Monstrosity and the Search for an Identity in *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

This work provides an insightful analysis of Mary Shelley's exploration of social norms, otherness, and acceptance in *Frankenstein*. It examines how Shelley challenges traditional perceptions of beauty and humanity through Victor Frankenstein's endeavour to create life, leading to moral dilemmas. The paper highlights how the creature's marginalised existence reflects social biases, driving him to retaliation. Victor's failure to acknowledge the humanity of his creation underscores themes of accountability and compassion. The paper emphasises Shelley's juxtaposition of Victor's actions and the creature's plight to expose society's inclination to ostracise deviations from the norm. Furthermore, it thoroughly examines creator-creation intricacies and the "self" versus the "other" theme, critiquing society's tendency to vilify the "other" as a monstrous entity devoid of identity and human essence and characteristics. The analysis stresses the need for understanding identity deprivation and the construction of monstrosity in society. This comprehensive examination sheds light on the intricate interplay between social norms and individual identity, urging a reevaluation of social treatment towards those perceived as different or 'other.' Through Shelley's narrative lens, the paper navigates through the complexities of moral responsibility, compassion, and social prejudices, inviting readers to reflect on the broader implications of human relationships and social constructs depicted in *Frankenstein*.

Keywords: *Frankenstein,* Social Norms, Otherness, Acceptance, Accountability, Compassion, Marginalised Existence

1. Introduction

In its analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, this work adopts broad cultural materialist lenses to explore themes of social norms, otherness, and the quest for acceptance. Grounded in cultural materialist perspectives, this approach focuses on uncovering how Shelley's work challenges and subverts traditional ways in which certain conceptions and characteristics are constructed and viewed. Through textual analysis and thematic interpretation, the article examines the complex relationships between Victor Frankenstein and his creation, emphasising the novel's critique of social structures and expectations.

The analytical approach undertaken in this research involves a multi-faceted exploration of Shelley's work, focusing, additionally, on the distressing question of identity for the creature, and social norms within the text. By adopting a qualitative interpretive method, this study seeks to reveal subtle interpretations of the novel's themes and conceptual frameworks, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of its socio-cultural significance. The rationale behind the chosen methodology lies in its suitability for capturing the complexities inherent in *Frankenstein* and its thematic explorations. Qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth examination of textual subtleties, character motivations, and narrative structures, thereby enabling a nuanced interpretation of Shelley's inspiring work.

To ensure transparency and rigour in the analysis, the research methodology entails a systematic examination of key passages, character interactions, and thematic developments within the novel. Through reading of primary source material, supplemented by insights from secondary scholarly literature, this study aims to construct a robust analytical framework grounded in textual evidence and critical interpretation.

Furthermore, the methodological approach is informed by a reflexive stance, acknowledging the researcher's subjectivity and potential biases in interpreting the text. By maintaining transparency regarding the analytical process and engaging in reflexivity, this study seeks to enhance the validity and reliability of its findings.

By and large, the methodological section serves as a foundational component of this study, providing readers with a clear understanding of the analytical approach, rationale for the chosen methodology, and a detailed outline of how the analysis was conducted. Through adherence to rigorous methodological principles, this research endeavours to contribute meaningful insights to the scholarly discourse surrounding *Frankenstein* and its thematic complexities.

2. Literature Review

Discussions and research work on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* have been quantitively and qualitatively enormous. However, in this work, the points of departure from the existing work on *Frankenstein* lie in its concern with different horizons from those that are already there. For example, Josephine Johnston's analysis of responsibility in *Frankenstein* underscores Mary Shelley's cautionary message about

unchecked scientific enthusiasm. In contrast, this work involves scrutinising the psychological dimensions of responsibility, exploring how characters grapple with their choices and the existential burdens they carry.[i] In a not-too-far line of investigation, Theresa M. Girard's analysis highlights Shelley's cautionary message about scientific ambition and responsibility towards creations. But this work involves exploring lesser-discussed themes within *Frankenstein*, such as the dynamics of power, identity, and existential alienation, and their implications for modern readers.[ii] At the same time, Sherman Dorn's exploration of accountability prompts a re-evaluation of its origins and implications. While acknowledging the importance of accountability, the difference in this investigation lies in questioning whether traditional notions of accountability adequately address the complexities of moral responsibility portrayed in *Frankenstein*.[iii] Wilfred L. Guerin's examination of Mary Shelley's biographical and historical context provides valuable insights into the creation of her novel *Frankenstein*. However, my point of departure from that involves shifting focus towards analysing the novel's themes from a contemporary perspective, exploring how Shelley's narrative continues to resonate in today's society.[iv] Usborne Classics' retelling of *Frankenstein* offers a compelling perspective from the creature's point of view, emphasizing his desire for acceptance and companionship. This discussion involves examining how Shelley's narrative challenges traditional notions of monstrosity and explores the complexities of human nature and social rejection.[v] In his thesis "Frankenstein's Monster and the Politics of the Black Body," David J. Bondy explores the racialized identity of Frankenstein's monster across various texts. While acknowledging the significance of race in literary analysis, this work differs in the sense that it involves broadening the scope to include intersectional perspectives that examine themes of identity, power, and marginalization[vi]. C. Schneider investigates the role of fate in shaping characters' actions in *Frankenstein*. The difference from that here in this work lies in critically engaging with the interplay between fate, free will, and agency and how these themes reflect broader philosophical inquiries into the human condition and moral responsibility. [vii] Mark A. McCutcheon's exploration of the impact of *Frankenstein* adaptations on the discourse of technology reveals the symbolic resonance of technology as a *Frankenpheme*. While McCutcheon emphasises the influence of Marshall McLuhan's theories, my departure from that lies in focusing less on technological discourse and more on the ethical and moral implications of scientific progress.[viii]

