

THE GREAT (FOOD) CHAIN OF BEING:  
DIETARY ANXIETIES AND THE *SCALA NATURAE* IN THREE CASES OF  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH FICTION

by

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This dissertation examines fictional treatments of the food chain in nineteenth-century England vis-à-vis the larger conceptual history of the Great Chain of Being—a cosmological schema that stratifies animate and inanimate objects along a fixed hierarchical scale. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* challenges carnivorous assumptions of the Great (food) Chain of Being and its endorsement of human dominion over animals and thereby advocates a Romantic vegetarian ethic as a conduit to revolutionary equality. In Lewis Carroll's *Alice* tales the threat of extinction caused by the violent nature of the food chain mirrors the monarchical, social, religious, and evolutionary anxieties of the mid-Victorian milieu; as such, Carroll endorses a pescetarian abstemiousness as a response to the riddle of the food chain. And H. G. Wells's *fin-de-siècle* novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, introduces morphologous beings that occupy the interstitial places along the Chain-of-Being hierarchy that complicate food-chain assumptions with their cannibalistic appetites and their hyper-relationality to the human species. This project argues, therefore, that the Great (food) Chain of Being (and the ontological questions that it supposes) serves as a phenomenological touchstone even as it dissolves, crumbles, or becomes upended in a post-Darwinian worldview of moral relativism, evolutionary debates, and dietetic anxieties as illustrated in these fictional case studies.

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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines fictional treatments of the food chain in nineteenth-century England vis-à-vis the larger conceptual history of the Great Chain of Being—a schema that stratifies animate and inanimate objects along a fixed hierarchical scale. Alfred O. Lovejoy’s definitive book on the subject, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (1936), traces the origin and historical trajectory of the *Scala Naturae* from both classical and Judeo-Christian hierarchical conceptions of the universe from when it first occurred as a defense of Plato’s philosopher-king assertions in *The Republic*; as it operated in Augustinian and Aquinian theological teachings on plenitude and creation; as it served as the operating principle of the Divine Right of Kings in the early modern feudal imagination; as it was undermined by the democratic idealism inspired by Enlightenment thought; and as it adumbrated Darwinian evolutionary theory in its emphasis on hybridity and morphology.

Although the Chain of Being served as an operating paradigm for social organization up through the Enlightenment period, many conceptual historians identify the collapse of such hierarchical conceptions of the universe with the revolutionary upheavals that swept across continental Europe and the British colonies in the late-eighteenth century either via monarchical dethronements (as in the case of the French and American Revolutions) or via evolutionary scientific theories that undermined plenitudinous conceptions of divine creation. Thus, historical and philosophical analyses of the Chain of Being often end at the French and American Revolutions as though the metaphorical chains of hierarchical thinking were interminably loosed and abandoned at

the close of the eighteenth century while giving rise to new, evolutionary outlooks of biological ontology. And yet, an idea as pervasive as the Great Chain of Being does not simply disappear in a matter of years or even decades as this dissertation thereby argues. Indeed, authors as divergent as Mary Shelley, Lewis Carroll, and H. G. Wells and other nineteenth-century English authors such as Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Bram Stoker, and William Makepeace Thackeray—to name only a few—engaged, in varying degrees, themes addressing the Great Chain of Being specifically in terms of aristocratic privilege, the metaphorical social ladder, the vestiges of Roman-Catholic hierarchization in an Anglican England, the Victorian penchant for categorization and obsessive taxonomical classification, and sanguinity and European bloodlines. As such, this dissertation examines the ways in which the Great Chain of Being pervaded the cultural, scientific, religious, political, and literary imagination of a post-Enlightenment England even after the supposed dissolution of the *Scala Naturae* in the aftermath of continental revolutionary fervor and the rise of evolutionary paradigms.

