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The Untraceable Line Between Monstrosity and Humanity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Introduction

This work will focus on Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein*, exploring fundamental questions of what constitutes humanity and monstrosity. At its core, the novel grapples with the repercussions of unchecked scientific ambition and society's role in the creation and ostracization of a scientifically constructed but eloquent and emotionally complex "monster." In light of this, this examines the presence of the blurred boundaries between humanity and monstrosity through the lenses of emotional depth, societal double standards, and the physical, moral, and psychological dimensions of the Creature.

The literary work provokes vital discussions in literary studies on scientific responsibility, the treatment of difference, and moral ambiguity. Key to this analysis is interpreting "monstrosity" not as an innate state of corruption, but as a complex interplay of choice and circumstance shaped by the environment. Likewise, "humanity" encompasses flawed characters like Victor capable of monstrous selfishness and negligence despite seeming socially "respectable." Defining these terms requires looking beyond surface assumptions. Using close reading, analytical, and critical dimensions, this project investigates the ethical dimensions within the Creature's emotional eloquence and Victor's ambitious overreaching.

Using as methodology the method of Deconstruction which is apt to tackle *Frankenstein* because it allows interrogating the uneven attribution of monstrosity to the Creature's physical appearance versus Victor's ambitious yet negligent scientific pursuits. A deconstructionist analysis also illuminates societal double standards that label the abandoned Creature as inherently "monstrous", while glossing over Victor's morally

questionable actions that precipitated tragedy. This will be very useful in the analysis to find the whole text might mean something else.

While substantial articles and critiques examined in-depth topics the analysis of the monster in the novel, involving the irresponsibility of the creator; just a few adequately tackle the nuanced interplay between compassion and rejection, ambition's dangers, and the uneven attribution of "monstrosity" facing the societally-ostracized Creature despite his capacity for sympathy. This thesis argues Shelley purposefully blurs "monster" and "human," through the lenses of emotional depth, societal double standards, and the physical, moral, and psychological dimensions of the Creature. Analyzing Victor's morally questionable actions and the Creature's marginalization sheds light on how narrow assumptions perpetuate harm against those deemed unlike the dominant order. Contributing to the idea that real monstrosity lies within humanity, which lets us with homogenized concepts of "monster" and "human".

Each chapter explores the physical, moral, and emotional facets of monstrosity and humanity. The first chapter will be focused on Humanity and the way that in the novel, this concept blurs through the juxtaposition of the Creature's emotional depth and capacity for empathy against Victor's self-serving actions in reckless pursuit of glory. The second chapter will examine how the concept of Monstrosity is explored through the physical appearance, and the moral and psychological dimensions of the Creature, highlighting the consequences of unchecked scientific ambition, societal rejection, and the blurring of lines between the Creature and his creator, delving into the complexities of human nature and the responsibilities that come with creation. The third chapter will be devoted to the way the blurred line between the concepts in Frankenstein is accentuated by the societal double

standard, where Victor's actions do not receive the same label of "monstrous", while his creation is immediately branded as a monster.

Chapter 1: Humanity

In Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, the topic of humanity is touched in-depth, questioning what it means to be truly human, which can be a difficult question to answer due to the mix of behaviors and actions that are present throughout the story, making quite hard to know where to trace the line in which we can consider as the loss of humanity. In the narrative, humanity blurs through the juxtaposition of the Creature's emotional depth and capacity for empathy against Victor's self-serving actions in reckless pursuit of glory.

To explore further the concept, it is important to analyze the different perceptions and what is said about it. Calcagno and Fuentes in their article revise different points of view to be able to give an answer to the question: What makes us human? They concluded that: "It is this cultural and cognitive reality, lived simultaneously through social, linguistic, symbolic, and evolutionary contexts, that makes humans truly distinct from other beings on the planet" (194). This suggests that what sets humans apart is their unique combination of cultural, cognitive, social, linguistic, symbolic, and evolutionary aspects. However, while this only focuses on evolutionary social contexts distinguishing humanity, the Creature is denied exactly that context via society's rejection. Yet, he still acquired advanced cognitive abilities like language, reasoning, and emotional sensibility that, according to the text, can be considered humanlike, even though he continued to be treated as subhuman due to his appearance. Despite the Being's aspiration to culture and symbols of humanity (society, friendship, literacy), society's rejection barred him from realizing a distinctively human form of life. Shelley tragically plays out what complete exclusion from the evolutionary social context does in eroding the Creature's humanity. If it is regarding that criteria, Victor's creation can indeed be considered human, and it can be observed