3. Victor Frankenstein: Dream vs. Reality

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* calls into question many social and cultural codes. The novel does not only address the attitude of a creator towards his creation but also examines more broadly the relationship between the "self" and the "other". Moreover, the image of the "other" is horridly drawn and is taken to its extreme, so that the "other" becomes precisely a constructed "monster" that comes from nowhere and belongs to nowhere. But, the degraded, marginalised "other" never gives up on what the centrally organised regulative community, including his creator, makes of him; rather, he tries diligently to creep from the margin towards the centre in an attempt to construct an identity that he lacks. His efforts never fade in his target to be recognised and accepted; he carries on. His tragedy is that of one who uses the self-gathered knowledge of the history of his creation to ascertain his possession of all human ingredients, and who educates himself by studying the best of what has been produced by humans (Plutarch, Milton and Goethe), but still finds his longing to become integrated into society unattainable.

The inclination of "moral" and/or conservative readers and critics to find an edifying cautionary lesson implied in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*[ix] whereby man's attempt to overreach, by not only disregarding the ethics of his work, but also, more, by "violating nature" and daring when attempting to play, or challenge, God, proves counterproductive, even disastrous is not ultimately a major concern here. Rather, the complexity of presenting the relationship of Victor to his creature seems to demystify the basis on which monsters are constructed. Far from having a regulative social function, the creation of the "monster" examines social anxieties, including that of the creator himself. This work attempts to examine the creature's difficult search for identity and how his efforts are challenged by socio-psychological elements that play roles in constructing identities.

When Victor Frankenstein is first met, he does not hasten to immediately tell his story revealing the details that are terrifying to the one who looks after him on board the ship. He is ostensibly very careful about how he presents himself, he discloses what he wants to convey, hence, in his self-presentation, he acts like what sociologists identify as a "calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain."[x] Indeed, before telling his version of the story, Victor Frankenstein attempts to give multiple dimensions to his character. He clarifies to Mr. Walton that he was a spoiled son who enjoyed childhood and was well brought up, he explains his nurturing saying "No human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself. My parents were possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence" he continues "when I mingled with other families, I distinctly discerned how peculiarly fortunate my lot was."[xi]

In a decisive mode of thinking whereby he wants to distinguish himself from others, Victor ascribes high characteristics to himself in a manner that looks like that known for Christopher Marlowe's central figure in his **Dr. Faustus,** who was never satisfied with the scientific and philosophical achievement.[xii] Likewise, Victor does not only describe himself as a person whose interests extend beyond what average people of his generation or his circle of schoolmates might think of but also, and more significantly, as he, in his own words, illustrates 'it was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; …the mysterious soul of man…, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or, in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world.'[xiii] He speaks of himself as a prominent scientist who is fashioned with good intentions, the effect of which is to gain sympathy, but more to find legitimation for his attempt to create a human being based on good and noble intentions. Victor's verbal self-presentation has gained momentous, consequently admiration and sympathy from his listener- and the primary narrator of his story, that is revealed by Robert Walton, who writes to his sister informing her that his 'affection' for his 'guest increases every day.' The narrator continues explaining how quickly he becomes very keen on his relationship with Victor:

'He excites at once, my admiration and my pity to an astonishing degree.' He concludes that Victor is 'so noble.'[xiv] This does not leave any doubt that Walton and Frankenstein are linked through morality[xv] and aim to break the norms of their own times and go beyond what has been known to, or explored by, others, one through scientific work, and another via geographical explorations.

In a further narratological method, Victor brings up more details related to his original intentions of the act of creation and his devotion to it and the laborious industrious work he spent while conducting it. He explains that he spent two years in Ingolstadt, where he studied and conducted his scientific work, without going back to Geneva, his original place to see his family.[xvi]

Although he succeeds in well-presenting himself and convinces his listener about his commitment to his work, his words, nevertheless, do not manage to hide crucial aspects of his tough and strong personality, one who cannot be deluded; he discloses his nature as a person who has never feared a 'tale of superstition, or to have feared the apparition of a spirit.' Alongside Victor's tough and realistic nature, there is another one which is almost antithetical to what he intended to reveal in the first place, a character that is shaken by the forces that rule life and death and coerces transforming the 'beautiful bodies' to be ugly and worthless as they become 'food for the worms.'[xvii] This has apparently prompted Victor to challenge the 'order of things' as far as life and death, beauty and grotesque are concerned.