England serves as a primary locus for such interrogations of the Great Chain of Being for a variety of reasons. While other nations across Europe and beyond experienced radical transformations of governance and attitudes toward sovereignty as their monarchical rulers faced dethronement, exile, or even decapitation such as was the case in revolutionary France, England inextricably maintained its monarchical stronghold in the figures of the Prince Regent and eventual King George IV, King William IV, and Queen Victoria and her many royal offspring who reclaimed monarchical authority



throughout Europe.<sup>1</sup> As such, Queen Victoria's monarchical rule stands as a testament to the lingering acceptance of the Great Chain of Being and its constitutive principle of the Divine Right of Kings even after such revolutionary upheavals threatened to dissolve monarchical strongholds throughout Europe. The author and art critic, John Ruskin, for example, vindicated Queen Victoria's throneship by invoking the "Divine Right" of the "true Dei Gratia" (127) in his essay titled, "Commerce," published in his collection of political writings, *Munera Pulveris* (1871).<sup>2</sup> But as much as Ruskin might have endorsed such a traditional narrative as that inscribed in the Great Chain of Being as a defense of Queen Victoria's monarchical position, Benjamin Disraeli, the Earl of Beaconsfield, turned to more humanistic justifications for the ongoing presence of English monarchical tradition in his many political speeches, writings, and novels. In an 1872 speech given to a political assembly in Manchester, England, Disraeli asserted that "the people of England appreciate the monarchy, as I believe they do, it would be painful to them that their royal and representative family should not be maintained with becoming dignity, or fill in the public eye a position inferior to some of the nobles of the land" (359–60). And he further argued that England's avoidance of such revolutionary *anomie* that occurred

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<sup>1</sup> Queen Victoria received the moniker, the "grandmother of Europe," owing to her royal progeny throughout Europe. Amongst her nine children and numerous grandchildren with Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's descendants came to reign in places as wide-ranging as Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Bulgaria. Her daughter, Vicky, for example, served as the empress of Germany; and her grandson Wilhelm operated as the last Kaiser of this country, while her granddaughter, Alix of Hesse, was Russia's last empress. Twenty-three descendants of Queen Victoria occupied thrones in Germany, Greece, Norway, Sweden, Hesse, Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Romania, Yugoslavia, Spain, Denmark, and Great Britain including the now reigning monarch of England, Queen Elizabeth II (King 6).

<sup>2</sup> See Sharon Aronofsky Weltman's "Be no more housewives, but queens": Queen Victoria and Ruskin's Domestic Mythology," *Remaking Queen Victoria*, ed. Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 119.

throughout other parts of Europe throughout the eighteenth century was a direct result of the able and ingenious rulership of the English monarchs as when he asserted:

Now, gentlemen, it is well clearly to comprehend what is meant by a country not having a revolution for two centuries. It means, for that space, the unbroken exercise and enjoyment of the ingenuity of man. It means for that space the continuous application of the discoveries of science to his comfort and convenience. It means the accumulation of capital, the elevation of labor, the establishment of those admirable factories which cover your district; the unwearied improvement of the cultivation of the land, which has extracted from a somewhat churlish soil harvests more exuberant than those furnished by lands nearer to the sun. It means the continuous order which is the only parent of personal liberty and political right. And you owe all these, gentlemen, to the throne. (357)

Like Disraeli's emphasis on "the ingenuity of man" (ibid.) through science, capital, labor, factories, and agriculture, George Eliot also privileges the humanistic if not humble efforts of England's ancestors as a vindication of England's noble place in the world. George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), for example, disregards the Divine Right of Kingship *per se* in favor of a divine right of all ordinary personages in the formulation of England's traditions and governance. Eliot writes, "Not only does the nobleness of a nation depend on the presence of this national consciousness, but also the nobleness of each individual citizen" (143). And rather than identifying the noble lineage

of England's royal family, Eliot instead traces England's noble and "divine" past to a more ordinary ancestry in the "old English seamen, who, beholding a rich country with a most convenient seaboard, came, doubtless with a sense of divine warrant" (141).<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile other nineteenth-century English authors questioned the ongoing claims of monarchical and aristocratic privilege made by England's royal family and its courtiers and instead invoked themes of industrial meritocracy as the rightful origin of social or governmental supremacy. Elizabeth Gaskell's condition-of-England novels such as *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), for example, portray the captains of industry (per Thomas Carlyle's political phraseology) as a favorable and sympathetic group of rising political, cultural, economic and even religious leaders of nineteenth-century England and beyond. Further, Carlyle's many political essays and writings endorse a meritocratic worldview that privileges such values as industriousness, capitalism, and a modified version of feudalistic *noblesse oblige* in his extollation of patronage and philanthropy.<sup>4</sup> Where authors such as Austen<sup>5</sup> and the Brontë sisters narrated the intricacies of aristocratic privilege, primogeniture, class, and sanguinity,<sup>6</sup> later Victorian authors eventually took up themes that challenged these feudalistic assumptions. Novelists such as Dickens and Thackeray, for example, took up themes of

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<sup>3</sup> See Elizabeth Langland, "Nation and Nationality: Queen Victoria in the Developing Narrative of Englishness," *Remaking Queen Victoria*, ed. Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 29.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843) in which he advocates for the replacement of an outdated aristocracy with a capitalistic meritocracy.