when he claims the following: “But it was all a dream: no Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam’s supplication to his Creator; but where was mine? he had abandoned me, and, in the bitterness of my heart, I cursed him” (106). He exhibits emotional sensibility, expressing loneliness and a desire for companionship, emphasizing his capacity for complex feelings despite society’s rejection. Besides, the Creature acknowledges the existence of his creator, seeking a deeper connection with him, demonstrating his aspiration for relationships, family, and a sense of belonging. All those elements are considered key aspects of human culture.

Nevertheless, more examples in the narrative indicate the necessity of bonding with others and creating relationships. Captain Robert Walton, the Artic explorer to whom Frankenstein narrates his story also shares a desire for companionship and connection. His yearning for a friend is evident in his letters to his sister: “I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavor to regulate my mind” (9). Walton expresses his longing for a friend who can understand him without judgment. He desires someone who will not dismiss his dreams as romantic and who cares enough about him to help him navigate his thoughts and emotions. It mirrors the Creature’s attempts to communicate and connect with others on a deeper level that can see beyond his physical appearance.

Furthermore, Coupland in his article speaks about the inherent duality within human nature, he states that: “All of us are born with the capacity to do great, selfless things as well as the capacity to do terrible things to one another. Which capacity is unleashed depends on the people and experiences that influence our lives” (161). It explains the intrinsic duality in human nature, saying that we each hold the simultaneous potential for

altruism and compassion as well as selfishness and destructiveness towards others, but the moral arc we ultimately trace greatly depends on the nurturing or trauma we receive from those guiding our development on the long path. This directly connects with the novel where the character of Victor embodies this duality. On the one hand, he possesses the intellectual brilliance to create life, but on the other hand, his actions lead to tragic consequences. His ambition and desire for scientific glory drive him to play with the forces of life and nature, ultimately resulting in the abandonment and suffering of his own creation. This can be seen in the narrative: “Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (35). This reflects Frankenstein’s realization of the aftermath of his desire and pursuit of knowledge. His intellectual brilliance allows him to create life, however, his unchecked ambition leads to a tragic outcome, highlighting even more the duality of his character. In addition, the Creature, despite his grotesque appearance, demonstrates a capacity for both good and evil. He seeks love, understanding, and companionship, displaying selfless qualities. However, societal rejection and mistreatment push him towards darker actions as he seeks revenge on those who have wronged him. Therefore, he claims that: “I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me?” (119). Here, he articulates the link between his misery and malicious actions, emphasizing the influence of societal rejection on his behavior, supporting the idea that external factors, in this case, the cruelty of society, contribute to the Creature’s descent into darkness.

Moreover, the characters in the novel also have a say when it comes to humans, and Walton expresses his opinion by saying: “I shall certainly find no friend on the wide ocean, nor even here in Archangel, among merchants and seamen. Yet some feelings, unallied to the dross of human nature, beat even in these rugged bosoms” (9). Here, we can see an insight into his views on human nature where Robert laments that he is unlikely to find a sympathetic friend aboard the ship or among the business-minded seamen in the northern Russian port city of Archangelsk. He sees them as practical people focused on objectives rather than emotional bonds. However, while acknowledging sailors and merchants prioritize rugged, unrefined goals, Walton notes they still possess “some feelings” that emerge despite being disconnected from the “dross” (something considered worthless, rubbish) dominating average human nature. Thus, Walton’s view of human nature is predominantly negative with him referring to humans as “dross”, establishing an overall cynical perspective on humanity. However, the glimmer of optimism shows up when he says “rugged bosoms” still contain “some feelings, unallied to the dross of human nature”, indicating Robert’s belief that a spark of something finer can glow even in those otherwise anchored to base interests. So while overwhelmingly despairing that few rise above dullness, Walton allows that latent potential for connecting meaningfully — “feelings” unmoored from wider defects in human nature — can occasionally be uncovered. A sole hopeful clause amidst a harsh depiction.