Victor's relentless creative quest is triggered by his fascination with what science can achieve and, more notably, by his desire to control life and death, a desire that stems from his upbringing and also, most significantly, from the distressing early loss of his mother. He wishes to create a 'new species' with undefeated characteristics as the ones that shocked him by the events and deaths in his family. He also wishes that the species' relationship to himself, he envisions, will be like that of the grateful 'child' to the 'father'. But the results of his efforts were appalling, he narrates the story of his shock with his creation as a disappointment with the outcome of a concerted effort to produce beauty—an effort which goes astray, producing instead a 'filthy mass', a 'monstrous body.' In a very striking way of speaking of the creature, Victor refers to him as 'he' before creation but following the process of animating the creature the 'he' is transformed into 'it'.

The interest Victor has extended to examining and defining beauty and life against ugliness and death. In other words, Victor's perception of life and death, on the aesthetic level, is well-marked by associating them with his observation of beauty contrasted with the grotesque. He states that 'Darkness has no effect upon [his] fancy, and of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm...'[xviii] Just as his enchantment with beautiful eyes is disturbed by the image of the worm-eaten ones, Frankenstein's view of life as a dream about beauty is shaken by incongruous reality. Therefore, in addition to his desire to control and master the key questions related to life and death, Frankenstein's arduous work to enliven the assembled parts of corpses is an attempt to reconstruct life and beauty, an aim stressed when describing the quality of the ingredients of the creature: 'and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful—Great God!'[xix] In addition to the disappointment with his creation, Victor's words 'the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart' point to his shock at the contrast between a mythically constructed world and an actual one. Thus, the shape of the deformed creature challenges the creator's equation of life with beauty, and the borderline between life and death shrinks to an extent where the dream of beauty transforms into, in his case, the nightmare reality, of life. Frankenstein's dream of meeting Elizabeth in Ingolstadt 'in the bloom of health. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms...'[xx] This dream during which Frankenstein's most loved alive and dead figures melt into one has the effect of narrowing the borderlines between life/beauty and death/horror conceptions; a broader effect of blending these conceptions into one is to touch upon Victor's construction of those opposed extremes and his closeness to, or distance from, them. On the same grounds, rather than being a sign of monstrosity, the deviation in the shape of the creature seems to interrogate the use of certain attributes or characteristics to define the norm (like proportionate limbs, shape, size, colour, body movements, etc.).

Victor's effort to incarnate a 'new species' results from a complicated socio-psychological combination of desires. Beyond being a desire to master life, Frankenstein's relationship to the new species, he expects, will be, though like that embodied in the paternal ties, of subservience as he states: 'A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.'[xxi] In a word, though Victor's creative attempts were mainly on the physical body, the impact of his creation rests on relations far beyond the human body as an object. However, this desire never materialised owing to his negligence of the results of his work.

Victor aspired to question the order of creation and thought of becoming a creator himself since he was frustrated with human skills, disabilities, and impotence in terms of creation and what was available to them. Nevertheless, he envisaged one thing but paradoxically produced another; the creation came out entirely different from his expectations. While some cultural critics might celebrate the potential to challenge and transgress the borders drawn for human beings, there are broader concerns about the sharp contrast between dream and reality, between desirability and availability, and between intentions and results. Victor had in mind a dream of eternity, as well as eternal youth and beauty. But the creature he made was neither eternal nor "beautiful" according to how beauty is defined in a society where someone is assessed according to his or her outer shape or physical appearance. Precisely if S/he looks different in size or disproportionate in parts, that is the issue that Victor not only ignored while he was still working as a student in the lap but also enhanced when he finished his work and saw the results. Thus, Victor's project of creation becomes counterproductive for Victor himself.

The experiment Victor conducted was shaped with pure enthusiasm to change something but he did not study carefully what the results might bring; he thought ultimately of the act of creation and the collection of the parts of the creature but ignored that creating a human

being entails that that being will have a soul and emotions. A scientist would think that even a machine would not function properly simply by putting parts next to each other and assembling them together. It needs to undergo many processes to become fit for use; likewise, the creature will not be produced and be fully and perfectly ready to be part of a society simply by the one-dimensional act of bringing it to existence; the process has to account for the individual needs of the creature. But, the gusto to create an object of desire drifts Victor away from thinking that his creature is a human being.   Moreover, to him, it is obvious that beauty lies in the shape and not in the substance. That is a standard way of perception according to Victor, it is the way he values beauty in general. He**,** in his description of Elizabeth, for example, speaks of beauty and amazing features that all focus on facial appearance. In a word, he is obsessed with beauty, the beauty that is defined by physical appearance.