<sup>5</sup> For a nuanced and thorough explication of Jane Austen's engagement of the concept of the Great Chain of Being, see the third chapter of Laura Mooneyham White's *Jane Austen's Anglicanism* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), titled, "Austen and the Anglican Worldview" (75–127).

<sup>6</sup> See Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1817); Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), or *Villette* (1853); or Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

social mobility, self-made ascendancy, and political or personal opportunism in their fictional *oeuvres*.<sup>7</sup>

The residual effects of the Great Chain of Being manifested themselves often throughout English fictional, essayistic, or rhetorical discourse. In many ways, the persistence of the idea of the *Scala Naturae* beyond the Enlightenment testifies to its paradigmatic position in cultural, historical, philosophical, and political ideologies even after its declared death by revolutionary thinkers. As I seek to convey in this dissertation, nineteenth-century English fiction often addresses the conundrum of the *Scala Naturae* in a post-Enlightenment world as scientific progress, democratic idealism, religious skepticism, and evolutionary biology serve as the operating themes in fictional discourse that often results in the upending of a Chain-of-Being hierarchical worldview. Because the concept of the Chain of Being is enormous—indeed, it stratifies the totality of the universe including all animate and inanimate beings and objects according to a hierarchical schema—this dissertation narrows the focus by examining in particular the

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<sup>7</sup> Thackeray's *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1848), for example, challenges a Carlylean emphasis on heroism and industriousness<sup>7</sup> and instead showcases through his character, Becky Sharpe, the unsavory aspects of social climbing, excessive consumerism and debt, and Napoleonic aspirations. Similar themes of social mobility and capital are also addressed in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860) in which the novel's protagonist, Pip, ambivalently negotiates his humble Marsh origins with his rising social prospects in London and the world beyond. Dickens's novels, in fact, are filled with allusions to and metaphors of the Great Chain of Being. The physical reminder of chains—an implicit evocation of Rousseau's famous introduction to his *Social Contract* (1762) (i.e., "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains")—abound in Dickens's fiction as symbolized by Magwitch's iron leg in *Great Expectations* or Marley's physical chains of earthly sin in *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The staircase too serves as an architectural metaphor for the fixedness of hierarchical schemas while simultaneously representing the metaphorical conduit that allows traversal along that same hierarchical scale, and Dickens' novels are cluttered with notable staircases: Mrs. Sparsit's "mighty Staircase" (221)<sup>7</sup> in *Hard Times* (1854); the stairs that creak in Pip's London apartment building in *Great Expectations*; the central stair-case in *Dombey and Son*; the staircases Esther navigates throughout John Jarndyce's *Bleak House* (1853).

ways in which the Great Chain of Being is exemplified, complicated, problematized, and in some cases even overthrown in scenes of eating where the Great Chain of Being becomes intricately connected with themes of the food chain. Carl Linnaeus, the seventeenth-century biologist who first offered a taxonomical naming system of binomial nomenclature to categorize zoological and botanical organisms, was also one of the first scientists to investigate ecological food chains and predator-prey relationships. Linnaean taxonomical biology, however, underwent increasing scrutiny as evolutionary biologists such as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer introduced the possibility of life generating not from a plenitudinous creative energy as taught in Judeo-Christian cosmological worldviews but rather from a single organism as theorized in *The Origin of Species* (1859), *Principles in Biology* (1864), and other evolutionary works of the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, the food chain becomes increasingly complicated when predatory animals are now thought to share the same original life force as that which they consume in their prey: the tautology of the food chain thereby illustrates one of the most riddling conundrums that arose in the advent of evolutionary biological theories insofar as that which one consumes is also that to which one can trace one's ancestral origins.