We get another interesting glimpse of Robert Walton’s point of view about the topic in one of his first interactions with Victor: “Certainly; it would indeed be very impertinent and inhuman in me to trouble you with any inquisitiveness of mine” (14). In this case, he uses the word “inhuman” to describe behavior lacking consideration or empathy for another

person's feelings. This quote comes from a scene where Walton rescued Frankenstein, who just confided that recalling his own story causes intense and painful emotions. Therefore, he means that it would be cruel, callous, and lacking in compassion if Robert were to insist Victor satisfy his curiosity by explaining and discussing traumatic memories that clearly distress him. He does not want to pressure him to open his emotional wounds simply to answer idle questions that would completely disregard the Doctor's dignity and agony. In essence, by "inhuman" Walton means insensitive, uncaring behavior inflicting harm without empathy for suffering. It conveys an absence of humanity's warmer, protective inclinations in dealing tactfully with another's vulnerability. We can see how Robert's perspective on human nature is not positive, and how he has a clear thought of what being "inhuman" means to him.

Victor also expresses his opinion about the topic stating: "A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity" (37). Here, he sets an idealistic view of human development, mentioning that the pinnacle of being human means maintaining constant serene poise, undisturbed by intense emotions or impulses that disturb inner peacefulness. It is a deeply embedded part of the human condition to experience passions, desires, and drives that can unsettle a balanced, tranquil mindset. However, allowing those volatile feelings or urges to actually disturb one's equilibrium represents an imperfection in humankind's potential. Therefore, this suggests that human beings have an obligation to rise above innate tendencies towards messier emotional fluctuations, actively preserving the harmony of the mind instead. Nonetheless, Frankenstein contradicts his lofty ideals of

human perfection with his own intense emotional turbulence that arises after he brings the Creature to life:

I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. [...] He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. 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. (39-40)

The Doctor cannot endure the appearance of the being that he created, which exposes his hypocrisy. Rather than calm poise, he spirals into revulsion and hysteria, invoicing the very volatile passions he prescribed humans transcend. This powerfully contradicts his belief that ideal humankind does not let disturbing desires impact mental balance. Facing his creation unleashes intense feelings that completely rupture his equilibrium as he fails to practice the perfect stability he preaches humans should maintain.

Ben in her text discusses several ideas of humanity also relating it to the Bible: “Humanity is a virtue linked with basic ethics of altruism derived from the human condition. It also symbolizes human love and compassion towards each other” (7). This conveys the idea that humanity is intimately tied to ethical principles like altruism, suggesting that this virtue arises from shared human experiences and symbolizes the capacity for love and compassion in our interactions with one another, encouraging the practice of treating others with kindness and empathy as a fundamental aspect of being human. However, I think that is an

unrealistic point of view, the fact that you do not possess these all good qualities does not mean that you lack of the virtue of humanity because being human does not allude to perfection. Humans, in general, exhibit a wide range of behaviors, including both altruistic and selfish tendencies. Some individuals may act with compassion and empathy, while others may act out of self-interest or even engage in harmful actions, and we can see it in the way the Creature is rejected, the way acted out of anger and started killing people, or even when Victor decided to remain in silence during Justine's trial. He was very well aware that the being he created was responsible for William's death, yet he chose not to reveal this information, which could have saved her from being executed.

Williams in his book talks about humans and machines, he states that: "some differences in the behavior of human groups are explained in terms of their different cultures and not in biological terms" (14). I agree with this idea, in the way that cultural conditioning/context can twist even sophisticated intellect toward destructive ends devoid of compassion. However, he then says that this encourages "the idea that culture explains differences and biology explains similarities. But this is not necessarily so" (14). It does not encourage it at all. It is clear that culture and context are involved in the differences in human behavior, however, biology can also explain differences, for example, when we talk about the Creature, at the beginning him being different is explained through science, and the fact that he was not created as any other human being (considering that he was made of animals parts), yet the way that he acts, thinks and feels is part of human nature, and the way that his behavior changes are due to the harsh environment he was exposed to.

To conclude, it can be seen that humanity it is touched in-depth throughout the novel, it can seem blurry when the Creature's emotional depth and capacity for empathy is

compared to Victor's self-serving actions in reckless pursuit of glory. Humanity is not defined by your physical appearance but by the way that your behavior and actions are shaped by the culture or the environment that surrounds you, considering that Victor and his creations are very much humanlike, despite the flaws and the malicious actions.