Victor was complacent while conducting his experiment of creation and only after he was shocked by the appearance of his creature, he decided to leave, rather run away, but without any consideration for the poorly-produced creature, leaving him alone, a stranger in a strange environment. To that, it is reasonable to observe that Frankenstein's attitude is shaped by the easiness of relinquishing the obligation he had towards the creature.   The problem with Frankenstein's reaction to his creature lies, to a very large degree, in stressing that his creature is the perversion of the desirable object of beauty and, simultaneously, his failure to understand that his creature is a human being who demands to be recognized.

Perhaps it is not irrelevant to point out that the overall function of amplifying Victor's narrative account of his motives for conducting his experiment falls under the category of presenting the 'self' and its noble, aspirational and human endeavour against the created 'other' who is labelled by all degrading stigmatizations. Depicting the 'other' as a monster is a kind of evoking colonialism and placing the self at the very centre while distancing the other to the far side of the margin.[xxii]

4. The Creature: The Other Version of the Story

Parallel to Victor's version of the story, the reader starts to construct another story related to the creature Victor made and later labelled with demonisation; an attribute that dominated the life of the creature by everyone around him. The novel is structured in a technical way that gives platforms to each the creator and the creature to tell their respective version of the story. Whereas Victor has enjoyed good hearing and sympathy from Walton, who, in turn, publicized it through his letters to his sister, the "monster" had no listeners among people in general due to the attitude they held against him by his facial and physical appearance; he even struggles to tell his story to his creator. He does not only speak about himself and his suffering but also his experience in this world. He is not being nurtured like any other person and instructed in what other humans would do to guarantee an appropriate enculturation process, rather he acquired his knowledge of everything by relying on himself and his inquisitive capabilities.

The first encounter between Frankenstein and his creature after he abandoned him is very vital. It discloses the contradicting attitudes of both figures. It shows the real essence of both of them; it becomes perplexing to the readers in such a way that they cannot but identify with both the creature and his creator and it further complicates the issue to the point where it is very hard to find out who the true 'monster' is. Frankenstein's verbal and physical languages divulge animosity and thrilling readiness to destroy the 'other'. He says 'Devil,' 'Wretched devil', 'vile insect,' and 'Abhorred monster'; he even adds 'come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed.'[xxiii] Unlike Victor's furious language and threats, the creature's reaction discloses rational attitude, respect, discipline and even moral behaviour; manners he did not acquire from the society around him, but he shaped them antithetically to what he had been observing of the miseries, through that, he showed how respect and consideration could be, paradoxically, created as reactions against the misery, disdain, and violence he was met with. The monster has created his way of dealing with his creator. Frankenstein describes those moments saying: 'I trembled with rage and horror, resolving to wait his approach, and then close with him in mortal combat…and I recovered only to overwhelm him with words expressive of furious detestation and contempt.' In contrast to the frantic language by which Victor addresses the monster, 'the monster' himself is very composed and urges Victor to relinquish anger and keep quiet and be prepared to listen to his grievances: 'Be calm! I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough that you seek to increase my misery?' He continues talking to philosophize his perception of life and how he values it, disregarding the suffering and misery that have been inflicted upon him: 'Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it.' The 'monster,' very wittingly, teaches Victor a lesson of not only self-restraint when possessing power but more ardently, the principles of respect and appreciation as he adds: 'Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king.'[xxiv]

Thus, the "monster" uses an entirely different language as he shrewdly and eloquently highly values the person whom he has been in search of almost all the time and now he is face to face with. Victor threatens and swears using the most repulsive expressions against the creature. However, while trying to demonize the creature, Victor unintentionally humanises him; Victor's narration reveals an excessive use of swearing and cursing words and expressions by him contrasted with logical, rational arguments held by the creature:

> "I expected this reception," said the daemon. "All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind".[xxv]

By that, the creature seems to disrobe the system human beings constructed as their method of life, showing the deficiency in their

understanding and that is reflected in the way they deal. To him, it is beyond understanding how cheap life is for Victor since he is ready to kill; it is incomprehensible that a creator should be killing his creature! In his way of explaining how relationships are supposed to be, he teaches Victor about duties and responsibilities and that the creator has obligations towards his own creation. He seems to imply that he is not ultimately the product of an experiment but rather he is an independent human being that has got his own needs in order to live normally; he is an individual with an independent life and not just a pile constructed in an unsuccessful way. The kind of argument the 'monster' holds here makes Mary Shelley's novel constitute a mid-point between literary text and scientific experiments. Victor's Monster has become our contemporary, in particular when considering the scientific achievements in the field of cloning.[xxvi] Genetic engineering and human genome projects provided the possibility of chromosome reading and showed that human genes (regardless of the external appearances of human beings: in shape, size, and colour) are similar, almost identical. Frankenstein's relationship to the 'Monster' is echoed in our time in the discussion of the ethical dimension of human cloning. Will the cloned Doppelgänger be created as our human equal (as, for example, cloning for childless couples) or will (s/he?) be one about whom we do not care, a monstrous bank of human organs for our use, i.e., the cloned being is, then, not our equal.

