fabricated creature made of abject oppositions is also a motherless proto-cyborg, betwixt and between alchemy and science, dead human bodies and artificial reanimation. Unexpectedly, Frankenstein's mechanized son incarnates a monstrous union of multifarious corpses with neither resemblance to him, as a father, nor to God. Haraway states that "pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the specter of the ghost in the machine. […] They could not achieve man's dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream" (2016, 11). Furthermore, the tradition of overreachers is bound to a hellish downfall after allying themselves to the devil to defeat God. Consequently, Victor, as soon as he delivers his creature, is the Adamic son who experiences a symbolical post-partum depression of sinfulness and embarrassment, when he is aware of Satan's malignant impregnation of his own mental pregnancy after his labor:

> I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation,

> listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life (Shelley 2003, 59).

Victor's artificial production by means of betraying the *original* reproduction of kinship is no more a prenatal dream of fame, but a postnatal nightmare of failure that ridicules him and triggers his mental instability, while his ghostly, proto-cyborg creature derides all the expectations of his creator. Indeed, Shelley alerts that this scientist's experiment is unhealthy and doomed, because he cannot conceive his offspring in his own image and likeness, but instead, he manufactures an ugly monster of giant stature detached from his own body, unlike the natural resemblance between child and its parents in biological reproduction: "I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! […] The beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (58). Besides, the alliance between Satan and Victor meant to usurp God's creational powers turns against him, as he proves to be a reluctant father of the Creature. Victor's mental production is transfigured into a devilish machinery, set in motion by Satan's potent seed, or an infernal specter resurrected from death during an unnatural male mental pregnancy, without divine or maternal participation: "A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (59). For Ellen Moers the most feminine aspect of *Frankenstein* is the trauma of the afterbirth, or the "revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (1980, 93). Indeed, Victor's downfall begins when his symbolical postpartum depression inflates his flaw of character. He cannot accept his transgression: the borders of death and life have been crossed, while his unpregnant mind still carries the outgrowth of trespassing the morals of science until the conclusion of *Frankenstein*. Conversely, Clare Hanson locates Victor's ruin before that moment, because the novel denounces the destructiveness of his inadequate artificial womb, without any light or female nourishment; as well his opaque gestating method, in which the child does not grow but develops itself through appositions of multifarious elements (2004, 49). Kristeva relates the abject to the human prehistory during which the individual must liberate himself/herself from the maternal power, even before existing outside the mother (1982, 13). Shelley's mythical novel criticizes the instrumentalization of science during pregnancy and labor to empower the male overreacher, and to free human beings from the *abject* procreative role of women. *Frankenstein* also announces the revenge of Victor's proto-cyborg offspring, due to the absence of an expectant mother and the abandonment of his ambitious and unloving non-divine father.

Reproduction has been understood as a form of production since early industrial times, where the uterus has symbolically been a machine. Then, the woman would be a laborer subjected to power and control, the obstetrician a technician using instruments to expel the fetus from the maternal womb –or a mechanical pump–, and the desired final product would be the child (Martin 1992, 54, 57). In Baines's novel, Zelda is the pregnant wife of a doctor –Roland Harris– turned into a cyborg. Without her consent, she is made a subject in the clinical trial of Professor McGuirk, who seizes childbirth to control its

appropriate timing for the sake of hospital efficiency and comfort: her appointment for induced labor is conveniently scheduled for health professionals on a Monday morning, not during the *inconvenient* weekend. The hostile relationship between traditionally male physicians and expectant mothers is generally a *natural* extension of gender constructions of masculine authority and silent feminine obedience to the *gods* of both the marriage and science institutions. In Zelda's uncomplicated pregnancy, her husband or the nurses at hospital treat her like a child, not as a reliable adult. She is a laboratory-rat incarcerated by the patriarchal discourse that reminds her of her own sexual inferiority and the male mental superiority to transgress the law of Nature, due to the overreacher's lust to control what is naturally uncontrollable: human birth. Like Frankenstein, McGuirk ventures to gestate life in his mind and to conquer women's procreative superiority. Haraway argues that sex, sexuality, and reproduction are central actors in high-tech myths, structuring our imagination of personal and social possibility, whereby the female body is permeable for intervention and instrumentalized for private satisfaction and utility-maximizing machine (2016, 43-44). Trusting her husband, Zelda consents to connect her body to a machine to induce a pre-term labor despite her unproblematic late pregnancy. This technological procedure enables the social progress of childbirth *à la carte* and allows the individual success of the father of the cyborg –consisting of the birthing woman connected to the birth machine– to reach immortality and to dominate the phenomenon of childbirth. The antepartum rupture of membranes and the concomitant sensations in her abdomen are biologically female, but they are artificially provoked by man's engine to both disrupt and hasten labor. Yet, the communion between Zelda's body and mind vomits anger and rebels against the Professor's machinery of soldiers – his healthcare staff– and their guns –the obstetric equipment. Indeed, the uterine contractions, announced by the water breaking, do not begin, because Zelda's womb acts *naturally*: it has its own laws and it stubbornly resists the time limits imposed by McGuirk's team, which resents waiting for their patient's whims during a long labor. In the interim, Zelda's brain chooses to escape to fairy tales and childhood memories, while her body remains captive and inert in the delivery room, like Frankenstein's amalgam of corpses, under constant intravenous infusion of oxytocin, which is the substance administered to her to fuel the birth machine that induces the pre-term labor. For Lucie Armitt the heroine's nightmares are set in motion by the plunging of hypodermic needles into her veins and the drugs send her to a fantasy world (2000, 157). Inside this chaos of fairylands and girlish recollections, Zelda's brain attempts to get pregnant with strength to find a paradigm of rebellion, so as to revolt against her oppressors at hospital, who have forced her to be plugged to the birth machine.