As the previous paragraphs attest, the avenues of interrogation of the vestiges of the Great Chain of Being in nineteenth-century fiction are endless. As such, this dissertation examines three case studies of English fiction that particularly address the riddles of the food chain vis-à-vis the philosophical concept of the Great Chain of Being as it changes throughout the trajectory of the long nineteenth century. As I argue, it is in scenes of eating where many nineteenth-century authors indeed confront the ethical implications of the claims of sovereignty, privilege, rank, nationhood, social status, and

human exceptionalism that the *Scala Naturae* supported and reinforced however much it was increasingly upended first by the revolutionary fervor of post-Enlightenment thought and later by evolutionary theories of common descent and shared ancestral origins. This dissertation, therefore, examines specifically the dietetic anxieties that the upending of the Great Chain of Being in revolutionary and evolutionary discourse posed to Romantic, Victorian, and *fin-de-siècle* audiences as illustrated in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Lewis Carroll's *Alice* tales (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [1865] and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* [1871]), and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), respectively. Where Shelley advances a vegetarian ethic to combat the often-excessive violence of revolutionary agendas, Carroll endorses an abstemiousness based in a pescetarian diet as a solution to the riddle of an evolving food chain; and Wells's dystopic vision of an evolutionary future takes a survival-of-the-fittest mentality to an excessive degree in his narration of cannibalistic justifications. Indeed, Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a novel inspired by Romanticist and revolutionary instincts, and so, this text specifically addresses the attitudes toward the Great Chain of Being in the immediate aftermath of such radical upheavals of monarchical government as witnessed in the French Revolution and the fears of Napoleonic conquest in England as well. Whereas Shelley's *Frankenstein* is inspired out of a decidedly Romantic milieu, Lewis Carroll's *Alice* tales speak to an unambiguously Victorian culture not only owing to Queen Victoria's long queenship since 1837 but also attributable to the many changes in England's demographics, urban landscape, political allegiances, scientific developments, and religious discourse since Shelley wrote her Regency period *Frankenstein* text. One of the predominant developments between Shelley's authorship of *Frankenstein* and

Carroll's publication of his *Alice* tales was the wide-scale acceptance of evolutionary theories popularized by Darwin and Spencer and other evolutionary biologists in England specifically. Thus, England's monarchical stronghold coupled by its radical evolutionary theories and its dominance in the rise of the genre of the novel thereby make England a primary location to examine the upheaval of the Great Chain of Being as an ordering paradigm of philosophical, cultural, religious, and scientific thought. And, Carroll's *Alice* texts certainly capture the ambivalence between the acceptance of the Great Chain of Being, the Divine Right of Kings, and plenitudinous notions of divine creation alongside the democratic, meritocratic, or republican idealism and the radically new conception of evolutionary biology. Finally, I selected H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* because even though it was written during Queen Victoria's lifetime, this novel captures a *fin-de-siècle* if not proto-modern sensibility quite different from the Romanticism of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or the Victorianism inherent in Carroll's *Alice* tales. Where Shelley's interest in dietetics is directly linked to her analyses of republicanism, and where Carroll's anxieties over the riddles of the food chain are attributable to evolutionary theories, Wells's novel arises out of a milieu deeply saturated in and unambiguously accepting of Darwinian notions of shared descent, survival-of-the-fittest outcomes, and evolutionary progressivism.

## A Brief Overview of Chapter One

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a novel that addresses ontological themes concerning the concept of the Chain of Being. Where Dr. Frankenstein's creature

specifically feels excluded from the Chain of Being by nature of his artificial ontology, his dietary habits suggest his human if not suprahuman nature. In *Frankenstein*, the reality of the food chain serves as a synecdochal reminder of the ethical implications of human consumption, predation, and the moral awareness of animal rights—all issues that gained prominence during Shelley’s early nineteenth-century milieu. *Frankenstein* challenges carnivorous assumptions about human dominion over animals by offering a corrective adaptation of the Adam and Eve allegory whereby the animals/beasts are typified by their self-restraint, ethical dietary practices, and ecological preservation—attributes missing from the human protagonists in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* story. Chapter One, titled, “Vegetarianism and Hierarchical Decline in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” emphasizes Shelley’s inversion not only of human-animal characteristics but also of the hierarchical ordering system endorsed by the Great Chain of Being. Shelley’s partner, Percy Bysshe Shelley, was a leading advocate for ethical approaches to eating, and his 1813 treatise, “A Vindication of Natural Diet,” directly connects a plant-based diet to the concept of original sin in the Judeo-Christian tradition: “The allegory of Adam and Eve eating of the tree of evil, and entailing upon their posterity the wrath of God, and the loss of everlasting life, admits of no other explanation, than the disease and crime that have flowed from unnatural diet” (5). Percy Bysshe Shelley’s text, no doubt, serves as a precursor to *Frankenstein* in its connection to the food chain and human morality.