The creature describes the life of some cottagers whom he came to watch. He thinks of the simplicity their lifestyle is fashioned with and sees that they possess the substance for being happy 'They possessed a delightful house, they had a fire to warm their chill, and delicious viands when hungry, they were dressed in excellent clothes; and, sill more, they enjoyed one another's company of speech, interchanging each day looks of affection and kindness.' Still, they were unhappy and they shed tears and experienced other elements that could talk about their unhappiness, the effect of this irony is to enhance the creature's puzzlement of the world when he compares himself to them. However, he discovers later that their uneasiness is due to their poverty and the limitations of their sources. The reader is now confronted with a situation that encourages him or her to consider how things can be viewed, in absolute relative to time and place rather than in isolation from them. They are fine in comparison with the creature but they are poor as such when examining the details of their lives and the way they give priority to distributing food among them.[xxvii]

The creature teaches another intriguing lesson when he notes the cottagers' poverty, which is in stark contrast to his previous observation. He tried to help silently by abstaining from taking any of their food and making wild "berries, nuts, and roots" from a neighbouring wood as his substitute for the food he secretly consumed from the store of the cottagers and also by bringing some wood and placing it outside their door. One cannot but admire what the monster is being fashioned with regarding his self-discipline when it comes to using others' food. He explains how he came to watch everything with love and curiosity in nature. Likewise, he also enjoyed observing every means of communication between human beings. He quite accurately describes the happiness he has been overwhelmed with while watching people producing sounds in communicating with each other, some sounds caused happiness, while others had antithetical effects. He designates how he longed to learn the language, but his problem was being unable to follow them because they spoke quickly, but later on he, very diligently, learned the language they spoke and remarkably he drew upon the names of objects and abstract conceptions associating words with objects and meanings.[xxviii] In fact, his efforts to learn the language come as a necessary method to establish an identity that would allow him to interact with others. However, the more he approached the point where some of his questions could be answered, the more life became even more complicated for him. Learning how to read helped him to be acquainted with key cornerstones of Western culture among which Milton's 'Paradise Lost', Plutarch's 'Parallel Lives', and Goethe's 'The Sorrow of Young Werther' are included. These poems, according to Peter Brooks, 'cover the public, private, and cosmic realms, as well as three forms of love; fact, they constitute a hypothetical Romantic cyclopaedia university.'[xxix] Moreover, accessing these cultural materials extends the creature's intellectual growth and forces him to develop a mechanism of realization of identity and personality that allows him to express his frustrations and embarrassment. He says 'I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener.'[xxx] He begins to undergo a psychological pressure and a more torturous phase to him as he starts to pose questions about himself, his origin, where he came from and what he is doing and where he is heading 'Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?'[xxxi] These questions are normally asked by all human beings at an early stage in life; they are questions that help one to psychologically fashion a self in the process of constructing an identity.

It becomes quite motivating how the creature's life becomes full of contradiction. He wishes to be recognised by the cottagers yet he cannot disclose himself to them, he helps them by bringing wood and clearing their way of the snow yet they do not know about that, he is present and absent at the same time.[xxxii] He sadly speaks of his loneliness in this world, and that problem springs from his shape. He learned about family relationships but suffered that this did not apply to him; he learned about sexes, about birth in the family, etc. However, while being significant to him and he enjoyed acquiring it, knowledge brought sadness and put him in a position where he felt he lacked everything that is related to social and familial ties; he felt he lacked the basics and did not enjoy the same life that all human beings do naturally enjoy: Thus, the more he learns about the world, the more miserable and sadder he becomes because he has no similar issues in his history of existence. He sadly expresses his lamentations over this uniqueness:

> But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing. From my earliest remembrance I had been as I then was in height and proportion. I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I?"[xxxiii]

The reader is at a moment whereby the creature expresses his pain resulting from the voidness that structures his life. A man is supposedly

a member of a community in which s/he is accountable for and has a history, has friends, connections, familial ties, relatives etc... and that history must have certain momentous events related to one's existence from the moment they are born. He moves further to speak about the painful facts related to him and his existence where he does not remember anything related to his gradual growth from a young person to becoming the way he is. He, very rightly and rightfully, lacks all the natural basics that every human individual on earth enjoys. He articulates precisely that he has no father to witness his development, nor has he a mother who filled his heart with smiles and caresses. He had no idea what he was doing. He is cast out into the world as an outsider in a strange and hostile land.

5. The Lack of an Identity

Dictionaries, psychologists and psychoanalysts define identity as, broadly speaking, a set of behavioural or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable or known. This would also include, of course, how this identifiable and branded individual is placed and described as a member of a group or community.[xxxiv] Therefore, one's identity is constituted by personal, discrete and social factors. However, the sociologist Anthony Giddens[xxxv] claims that 'a person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going.*' In *Frankenstein*, it is a combination of both individual and social. However, the contradiction between the personal identity and the given one is what creates the tension all the time. The creature 'finds himself with an incomplete identity'[xxxvi] so he tries hard to rectify this deficiency and be accepted among the human community but he is rejected. The 'monster's' steps are all desperate attempts to place himself as a human being like everyone else. He imitates birds, learns how to read and educates himself with the best of what human minds have produced.