Chapter 2: Monstrosity

In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the topic of Monstrosity is explored through the physical appearance, and the moral and psychological dimensions of the Creature, highlighting the consequences of unchecked scientific ambition, societal rejection, and the blurring of lines between the Creature and his creator, delving into the complexities of human nature and the responsibilities that come with creation.

It is interesting to note that the concept of "monster" in the novel is always used with a negative connotation. For example, when Victor says: "I dreaded to behold this monster; but I feared still more that Henry should see him" (42). This refers to the "monster" as a figure of fear or horror, where Frankenstein expresses apprehension and reluctance at the prospect of encountering or revealing his creation, which he considers monstrous, to Henry. Additionally, even though the word "monster" still carries a negative connotation, this time is used by Victor to refer to himself: "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" (66). The Doctor starts feeling the weight of Justine's fake confession, and "almost" starts thinking that he is the monster based on the judgment made by his creation. This time the term is associated more with condemnation, which suggests that the word is not merely a description but a harsh and judgmental label imposed on Frankenstein.

Another point to consider is that as readers, we only have access to Victor's narrative perspective, so how can we fully trust or validate the Creature's version of events? Frankenstein's account of the Being's inner thoughts and feelings is necessarily mediated

through his own subjectivity. So we have some facts to consider: As mentioned, Victor has clear biases, so we take his narration with skepticism. This applies to his depictions of the Creature's psyche. We recognize he may mischaracterize or misinterpret things. Besides, the Creation's first-person account is nested within the Doctor's overall framing narrative. This "story within a story" device gives readers partial direct access to the Creature's voice. His eloquent self-articulation engenders reader empathy, which helps us to understand that the structural devices and compelling emotional resonance encourage our sympathy and identification regardless.

To explore further the concept of monstrosity, it is important to show the different existent perceptions about it. There are different conceptions of the concept of monster and monstrosity. In Adams' article, "Monstrosity", he states: "monstrosity more obviously helps to define the manifold meanings we attach to the idea of the human: monstrosity is incarnated in those bodies and forces that delimit or threaten or defy that norm" (776-777). Here, he discusses how the concept of monstrosity is used to highlight and define the various ways we understand humanity, as it can be associated with bodies or forces that deviate from, challenge, or threaten the established norms of what it means to be human.

Huet in her article discusses the concept of "monsters" in the 19th century and how they relate to the idea of the "esthetic of the signature", stating that:

The "scientific" production of monsters in the nineteenth century will also exemplify the esthetic of the signature. ... it reaffirms the seductive power of the monstrous as aberration and the creative power of the savant and artist as absolute father. The categories a-nomos/norma, physis and techne rearrange the elements of

representation in such a way that the monster appears as the most extreme case of an almost natural law (76-77)

This suggests that during that time there was a specific way of creating or categorizing “monsters” that reflected a certain aesthetic or artistic quality. This could imply that even in the scientific study of abnormalities or aberrations, there was an element of personal expression or style involved. It is also mentioned "a-nomos/norma," which could refer to the absence or violation of established norms, "physis" which often relates to nature, and "techne" which pertains to art or craft, suggesting that these categories were used to rearrange or reinterpret how monsters were represented. In this reinterpretation, monsters were seen as extreme examples of deviations from what might be considered a "natural law" or normality. In the novel, that can be seen as an embodiment of an extreme deviation from natural laws. It explores the scientific and artistic creation of a monstrous being, the allure of the abnormal, the creative power (Victor), and the consequences of the extreme departure from the natural order.

Therefore, we can take into consideration certain aspects to refer to these concepts in the novel. Mary Shelley skillfully weaves outstanding elements together to explore the multifaceted nature of monstrosity while also examining the broader themes of scientific ethics, societal prejudice, and the human capacity for both good and evil. First, the Creature’s physical appearance is one of the most important aspects of the story. Victor Frankenstein’s scientific experiments led to the creation of a being with grotesque features, including yellow skin, watery eyes, and black lips. The author uses the Monster’s outward form to illustrate society’s tendency to judge based on physical looks, emphasizing how superficial judgments can cause misunderstanding and prejudice. In the following passage,

we can see Victor reflecting on his creation and expressing his initial intentions and reactions to the monster's appearance:

His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful.

Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (39)

At first, he describes how he carefully chose and constructed the body, making sure that its limbs and facial features. He also mentions the word “lustrous” which refers to his very shiny hair along with the whiteness of his teeth, which were considered “luxuriances”, which refers to the quality of being pleasantly thick or full, however, this created an unpleasant contrast with his watery eyes. It is noticeable the state of shock he was in while observing what he had brought to life, being in disbelief because the result was not what he expected. Besides, the depiction of the Monster's skin highlights his unsettling physical characteristics. Despite some good aspects, such as the flowing black hair and white teeth, Frankenstein underscores that these features only serve to make his creation's overall appearance more disturbing, illustrating the stark contrast between the initial reaction to create something beautiful and the gruesome reality of the being he has brought to life, highlighting the consequences of tampering with nature in the novel.

Furthermore, we can observe the Monster's reflection on how his experiences and suffering have led him to embrace evil as a response to his despair, showing the blurring of

lines between victim and perpetrator in the novel, highlighting the complexity of human nature and the moral ambiguities of his actions. This can be seen in the following quote: “I had cast off all feeling, subdued all anguish to riot in the excess of my despair. Evil thenceforth became my good” (188). Here, the being created by Frankenstein reveals how he has undergone a profound emotional transformation. He begins by stating that he had “cast off all feeling”, which suggests that he initially experienced anguish, pain, and a sense of being wronged. However, as time passes and his suffering intensifies, he reaches a point where he “subdued all anguish” and, in doing so, loses touch with his human emotions. This emotional suppression is a consequence of the relentless rejection and mistreatment he faces from society. This illustrates the way that the roles of victim and perpetrator become blurred in the novel. In the beginning, he is clearly the victim of Victor’s scientific experimentation and subsequent rejection. Nonetheless, as the story progresses, the Creature begins to commit acts that society deems evil, such as murder and destruction. His transformation from victim to perpetrator challenges the traditional narrative of good and evil, making us question who is truly at fault.

Shelley uses this character to explore the moral complexity of human nature. The novel raises questions about the extent to which external circumstances and societal rejection can drive an individual to commit harmful actions, also emphasizing the blurring of lines between humanity and monstrosity, highlighting the complex and morally ambiguous nature of human action and the impact that they have on the transformation to a monster. Regarding this, Benedetti, in her article “The Misunderstood Monstrous: An Analysis of the Word “Monster” in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein”, discusses how the creature is often referred to as a “monster” by several individuals, including filmmakers,

authors, and characters within the original book. The text suggests that while the Being exhibits monstrous characteristics, such as its abnormal body and murderous behavior, it also displays a more human side driven by desires. However, society and those who interact with the Creature tend to reduce it to the role of just a “monster” due to its appearance. This labeling and societal expectations push the creature to fulfill the role others have assigned to it, leading to its fate, stating that: “Societal focus on this abnormality suggests that, like the characters within the novel, we have reduced the Being to less than a sum of his parts, labeling a physiognomy that frightens us with the word “monster”” (6). In essence, I agree with this idea, it definitely highlights how society tends to simplify and stereotype based on outward differences, ignoring their complexity and humanity. However, I think that it is also very relevant to mention Victor, who in spite of his considered normal aspect, also acts in ways that are morally incorrect according to societal views.

Victor’s initial act of creation can be considered a questionable action, crossing ethical limits by pushing the boundaries of science and playing the role of a God. He attempts to defy the natural order of life and death. He acknowledges the moral implications of his actions when he says: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me” (36). Here, his ambition and ego drive him to undertake a morally questionable experiment.

Erle and Hendry, in their article “Monsters: interdisciplinary explorations in monstrosity.” explore the enduring significance of monsters in various aspects of society, from literature to academia, and how they both reflect and influence societal concerns and values. They claim that: “The monstrous quality of life comes to the fore in Frankenstein’s laboratory and at the very moment the new species opens its eyes. ... he recognises that he

has created a monster and that he is unable to handle it. A monster is always alive and, therefore, a negation of human values and, therefore, ‘valuable only as a foil’” (4). This suggests that the truly monstrous nature of life is revealed when Victor’s creature comes to life. He initially panics but eventually realizes that he has created a being he cannot control. This also points out that a monster, being inherently different from humans, challenges human values and serves primarily as a contrast to them, reflecting on the moral and ethical implications of creating something that defies the norms and values of humanity. However, I argue that the creature's monstrosity may not be just a result of its existence but rather a consequence of societal rejection and mistreatment. Besides, I do not think that there is too much difference between what is called a “monster” in the novel and the humans. Shelley allows us to empathize with the Being, highlighting its capacity for good and evil, which we can also take into account as something very humane.