My opening chapter, therefore, begins with an emphasis on Victor Frankenstein’s creation’s longing for a place along the Great Chain of Being however much he is estranged from such natural taxonomical classifications owing to his artificial construction. The “monster” confesses a desire to “become linked to the chain of



existence and events, from which [he is] now excluded” (100), and the novel thereby narrates the confusion, suffering, anxiety, and monstrosity that arises not only owing to a deformed physiognomy or imperfect skeleton but also because of an existential crisis of exclusion and desolation from the *Scala Naturae*. Shelley’s Gothic novel includes many references, allusions, and metaphors to the concept of the Great Chain of Being while similarly endorsing a vegetarian ethic in contrast to the human-dominated food chain that the Chain of Being long upheld. Like many of her contemporaries such as Frank Newton, Joseph Ritson, and Percy Bysshe Shelley who similarly espoused a vegetarian radicalism, Shelley advocated a noble restraint in food and drink not unlike the herbivorous and teetotaling status of her novel’s “monster” protagonist as the necessary precursor to an ethical, moral, and equitable world. Thus, the “monster’s” rudimentary diet of herbs, nuts, and berries (as when he states, “My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment” [99]) operates in contradistinction to the animal exploitation and cruelty exhibited by the human characters in the novel. Indeed, it is the humans who hunt, participate in whaling and fishing expeditions, wear furs, use dog-sleds and horse-drawn carriages, eat meat, cull animal organs and limbs from the slaughter house, and perform medical experiments on a variety of once-living animal creatures. As the novel progresses, Shelley increasingly emphasizes the fine line between human enlightenment and human depravity if not animality and thereby inverses the precepts of the Great Chain of Being that would place humankind fixedly above animals on a taxonomical continuum of ontological derivation.

As scholars before me have enumerated, Shelley's *Frankenstein* text displays an enormous indebtedness to John Milton's cosmological schematic from *Paradise Lost* (1667)<sup>8</sup> and to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political theories as I enumerate in my chapter on *Frankenstein*.<sup>9</sup> Not incidentally both of these authors—Milton and Rousseau—relied on the concept of the Great Chain of Being. Rousseau's famous exhortation that "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (*Contrat Social* 3) is a defiant refutation of the hierarchical ordering of the universe that the Chain of Being so long endorsed in Western civilization (and Rousseau even uses the same "chain" metaphor in his arguments against such hierarchical social arrangements). Although his political philosophy ostensibly discards the entire concept of the Great Chain of Being in favor of a republican idealism, Rousseau's works ironically uphold the taxonomical fixedness of a Chain-of-Being worldview by condemning any hubristic attempt to deify one's self above and beyond other human beings. Thus, Rousseau both advocates for the figurative loosening of the chains of hierarchy while paradoxically affirming the *Scala Naturae* as a fixed system of

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<sup>8</sup> See John B. Lamb, "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Milton's Monstrous Myth," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47.3 (1992), 303–19; Leslie Tannenbaum, "Filthy Type to Truth: Miltonic Myth in *Frankenstein*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 26 (1977), 101–13; and David Poston, "Exploring the Universe with John Milton and Mary Shelley," *The English Journal* 78.7 (1989), 28–33.

<sup>9</sup> See Paul Cantor, "The Nightmare of Romantic Idealism," in *Creature and Creator: Myth-Making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1984), 103–32; Mary Graham Lund, "Mary Godwin Shelley and the Monster," *University of Kansas Review* 28 (1962), 254–5; David Marshall, "Frankenstein, or Rousseau's Monster: Sympathy and Speculative Eyes," in *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), 178–227; Milton Millhauser, "The Noble Savage in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," in *Notes and Queries* 190.12 (15 June 1946), 248–50; James O'Rourke, "'Nothing More Unnatural': Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau," *English Literary History* 56.3 (Fall 1989), 543–69; and Judith Weissman, "Mary Shelley: Fiends and Families," in *Half Savage and Hardy and Free: Women and Rural Radicalism in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1989), 123–38.

natural order which ought not be renegotiated by humankind's ambitions to overcome it or one another.