Names, as known, are given to children by parents at the time they are born, but the creature did not enjoy that parental distinction, nor was he given that by his creator. To stress the significance of the names, we have to reiterate that every human being has got a name by which they are, quite naturally, identified. This determining component does not exist in the case of the creature, it is a hammering factor that imbrutes him 'to not name something dehumanizes it and makes that thing an It – lack of identity due to no name fear of unknown.'[xxxvii] The only signifying word that is used to label him is a 'monster.' It is the category or the species that he does not meet. To discuss the significance of the name from a different perspective, we can, perhaps, invoke the argument held by Shakespeare's Juliet's question as she diminishes the significance of the name when she wonders: 'What is in a name?'[xxxviii] She implies that the names are not important but the essence is what should be regarded as far as human identity is concerned! But, on the one hand, Juliet's argument comes amidst the joy of her love. That is why the object of her love is her main concern (the signified and not the signifier) on the one hand, and on the other hand, the chance that the creature could reveal his inner self was not granted to him. Rather, there was a continuous label that was tracing him wherever he might go and by whoever he might be seen; thus, being nameless is a further estranging element in his story. Moreover, he was pushed to the point where his name, brain, or any other factor would not define him; rather his reactions, to actions conducted by people, would do, let alone his physical deformity.

The creature has his own remarks on the socio-economic stratification that he regards as unfair; he talks about poverty, about the division of property, and the immense wealth against the squalid poverty of rank descent and nobles loved all these things which seemed to him. The creature's problem in that respect is that he sees injustice but he is not allowed to give an opinion. This was the case for everyone, poor and rich, alike. They have inflicted pain on him but he has never done harm to anybody to be poorly rewarded like that. The creature's awareness and understanding of his surrounding encourages him to focus on the identity question. He accurately grasps how a man is valued and respected if he possessed one of the characteristics that attract people around him, but the lack of any of those elements would render a man a vagabond or a slave, except in rare cases. This standard for placing and appraising a man has ostensibly played on the creature's feelings since he reiterated his lack of everything. He possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property.[xxxix] Thus, the sharp contradiction between the seen shape and the inner essence is a major constituent of the creature's disaster, hence his tragedy is thereby to which extent he is a monster because of his shape and to which extent he is a human being by the realities of his mind, his self-education of the human knowledge.

The emphasis on familial bonds, which serves, among other purposes, to underscore Victor's depravity in the aftermath of his mother's death, provides psychological foundations for sympathizing with someone who yearns for kinship but is unable to find it. It's no coincidence that Mary Shelley portrays the character of the "monster" as the most eloquent figure in the novel. Reviewing his wife's novel, Percy Shelley disputed the existence of a monster in it.[xl] At a crucial moment of his revelation about his experience, while trying to accommodate himself among the human community where he should belong, the creature describes how much he admired the cottagers' lovely forms elegance, beauty, and delicate complexions and disregarded his own. He even confesses his horror at seeing himself in a translucent pool. He goes on to say that he initially took a step back, unable to believe that the person reflected in the mirror was himself. Whereas he has been critical of the way human beings construct their views based on his facial appearance as their first guideline to regard him, his very thoughts, at certain moments such as this, are shaken as he internalises human racism and describes himself ultimately according to his appearance. He continues: 'When I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity.'[xli] Thus he obviously could not escape their way of evaluating beauty, i.e. appraising beauty by the physical appearance.

The creature's imagined identity, nevertheless, has been shaped not by his self-presentation and objective reaction by people. There is no dialogue allowed between the creature and everyone else; rather there is a monologue in his brain about his identity contrasted with the dialogue held by everyone else, including his creator, about his identity. The case of the creature does not have any space for what he wants to present of, or about, himself to people but it proves to be the arbitrated reality they pre-shaped about him due to his physical

appearance. Humans' ideas, values, sentiments, and set of beliefs are expressed in their 'mental scripts,' which, in turn, shape their perception of per se realities, facts that are shocking when dealing with Frankenstein's creature and basing his identity on his body shape.

In an obvious mode of seeking recognition from the one who, presumably, knows him properly, the creature urges Frankenstein to treat him with decency and not like everyone else does. Based on the creator's commitment, and assumed obligation, to the creature, the latter reminds Frankenstein that he merits his fairness, tenderness, and dedication. He argues that he is supposed to be his Angel Adam, yet he is his fallen angel. In a pattern of reasoning argumentation, similar to that which materialist and cultural critics hold over the harsh choice by Greek mythological gods of Oedipus to be punished for no apparent reason, even before birth, the creature, quite rightly, maintains that he is being punished for no obvious cause. He wonders why pleasure is everywhere he looks, yet he is forever barred from happiness. He continues to discuss that he used to be friendly and good, but sadness turned him into a fiend. 'I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend.' And, quite logically, he states that human beings are the products of their environment in manners: 'Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.'[xlii] The creature's insistence on being recognised can be regarded as his many orators do, i.e., to 'seek to stir pity and identification, to humanise themselves, to shape a narrative. But the stakes for this creature are much higher than for the average after-dinner chunterer.'[xliii] The creature exhausts all possible means to become one of 'us', but he is persistently met with resistance of one kind or another and thus remained an 'other'; he thought of achieving that in religion, or in what might look like a master-slave relationship with Frankenstein, and even in other means. His attempts, however, proved futile. It is a fact that many elements have significantly played a role in, like his unique self-upbringing, artificial construction, and monstrous look. They all have contributed to his lack of identity and incited this search.