We can see it through Victor’s actions and the complex relationship between creation, ambition, and the consequences of playing with the boundaries of life and death. It portrays how his initial pursuit of knowledge and creation transforms into horror and disgust when he says: “I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body ... but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (39). His creation is driven by reckless ambition and lack of consideration for the moral and ethical consequences of his actions, not taking responsibility for the being he brought to life, leaving it to fend for itself in a hostile world. The Creature’s subsequent isolation and rejection by society makes him increasingly bitter and vengeful, ultimately leading to tragic events. Victor’s repulsion of

his own creation demonstrates how society's fear and prejudice can turn a being into a monster.

Lastly, it is challenging to trace the line between what we can consider a "monster", we would not only refer to the physical characteristics but also consider the moral conceptions. Many of Victor's and the Creature's flaws come from human nature, however, everything depends on the societal perspective. The Being's initial isolation and rejection drive him to commit acts of violence and revenge, suggesting that society's treatment of him plays a significant role in reinforcing his monstrousness, which makes us consider society as the real "monster" of the story. Conversely, Victor's actions, while morally questionable, are influenced by societal norms and expectations, such as the Enlightenment-era belief in the pursuit of knowledge at any cost. The exploration of monstrosity in the novel delves into the physical, moral, and psychological aspects of the Creature and Frankenstein, underscoring the repercussions of unrestrained scientific ambition, societal alienation, and the blurred lines between victim and wrongdoer, revealing the intricate facets of human nature and the responsibilities tied to creation.

Chapter 3: Where does the line start getting blurry between Monstrosity and Humanity?

In this third chapter, it is important to dive into the division of the most significant concepts of Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*. It is challenging to trace the line where humanity and monstrosity differ from each other. The limit between those concepts becomes increasingly indistinct as the story highlights the notion that what society deems monstrous is often a reflection of its own biases and fears. The societal perspective on monstrosity is highly selective and biased. Victor's actions throughout the story are morally questionable and they may be considered "monstrous", however, the society in the novel largely overlooks his transgressions, highlighting the inconsistency and subjectivity of societal judgment. On the other hand, the creature's appearance and actions, which are driven by loneliness and desire for connection, are met with immediate rejection and condemnation by society, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of the judgments and monstrosity as a social construction. In light of this, the blurred line between the concepts in *Frankenstein* is accentuated by the societal double standard, where Victor's actions do not receive the same label of "monstrous", while his creation is immediately branded as a monster.

Sharpe in his article discusses that: "The term monster is another name for hybridity or 'otherness within sameness,' and typically refers to a creature that is both, and simultaneously, human and non-human" (385). This means that the term monster is often used to describe beings or creatures that blur the lines between what is human and what is not, embodying human and non-human characteristics simultaneously. It is a term used to denote hybridity or the coexistence of different elements within a single entity. A monster is

often seen as a being not easily categorized as purely human or non-human. When we talk about this hybridity, it refers to the blending of different elements or characteristics, suggesting that it is a creature with a combination of human traits with what are considered “non-human” traits, creating a unique and often unsettling mix. The duality can be manifested in various ways, such as a being having a human-like appearance but possessing superhuman abilities, or having non-physical attributes but displaying human emotions and behavior. Monsters challenge our understanding of identity and provoke questions about what it means to be different or unique in a world where we often seek to categorize and classify things. I disagree with that idea because instead of referring to that as hybridity, I would consider that it symbolizes a certain degree of homogeneity within humanity. There is an inherent, universal aspect of “monstrousness” present within every human being, and this quality is what ultimately defines us as humans, asserting that those aspects are integral to our shared human nature. It is key to consider the universality of flaws and imperfections in human beings. We all have our individual shortcomings, mistakes, or moral defects, these flaws are not exclusive to any particular group or individual; they are part of the human condition. Thus, it can be argued there is a shared “monstrous” element within each person, making it a part of our collective humanity. Besides, while we all share these inherent imperfections, the specific manifestations of the monstrous characteristics can vary widely from one individual to another. This diversity of experiences and expressions of our imperfections does not necessarily indicate hybridity but rather highlights the rich tapestry of human existence.