Unlike Zelda's cybernetic labor, Frankenstein's delivery of his hideous mental offspring fabricated with dead bodily parts reanimated by his engine becomes a new Original Sin against the law of God, but without the female sinner Eve. After his traumatic birth, the Creature without a mother sees how a selfish yet scared Victor flees when he realizes that he has fallen from grace. Indeed, this scientist abandons his newborn within his uterine laboratory to avoid "the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which (he) had so miserably given life" (Shelley 2003, 59). Therefore, this proto cyborg is transformed into a wretched orphan, rejected by his artificial procreator and deprived of God, as his divine Father. Concurrently,

Victor endows himself with the moral right to judge that the other parent of his monstrous child is the Devil, and that its physical deformity and lack of resemblance to him –and God– is the condemnatory result from Satan's seduction and the undesirable intercourse with him during his *uterine* experiment. As a consequence, his quest to trespass the abject threshold between life and death and to resurrect a corpse, would enrage the only godly Father and all mothers since Eve, including the novel's mighty creator: Mary Shelley. Like Adam and Eve in the Bible and in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Victor is expelled from the garden of scientific glory and condemns his child to the same doom of misery outside any homely Eden, because, as a father, he refuses to accompany –and nurture– his progeny during his solitary exile on a barren earth. Haraway contends that "illegitimate cyborgs, not of Woman born, refuse the ideological resources of victimization so as to have a real life" (2016, 59). Accordingly in Shelley's novel, Victor's cybernetic creature ceases to lament for having been deserted by its creator, because he is fueled by Satan's rage to incarnate a second angel of destruction. Thenceforward, he begins an eternal, bloodthirsty spiral of revenge and murder against his ungodly father and his family from Geneva after a long period of self-knowledge, as he warns Victor:

> I will revenge my injuries: if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care: I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you shall curse the hour of your birth (Shelley 2003, 148).

However, when father and child finally meet in the Swiss Alps, the monstrous Creature also commands his scientific progenitor to use his procreative power to conceive a female partner for him, so as to alleviate his forlornness. Initially, Victor has no courage and is reluctant to recommence the labors of his pregnant mind of overreacher. But he experiences the same *jouissance* as he did with his first mental gestation, and his second pregnancy will reproduce the same modus operandi of self-absorptive prenatal industriousness during some months. Yet, before giving birth (un)*naturally*, Victor induces a pre-term labor to *himself* to abort his second child: a female. David Soyka correlates that the genesis of evil in Shelley's novel is initiated by Victor's "dual metamorphic role is as both God the Creator and Satan the destroyer of God's creation" (1992, 167). Having his first experiment symbolically killed the mother, Victor's second crime of female annihilation –the motherless unborn daughter– enrages his first proto-cyborg male child, who witnesses the abortion of his potential female partner from the distance, but he culminates his threat of revenge against his Creator: assassinating Victor's future wife Elizabeth. Indeed, Shelley vindicates that a rejected son can become a homicidal monster when the nuclear family fails to mother its offspring (Mellor 1988, 52). Victor splits into two because he is still the god-like creator who delivered the Adamic son he repudiates, but he also aborts his unborn cybernetic daughter to deliberately stop that "a race of devils will be propagated upon the earth" (Shelley 2003, 170). He already defied the authority of God once, while he subsequently manages to control the workings of Mother Nature by interrupting an undesirable second mental pregnancy, because he is afraid that this unborn female will procreate in the future and be empowered as a second Eve of a new race of furious, ghostly cyborgs. Victor fears that a woman's sexuality may be free to choose her sexual partner and disobey her lawful

husband, so he rather rapes his unborn creature to reassert the male authority over the female body (Mellor 1988, 120). In short, Shelley's scientist not only procreates by himself and is the unfatherly single parent of his male creature, but also denies the maternal potentiality of a second Eve and admits that he relinquishes the possibility of any future mental pregnancies: "the idea of renewing my labours did not for one instant occur to me" (Shelley 2003, 175).