His self-evaluation concerning beauty is likely impelled not only by mainstream ways of viewing beauty as such, which he at certain moments internalised but also, and no less significant, by his uniqueness and his sense that he was created alone with no ties whatsoever: 'Like Adam, I was created united by no link to any other being in existence…but I was wretched, helpless, and alone.'[xliv] Should there be many of his shape, then the beauty criteria would differ and he might be admired and appreciated by his own-so to speak-'species'; then 'deformity' will be 'normality.' Thus, the creature's insistence on having a partner is driven by the need to demystify the monstrous ascriptions from which he suffers, i.e., the need of a woman of his kind and shape, a female that would understand and appreciate him, above all, the existence of creatures of the same shape will help finding, or establishing, an identity.

6. Love or Monstrosity

As examined above, the creature is judged and hated for what is not his fault, precisely his facial traits and his physical appearance; he is despised for his 'deformity' since he does not appear to relate to one of the 'regular' communities. Even his creator detests his disfigured form and has fled away from him at the moment of animation. Thus, the outer shape of the creature is outrageous and frightening to people around whom he comes. Evidently, that is the case with everyone who evaluates the creature only by seeing; the novel subverts the premise on which people rely to define the creature by making him meet a blind old man, De Lacy who does not regard the creature as a monster, rather he conversed with him and, seemingly, he enjoyed his company. In effect, De Lacey's blindness is truly a blessing of vision that allows him to properly see the "monster" for a brief while, removing the barrier of ignorance and bringing the creature up to par with De Lacey. When De Lacey is asked by the creature to give his opinion on his companion he says: 'I am blind, and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere.'[xlv]

The creature's identity is defined ultimately by his 'otherness.' Concurrently, the word 'other' conjures up, and is synonymised with, monstrosity, as well as expressions of ugliness, deviance, and evilness.[xlvi] The dehumanising and mostly imbruting of the 'other' was a Victorian obsession. In a manner that looks like textualizing history and/or historicising text, the working classes in England, for example, were portrayed as monsters in Victorian England,[xlvii] a place and time that are not remote from Mary Shelley's depicted 'other'.

Not only did the creature's bodily appearance influence how he was regarded, but his conduct was also perceived under the constructed hideous identity by which he was stigmatised. Adding to the creature's anguish over his inability to be accommodated within the human community, his virtuous deeds were misinterpreted, causing him further estrangement by twisting his intentions of conducting any act. He acquired the language, tried hard to be normalized as a member of the human race. He laments his pain and suffering to his creator, reminding him of his place in the universe and who he is to him: 'I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed.'[xlviii]

The creature found himself ringed in a difficult, if not impossible, situation from which there is no way out if he accepts the status quo, which was achieved via no fault of his own, therefore he resolves to re-act rather than acquiesce. The reader cannot but sympathise with him as he declares: 'If I cannot inspire love I will cause fear.'[xlix] He is in no position to compromise and keep receiving hatred, he announces that his 'feelings were those of rage and revenge…from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species,' and that would include more than all the one who had 'formed' him, and sent him 'forth to this insupportable misery.'[l] Thus, the creature's violence is not his responsibility but theirs. He had not instigated violence but they did. He desired love but received hatred instead.

7. Concluding Discussion

Although Frankenstein attempts to ennoble himself by using fashioning expressions of his intentions and similarly aggrandises himself as a scientist, he fails to meet these categories throughout his development. Rather, he seems less experienced and with lower awareness if compared with those around him. For example, Frankenstein is critical of his father's conservative way of handling things and being very cautious, but he seems not to match the morals and principles his father had. Frankenstein's mother was an orphan and a beggar-like girl

when his father adopted her and placed her among a well-off family, even though he later got married to her; a similar girl with horrible conditions was Elizabeth herself, who was brought from an orphanage. For example, Frankenstein is critical of his father's conservative way of handling things and being very cautious, but he seems not to match the morals and principles his father had. Frankenstein's mother was an orphan and a beggar-like girl when his father adopted her and placed her among a well-off family, even though he later got married to her; a similar girl with horrible conditions was Elizabeth herself, who was brought from an orphanage.[li] While Frankenstein tells his listener of the clemency, compassion, and good behaviour that his father and his family in general have, he paradoxically fails to meet any of these categories, in particular when he refers to the poor individual who was given life by him as "my enemy" and reiterates calling him a monster. He even reveals a kind of criminal inclination, as he says, 'and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed.' The juxtaposition of Frankenstein and his father shows that he is neither like his father in that respect, nor is he a responsible 'scientist' as he introduced himself.