There is a societal selective judgment that exists in Shelley’s work, where Victor's actions compared to the creatures underscores the arbitrary nature of defining monstrosity

and humanity. When he talks to Walton says: “You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been” (17). Here, Victor acknowledges his pursuit of knowledge and ambition. Despite the consequences of his actions, society does not label him a monster because ambition is a very human characteristic, which highlights the inconsistency in societal judgment. Here, we can see monstrosity as repressed humanity. Victor’s ambition to transcend conventional boundaries and unlock the secrets of life reflects an innate human desire for knowledge and achievement. However, the consequences of his unchecked ambition are profound, as he admits: Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (35). In this case, Frankenstein acknowledges the peril of his pursuit, revealing the internal conflict between his aspirations and the tragic outcome of his actions. This serves as a warning about the dangers of unchecked ambition and pursuit of knowledge without ethical responsibilities. In essence, the Doctor tells Walton it is better to be content with limited knowledge and remain in one’s narrow worldview, rather than constantly aspire for more knowledge and achievement to the point of overreaching boundaries and limits. The core lesson Victor imparts from his own example is that ambition transformed him into a monstrous figure who pursued knowledge without regard for consequences. He brought only suffering and ruin upon himself and his loved ones — considering the death of his beloved Elizabeth and his best friend Henry, and Justine’s execution. He thus counsels Robert to learn from his mistakes. This prompts the readers to question whether Frankenstein’s so-called monstrosity arises from an inherently dark nature or from societal expectations that push individuals to extremes in the pursuit of knowledge.

Merkelback talks about what aspects are relevant when it comes to the way society sees monsters, mentioning that: “Firstly, behavior is more commonly assessed than appearance, but appearance does matter” (155). The first part of the quote suggests that, generally, the assessment of monstrosity tends to focus more on behavior than physical appearance. However, I disagree because even though she mentioned that “appearance does matter” she also thinks that “behavior is more commonly assessed”, which challenges the perspective that is portrayed in the novel, where the concept is assigned to the Creature, and in the beginning, it did not matter if he had good intentions or not, he was immediately judged by the way he looked (even his own creator did it). We can see it in William’s reaction: ““Let me go,” he cried; “monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces—You are an ogre—Let me go, or I will tell my papa”” (117). In this case, Victor’s younger brother reacts with fear and judgment upon encountering the Creature. The use of terms like “monster” and “ugly wretch” directly reflects the negative perception based on the Being’s physical appearance. The association of Victor’s creation with terms like “ogre” emphasizes the immediate and harsh assessment of monstrosity solely based on external features.

In addition, Collings claims: “Shelley gives monstrosity a human dimension. For her critique to strike home, she demonstrates that the creature is not only human, but is the exemplary figure of the human in a world that seeks to master its essence. Where subjectivity is in threat, its best response is to take the form of an unconquerable monstrosity” (197). When it comes to this idea, I totally agree because this suggests that Shelley’s portrayal of monstrosity goes beyond a mere manifestation of otherness or grotesqueness; instead, she imbues the Creature with a genuine human essence, implying

that he is not just a monstrous being but is, fundamentally, a complex and multifaceted representation of humanity. Besides, The emphasis on subjectivity, the challenges to human essence, and the creature's role as an exemplar of humanity contribute to Shelley's critique of societal norms and the consequences of attempting to master the essence of what it means to be human. It can understood better with the following fragment of the narrative: "I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me?" (119). Here, the Being expresses his misery and questions why he should pity humans who shun and hate him, highlighting his emotional complexity which emphasizes his capacity for suffering and misery, qualities that resonate with the human experience.

Lestel, in her article, discusses the question of Why are we so fond of monsters? According to that, she states: "I can voluntarily become a monster, and true monstrosity does not consist in whether I am a monster or not, but whether I expose my monstrosity to others and am confronted, in spite of myself, by the monstrosity of others. The era where the world was split between monsters and non-monsters is over" (266). In this case, it is suggested that an individual has the capacity to voluntarily become a "monster", implying that monstrosity, in this context, is not solely a fixed trait but can be adopted or embraced by choice, introducing the notion that individuals have agency in determining their own perceived monstrosity. This challenges traditional notions of the already-mentioned concept by emphasizing its subjective and relational nature, encouraging a perspective that acknowledges the dynamic interplay between humans and society in shaping perceptions of monstrosity. It signifies a departure from a dualistic worldview, suggesting that the