Both as victims of science, Zelda Harris and Frankenstein's Creature regress to a primitive state of savagery to protect themselves from physical and mental aggressions perpetrated by those obstetric male hands that were supposed to care for them. Accordingly, Haraway argues that "the cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed" for the status of bestiality to eventually prevail over humanness (2016, 11). In Baines's novel, Zelda is dispossessed of the birthing power gifted by Mother Nature and falls into madness but rises as a maternal cybernetic monster against the alliance between her obstetrician and the father of her unborn baby, like the murderous career of Frankenstein's nameless creature against his creator. Before this, Professor McGuirk, who boasts the productive power, succeeds in calming his overreaching desire to deliver a child by himself through his obstetric machinery. Meanwhile, Zelda's reproductive work is to remain passive to let the birthing hands and pregnant mind of the doctor to interfere with her vaginal labor, which becomes a male childbirth, like in Frankenstein's experiment. Zelda's parturient body offers no physical resistance and surrenders to the male birth machine when the first signs of labor begin, but an indomitable part of the cyborg also dwells in her brain when she disobeys the instructions of the healthcare staff: "No, no stop that!! Their voices are urgent: It's not time, control it! […] She does it, she gets control – snip, cuts her head and the shoulders away from the rest of her body" (Baines 2010, 78). Although Zelda's reproductive anatomy is ultimately tamed and mechanized by medical care, her mind is infuriated. She rejects the intrusion of the birth device in her already dismembered self. She also refuses to become one with this machine to deliver her child more quickly, so she rebels against the motors of the electronic fetal monitoring and the intravenous infusions of oxytocin to unleash the *beast* within her. It is the reification of her body what revolts Zelda's cybernetic mind to empower her, so her act of self-protection against this external aggression is to reveal her animal and supernatural selves in a magic circle of pre-human instincts and scatological fury:

> She's their baby, their goody, their Frankenstein beauty. Oh, no, she's not, here's the urge: her body gels, gathers, and now she's her very own monster, wolf-mouth howling, frog-legs flexing: they flinch back (…) She laughs, wild strangled laughter, coiling helter-skelter inside the huge knot of her, she sees them looking from one to the other. In spite of their magic, in spite of their enemas, she squirts shit in their faces (78-9).

The laboratory-rat into which Zelda is transformed is only a Frankenstein beauty mirroring the procreative ambitions of the godly father McGuirk; she is mere reproductive matter monitored by his productive mind and stripped of her own agency. Through this allusion to *Frankenstein*, Baines deliberately correlates *The Birth Machine* with Shelley's Gothic tale to demonstrate that Zelda's birthing process is successfully manipulated by men's medical interventionism, and to show the cybernetic

aggression inflicted on her commodified soma and psyche. Baines's objective is to shed light on the secondary role in which women are relegated during late pregnancy and at labor, as endured by Zelda at hospital. First, she questions and resists the clinical authority of men and their metallic engines over her pregnant body; then, she is forced to passive resignation and finally, she descends into madness as a bestial cyborg, when the male-produced machine allies itself with the birthing woman to disobey the father-scientist: McGuirk. Although Zelda's conscience revives from physical paralysis, she is malleable clay or dead material in male hands, because she incarnates Frankenstein's daughter beautified by clinicians: she is not the female creator of human life, but the creature given birth to by men in the delivery room. However, Alice Adams posits that, like Frankenstein's progeny in Shelley's novel, Zelda offends and intimidates her creators who sedate and restrain her, and although she herself becomes the birth machine, the cyborg elements of Baines's novel are the fall of male domination and how Zelda draws a new kind of power by her connection to the machinery of induction (1994, 57, 60). Baines's heroine ultimately proves that she is not a disjointed doll to be played with her comatose reproductive anatomy, but a reanimated cyborg of her own myth-making. She shouts like a loud witch reborn from her burning ashes and howls like a she-animal**,** who scares and defecates before her obstetric audience, while provoking the disruption in the Professor's labor protocol. Zelda's guttural sounds, which symbolize her reincarnation in Shelley's Creature, echo a common threat against female procreativity across time: the obliteration of the mother in the nineteenth century or the tyranny suffered by parturient women in hospitals before the twenty-first century. Similarly, Tess Cosslett argues that Baines's novel offers an image for a primitive force in a woman's body shown during the birth process, which resists the coercion of the medical establishment in the form of a witch (1994, 33). The angry message from Zelda, as a daughter of Eve, a Satan's follower or a sorceress, is to reclaim her female anatomy against the mental creation of a second Adam –the birth machine–, and to unleash the savage cyborg within herself with the purpose of preserving the baby in her womb until its due date. Nevertheless, her insubordination is punished with an emergency Caesarian section because the engine detects fetal distress. This male diagnosis of presumable risks for the unborn baby, announces the presumable triumph of patriarchal obstetrics that burst into flames Zelda's witch-self: her big mouth and scatological rage, her irregular uterine contractions against the male clock-time, or her progressive proficiency in breathing techniques to reconquer the act of childbirth against traditional instructions provided by McGuirk's nurses.