Similarly, Milton also relied heavily on a Chain-of-Being schematic in the construction of *Paradise Lost* (1667) especially as the Miltonic legend depends on a worldview which consists of gradations of angels and daemons with humankind positioned as a "middle link" between the spiritual and material worlds of cosmological existence. Shelley too incorporates the angelology of a Miltonic worldview into her *Frankenstein* text even as she inverts the fixed gradations that Milton portrayed in his seventeenth-century canonical work. When she writes that "The angel becomes a malignant devil" (Shelley 154), she not only invokes a Luciferian descent as Milton describes but she also enacts a radical renegotiation of those who were once considered supreme and noble (i.e., the humans) over and above that which was once debased, depraved, and brutish (i.e., the animal or the "monster").

Shelley's text similarly alludes to Alexander Pope's neoclassical poem, "Essay on Man" (1732–34) which delineates in poetic form the concept of the Great Chain of Being. Pope's poem identifies as the downfall of humanity a hubristic ambition to become like the angels and/or to triumph over god. Pride, according to Pope, is the root cause of human frailty, and such pride often manifests itself into a futile hope of transcending one's fixed human identity into the realm of the angels. Pope writes, "In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies" (30 / 1:123), and he continues by asserting that

Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,

Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.

Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell,  
 Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebel:  
 And who but wishes to invert the laws  
 Of order, sins against the Eternal Cause. (30–31 / 1:125–30)

Pope's Chain-of-Being worldview thus holds that this aspiration toward divinity (rather than an acceptance of one's humanity and natural laws) results in a sinful and disordered universe—a claim that Shelley also emphasizes throughout her *Frankenstein* text as my first chapter enumerates.

One of the overarching conundrums that Shelley exposes in her *Frankenstein* tale is that to which Lovejoy refers as the “ethics of the middle link” (201). Indeed, can one only descend down the Chain of Being into the sphere of the daemons and the brutish animals with never a hope toward a divine ascendancy? How is it that Victor Frankenstein (and his “monster” as well) can be so irrefutably demoted to a daemonical sphere but never promoted into an angelic one? According to Shelley's worldview, such angelic ascendancy is certainly possible. Such an ascent begins by correcting the first corporeal sin of Adam and Eve in the consumption of forbidden foods. Only through an herbivoric diet absent the consumption of animal flesh might one achieve such spiritual ascent that is otherwise denied in the “ethics of the middle link” (ibid.).

Just as Shelley challenges the Great (food) Chain of Being and its claims toward human superiority over other sentient creatures, Shelley similarly interrogates other hierarchical structures dependent on the schema of the *Scala Naturae*. Throughout her *Frankenstein* narrative, Shelley not only advocates a vegetarian lifestyle, but she

similarly questions hierarchizations of governance, religiosity, and aristocracy. Indeed, Shelley's novel suggests that the adumbration of a peaceful and equitable world begins with a plant-centric diet, and her novel similarly intimates the possibilities of democracy, religious pluralism, complementary marriage, and harmonious relationships that such a radical dietetics might precipitate. Alternately, *Frankenstein* is filled with reminders of a decaying or ruinous past brought about by unethical practices of governance, religious order, and aristocratic privilege. Shelley scatters throughout her novel scenes of dilapidated castles that dot the Rhine River to serve as reminders of defeated monarchies and royal families that have dwindled in comparison to the sublime sovereignty of nature and time.

Moreover, Shelley's text also reveals a decidedly anti-Catholic sentiment first in its indebtedness to Milton's seventeenth-century *Paradise Lost*—a text that disavows any papal allegiances and authority—but also in its secondary scene of Ingolstadt. Indeed, Frankenstein's arrival at this university town not coincidentally coincides with the historical creation of Adam Weishaupt's deistic and republican-oriented secret society of the Illuminati founded in 1776 (see *Frankenstein* 24, n1). Moreover, Shelley includes references to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" which conjures the dilapidation of a former Roman Catholic monastery and the decaying power of the Roman Catholic Church in a post-Reformation England. Further, one of the offstage villains of the *Frankenstein* text is Justine Moritz's evil priestly confessor who convinces her stainless soul to confess a sin she never in fact committed. Justine bemoans her fate when she cries,

“Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments, if I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me; all looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition. What could I do? In an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly miserable.” (56)

Time and time again, Shelley undermines any kind of hierarchical paradigm whether it be local or national governance, papal or priestly authority, or something as elemental as the food chain. As Chapter One thereby argues, Shelley’s novel not only advocates a vegetarian dietetics as a fundamental precursor toward a republican idealism that so many Enlightenment thinkers imagined but never realized, but Shelley also inscribes into her *Frankenstein* text the dissolution and ruination of hierarchical structures of government, social order, and religion—especially the hierarchically dominated Roman Church of the Holy See—as a fulfillment of such herbivoric revolutionism.