understanding of the concept is evolving and becoming more nuanced. From my point, I think that indeed is a departure from a hybrid perspective, and it is not only evolving but becoming more homogenized, where we can refer to monstrosity within humanity. Here, we can connect it to a passage from the novel: “If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear” (119). This is particularly poignant as the Creature, feeling the absence of love and connection, makes a conscious decision to evoke fear in the absence of the positive emotions he desires. It underscores the voluntary nature of his transformation into a figure capable of instilling fear, highlighting the emotional complexity and agency of Victor’s creation in shaping his own identity.

Lastly, this shows the societal double standard, where Frankenstein’s actions are not received nor categorized in the same way that the Creature, which reflects the blurred line or better said the untraceable line between the concept of “Humanity” and “Monstrosity”. This highlights how these concepts are part of each other, where it can be said that there is a monster inside every human being.

Conclusion

To conclude, through a deconstructionist analysis, this thesis has explored the blurred lines between notions of humanity and monstrosity in Mary Shelley's seminal Gothic novel *Frankenstein*. The complex interplay between compassion and ambition, societal privilege and marginalization, and choice against circumstance resist clear categorization of the Creature as a sheer "monster" or Victor as emblematic of human nobility. Embedded societal hierarchies that value particular physical traits, moral codes, and emotional ranges over others underlie uneven attribution where Victor's questionable actions elicit less outcry than the Creature's crimes of passion.

Analyzing the text through the lenses of emotional depth, double standards, and moral complexity foregrounds Shelley's critical examination of what factors truly make one "human" or "monstrous." Though superficially depicted as inhuman, the Creature exhibits emotional eloquence and earnest longing for understanding. Counterintuitively, his "monstrous" violence emerges from sorrow upon experiencing repeated rejection by even his putative creator. Meanwhile, Victor, though socially accepted, pursues glory recklessly without accountability for the fallout upon his Creation.

These profoundly complex characters resist singular labels, provoking timeless questions over the "humanity" of those who appear different as well as the "monstrosity" lurking within the educated elite who nonetheless abandon moral responsibility. *Frankenstein's* creation represents what can be considered the monster of society. However, it is discovered that due to being unable to trace the line between monstrosity and humanity, let us understand that it is a homogenized idea, where it can be found that there is a monster

inside every human but being that the most important of humanity. Realizing that human nature has flaws that are intrinsic to the concept and noting that the real monstrosity is inside humanity.

There were limitations to this project in which can be mentioned the fact that in the novel can be found the presence of an unreliable narrator, which makes me very aware that the experiences and the details expressed in the story may not be in the way that they were expressed due to Victor being the one who is telling the story. Besides, this does not answer the question of how Frankenstein knows the point of view of the Creature, and how was he able to describe his emotions and deepest thoughts. Besides, there are different perspectives on the concepts of humanity and monstrosity and this work cannot embrace each one of them

Having navigated the intricate landscapes of Shelley's *Frankenstein* through the lens of monstrosity, my understanding has evolved, prompting a reflection on the enduring relevance of this literary work. The juxtaposition of the Creature's emotional depth against Victor's self-serving actions has unraveled a profound commentary on the complexities of human nature. The societal double standards illuminated in this analysis raise poignant questions about the arbitrariness of labeling individuals as "monstrous." Furthermore, the exploration of physical, moral, and psychological dimensions has underscored the broader implications of unchecked scientific ambition and the responsibilities tied to creation.

In light of this, I find myself contemplating how Shelley's narrative, penned in the 19th century, resonates with contemporary ethical debates surrounding scientific advancements, societal judgments, and the ethical considerations of creation. How does our

current societal stance on scientific progress and the treatment of the things or beings that are considered different from us, humans, align with or diverge from the themes elucidated in *Frankenstein*? Moreover, how might a deeper understanding of monstrosity inform our perspectives on empathy, societal norms, and the consequences of unbridled ambition in the present age?

This journey through the dissertation has not only enriched my appreciation for the timeless relevance of *Frankenstein* but has also opened avenues for exploring its implications in our modern context. It prompts a call for continued dialogue and reflection on the ethical dimensions of scientific pursuits, societal labeling, and the intricate interplay between creation and responsibility in an ever-evolving world.

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