The *offspring* from the war between the birthing body and the scientist's pregnant mind at this stage is a forced labor. This victory of medical interventionism implies that a full-term pregnancy, a vaginal birth, and nature's ungovernable control over labor time are denied to Zelda due to a man's cybernetic power. She does not give birth by herself, but her child is pulled out of her uterus too early thanks to a male attendant of the obstetric team, not to her own birthing strength or McGuirk's godly powers: "Pop he pulls it out, like a rabbit from a hat. A purple corkscrew baby" (Baines 2010, 86). Zelda's puerperium begins when she learns that she was not informed that she has been a test subject for a "Clinical Trial: Convenience Induction" (128) to publish the *benefits* of the pre-term labor beyond health reasons on a research paper in a prestigious scientific journal. Though still in bed, Zelda refuses to be a Frankenstein's

doll under McGuirk's control while being conscious that her husband will not disconnect her to machinery of hospital labor. Zelda's acquisition of *postlapsarian* knowledge after having birth to her child is to find out Roland's complicity with her induced pre-term labor, because he obeyed the unethical medical decisions of his hierarchical superior: Master McGuirk. Haraway contends that "cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (2016, 55). In line with this breakthrough narrative genre, Baines depicts how Zelda resists the harm inflicted to her by men, and how her *witch* body reacts against the control of obstetrics that nullifies her choice of a full-term pregnancy and classifies her natural reproductive power as the other; thus, defective or inferior to men's mental pregnancy capable of creating and assembling birth machines. Zelda is a second Eve and a female cyborg, stigmatized by Original Sin to give birth with physical and mental pain. Yet, this biological mark of being female equally allows her to regress to a diabolic primitive state, in which the protectiveness of maternal animality vanquishes protocols and clinical trials of *civilized* men. Her beastly insubordination is a reaction against Adam's son –Shelley's overreacher– who has incarcerated her parturient body and transformed her into a cybernetic utility at labor. She disconnects herself from the birth machine and regains her autonomy outside the male machinery to embrace, with revengeful fury, her primitive instincts as a mother. Then, Zelda reclaims the product of labor: her son, while repudiating her partner in sexual conception –her husband– for having betrayed her and deprived her of the event of natural childbirth. As Satan's army, Zelda is the dormant witch, who finally awakens to escape with her baby boy from the not Eden-like institutions of obstetrics at hospital and of marriage at home:

> She names herself: Teacher, Scientist. The words taste. At last they have texture. At last, to acknowledge her 1own insights, to be her own author. (…) Ladies and Gentlemen, my last trick but one, the disappearing trick. She begins to laugh. Silently, she shakes. It hurts, her stitches strain, she holds the baby against them to ease them, and then she's laughing to split her guts, holding them in with the bundle of the baby. The baby nestles his warm head against her vibrating body, his mouth begins to search (Baines 2010, 136).

Based on the act of retelling male stories, Haraway posits that feminist cyborg narratives "have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control" so as to reverse hierarchical dualisms (2016, 56). In line with this, Baines's fiction envisions a paralyzed, silent expectant mother who is forced by an ambitious physician to be transformed into a cyborg to deliver her child passively for the convenience of a clinical trial and hospital protocols. But as such, she paradoxically rebels against science when she decides to be unborn from her male creator –her doctor–, like Frankenstein's Creature. Regaining her motion and consciousness, Zelda refuses to be a doll and flees from her healthcare captors and their engines of bondage, carrying her baby boy not in her womb but with her hands: the treasurable progeny of McGuirk's pregnant brain and the male heir of the Harris family. Ultimately, the heroine's symbolic feminist manifesto is to proclaim herself as the only entity in charge of

her own body and mind, or the author of female subjectivity at constant labor without any man's supervision, whether her obstetrician or her husband.