## A Brief Overview of Chapter Two

Chapter Two, ““Un-dish-cover the fish, or dishcover the riddle?”: The Riddle of the Food Chain and the Great Chain of Being in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice Tales*,” takes as its subject the food chain and the *Scala Naturae* in Carroll’s two *Alice* tales. Throughout her journeys through the worlds of Wonderland and the Looking-Glass, Alice’s dietary

impulses are complicated by the animism of her food. In a world where even the pudding is animated, what is left to eat? One must still eat *something* after all. By novel's end, Alice suggests not a bat or a mouse or a rat as a suitable dinner for her feline companions, but rather oysters, fish, and other sea creatures to satisfy Alice's and her cat's food cravings; we might even take as the moral of Alice's Looking-Glass education a pescetarian abstemiousness as a suitable and ethical dietary program. Unlike Shelley's vegetarian endorsements, Carroll's *Alice* tales often include riddles about fish that illustrate the tautological nature of the food chain owing to the evolutionary theories of shared descent and common ancestry however much it seems to be a teleological predator-prey system of eating. When Alice rises above her own rank to become the presiding queen of Looking-Glass country, the fixed hierarchy of the *Scala Naturae* disintegrates into a confusion exemplified by the Red Queen's dissolution into the soup-tureen at the raucous coronation banquet.

Carroll includes in his *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* texts a variety of riddles, anecdotes, and dialogic exchange about and between the fishes of Victorian menus and recipes such as those enumerated in Isabella Beeton's *Household Management* (1861), for example. Oysters, whiting fishes, lobster, snails, and mock turtle soup are but some of the popularized first-course dishes in Victorian diets (as Chapter Two of this dissertation argues). In typical Carrollian fashion, these fish become anthropomorphized down to the shoes on their footless bodies as per the oysters of Carroll's "Walrus and the Carpenter" poem. Carroll repeatedly uses puns, euphemisms, and suggestive metaphors to animate the fish dishes he inscribes into his children's tale. In the language of the Great Chain of Being, for example, Carroll makes the whiting fish condescend to the level of the benthic

or bottom-feeding lobsters to attend the quadrille ball, and, in so doing, the whiting fish falls down the paradigmatic social ladder. Meanwhile, characters such as the Gryphon, the Mock Turtle, and even the Jabberwock exist outside of the *Scala Naturae* owing to their fictitious origins not unlike Frankenstein's nameless creation who similarly is denied a spot on the taxonomical scale of ontological order. Moreover, Carroll's puns at the expense of the *Scala Naturae* correspond with the taxonomical scale of zoological classification introduced first by Linnaeus in his *Systema Naturae* (1758) in which the whiting fish indeed belongs in a higher rung of the *Pisces* family whereas the lobsters fall under the lower *Insecta* familial categorization. Further, Darwin's *Origin of Species* specifically argues that fish, insects, and amphibious waterborne creatures are lesser evolved species than mammals and other land-roaming animals owing to their closer proximity and resemblance to the singular primordial ancestor about which he theorizes. As such, Carroll's text offers a richly varied and highly nuanced interrogation of the ethics of pescetarianism in a polyvalent framework of narrative, poetic, conceptual, societal, taxonomical, zoological, and evolutionary discourse.

That Carroll repeatedly emphasizes the first-course "fish" dishes above all other elaborate dinner menus, we might argue that Carroll's piscatorial fixations relate to his own biographical abstemious approach to eating. For instead of dining on the gluttonous four or five courses that Victorian bourgeois culture esteemed, Carroll prescribes exactly one course, the fish dish, so as to fulfill his abstemious approach to dining and eating. Alternately, those characters defined by their gluttonous appetites—the Queen of Hearts' jurisdiction over the tarts; or the Duchess's suckling infant—suffer the degradation and devolutionary consequences of their gluttonous appetites. As Chapter Two similarly