Conclusion

A main battle fought by feminist movements in the mid and late twentieth century, extended to women's health movements and government policymakers, has been the de-medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth to define them as safe physiological processes, rather than pathological conditions (Treichler 1990, 121, 131). *The Birth Machine* has contributed to this fight because, as Tess Cosslett states, Baines's work is a reaction against the dramatic increase of labor inductions, even for non-medical reasons, in the 1970s and 1980s (1994, 50). But through this novel, Baines also resurrects Frankenstein's Gothic myth created by Shelley to howl the voice of the *other*: the woman transformed into the *hideous progeny* of science, denied the action of childbirth and relegated to a passive secondary role at the delivery room. Zelda's instincts prevail, and she is to be heard aloud like a she-animal, a lunatic, a witch, or a sinful Eve, while her postpartum escapade counterattacks the violence of modern medicine, which tries to dominate women's biological advantage over men in sexual reproduction. Baines's intention, as Shelley's symbolical younger sister, is to modernize the horror of *Frankenstein* and to re-contextualize its universal moral teachings against a scientist's usurpation of the natural female superiority in procreation to the age of high-tech obstetrics in recent times: women must be entitled to establish the limits to the control of medicine over their own gestating/birthing bodies to prevent men from artificially reproducing themselves thanks to their uterine minds and subservient female bodies plugged to machines or enslaved by hospital management. In unison, Shelley and Baines reveal how, yesterday and today, overreachers, as prestigious men of science, ravage real pregnant patients –like Zelda– and a Gothic son not of woman born –like Frankenstein's Creature–converted into malleable inert matter or automatons. Yet, they eventually reach an identity of their own and achieve power to avenge the supreme law of the Mother violated by unethical scientific praxes. Victor Frankenstein's experiment to create life from dead bodily parts inside his womb-like laboratory in Shelley's nineteenth century and McGuirk's clinical trial to enforce arbitrary pre-term labor inductions in the late twentieth century, undermine the unpredictable laws of reproductive nature, the magic of childbirth and the sovereignty of expectant mothers at labor, but they equally dehumanize the medical profession, even more than its female patients or its monstrous offspring of reanimated corpses. Hence, in *Paradise Lost* as the patriarchal myth echoing the Bible, Milton paradoxically plants the seed of female empowerment in terms of sexual reproduction, which subsequently takes root in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and ultimately flourishes in Baines's *The Birth Machine*, all against male plagues attempting to uproot procreativity from its legitimate female possessors. In short, after falling from grace by Original Sin, women writers rise to exonerate their common mother Eve from sexual guilt and to give birth to their own (proto-)cybernetic creatures in the shape of literature that defies the official history and medicine written by men. With this purpose, Eve's daughters –Shelley and Baines– intuitively demonstrate that the (proto-) feminist revisionism of cyborg

narratives resides in the synergy between the human body and machines 'not of woman born' so that both are liberated from the tyranny of their ungodly fathers of science.

العنف الولادي مقابل العصيان لبنات حواء: (*جمرات فرانكنشتاين*) لذا ماري شيلي في (*آله الفراق*) لإليزبث بينز

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الملخص

يمكن فهم فرانكنشتاين على أنه اتهام من ماري شيلي للاستيلاء على قدرة الإنجاب لدى النساء من قِبل أب علمي، وأصبحت أسطورة تغذي 'نسلاً مشوهاً' من التعبيرات الأدبيّة المتنوعة. فالشكر والتقدير لمجهود هاراواي عن بيان السايبورج، الذي يستكشف إلهام فرانكنشتاين لإله الولادة الذي ابتكرته إليزبث بينز لكشف الغضب عبر الأجيال لبنات حواء ضد العلم الأبوي، وإعادة شيلي الخالدة لكتابه الكتاب المقدس والفردوس المفقود لميلتون،التي استمرت من القرن التاسع عشر إلى العصر الحديث لتكنولوجيا التوليد والعنف ضد المرأة. في وحدة أخوية، تكشف شيلي وبينز عن كيفيّة اجتياح المتجاوزين الحوامل/المولودات في الأمس واليوم من قِبل الأطباء وإبن مروع ليس 'ولداً من إمرأة'، إذ يتم تحويلهم جميعاً إلى مادة قابلة للتشكيل في أيدي الذكور، ومع ذلك، يفحص هذا المقال كيف تصل النساء إلى السلطة لتنتقم من قانون الأم الذي انتهكه العلماء الأخلاقيون.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الولادة، الإنسان الآلي، تكنولوجيا التوليد، العنف.

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