In the general discussion of Frankenstein's story viewed against that told by his creature, the reader will unavoidably sympathize with both. However, juxtaposing their own respective mindsets for the final debate may encourage us to evaluate the disaster in different scopes.

When Frankenstein is rescued and received on board a ship, although he seems mystified by a mysterious story, he is looked after and enjoys care, listening, and sympathy from Robert Walton. This raises high concerns about Frankenstein's human behaviour when comparing his lack of socio-psychological care towards another being that he brought to life, i.e., his creature; he abandoned him refusing to take responsibility for, and towards, him. This is not to dismiss the reality that he was responsible for the creature's catastrophe. Upon seeing his creature, rather than, quite logically, granting him a hearing on which he persists, the creator cries: 'Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your defected form', 'Begone, vile insect!' 'Abhorred monster!' The creature says: 'All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature.'[lii]

When Victor is approached by his creature, he recognises that his challenge to his creation is twofold. On the one hand, it is the creature's deformity. On the other hand, which is no less noteworthy, the creature expects that, while justified, are impossible to meet due to the severity of his existence. It might be argued that Victor made a mistake and he does not want to repeat the same mistake, but his mistake is very distinctive. It has involved creating an individual for whom, and against whom, he must be responsible. His creation is not an inanimate object or an abstract conception, but precisely a human being. Instead of claiming accountability, he runs away. The creature, rightfully, shocks Victor with the logic that he is his creator, therefore he has obligations towards his creation. The creature shrewdly articulates his concerns to Victor: 'Oh! my creator, make me happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my request!'[liii]

The creature's monstrosity stems primarily from the deviation of his shape that renders him a grotesque body. Despite his best efforts, the "monster" is unable to obtain Victor's recognition due to his psychological frailty and "ugliness." The creature, despite being labelled a 'monster' and denied an identity, certainly hopes to win the opposite treatment. Thus, he pleads for pity, sympathy, and understanding from the same people who stigmatized him, including Victor, his creator. The creature demands to be treated with compassion, just as every other human being is. The dilemma is even more problematized by the creature's request to have a partner, a step that Victor is unwilling to take, but again he is faced with his criminality that he produced a creature that cannot be accepted by the human community, rather he is labelled as a monster. That does not fit with him either, because he is not part of the monstrous environment, nor does he enjoy what they enjoy of affections as he argues....: 'Shall each man,' … 'find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I had feelings of affection, and they were requited by detestation and scorn.'[liv]

The vital point about Victor's attitude towards the result of his work is that he did not appreciate the outcome when it did not match his expectations. He did not value that the act of creation was successful; rather he focused on the shape of the creation. So, he is obviously never satisfied with half of his achievement, which is life, compared with what he originally planned to do, i.e., creating life and beauty.

If there will be sympathetic readers who will admire Victor Frankenstein for his original ambition, his challenge to the way human life is conditioned, and his willingness to transgress what is available for human beings, as well as how he worked incredibly hard and sacrificed a lot of his personal affairs solely to pursue his objective, undoubtedly, there will be others who will focus on his approach to dealing with the outcome of his work.

The conclusion that Victor Frankenstein reaches is discouraging and conservative in the sense that he warns against aspiration and knowledge, contrary to what he started with upon conducting his experiment. This is what could be of interest to New Historicists, where the original aim he claims is contrasted with, or negated by, his final discourse, wherein the act of going beyond his natural spheres of being is proved counterproductive and his final discussion enhances the same order he rebelled against in the first place. Victor warns Robert Walton against knowledge, considering it hazardous and 'dangerous' 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.'[lv] However, Victor made it extremely hard and problematic when fleeing and dismissing the end results of his own efforts and invention, so it is not knowledge and aspiration to blame but his actual negative, negligent response to the outcome of his experiment. If the creator runs away from his own creation, why should others, who aren't aware that the creature is the outcome of an incomplete experiment, not do the same? Did he propagate his work and its results? Of course, he did not.

i   Johnston, J. (2018). Traumatic Responsibility. *Frankenbook*. Retrieved from https://fall2020frankenbookclone1.pubpub.org/pub/y7vq65rz

ii Theresa M. Girard, "Mary Shelley: Teaching and Learning through *Frankenstein*" in **ERIC Number:** EJ870081 (2009), pp.1- 17.

iii Dorn, Sherman, *Accountability Frankenstein: Understanding and Taming the Monster* (Information Age Publishing, Incorporated https://books.google.sn/books?id=6f0nDwAAQBAJ,2007).

iv Wilfred L. Guerin et al, *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* 6th ed. (Oxford University Press: 2010).

v John Grant (Adaptor), *Usborne Classics Retold Frankenstein from the Story by Mary Shelley* (Usborne: 1st pub. 1995).

vi David Joseph Bondy, "Frankenstein's monster and the politics of the black body" (University of Windsor:2000).

vii M. Simonson, "The Monsters Within: Gothic Monstrosity in *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and its Role in the Nineteenth Century English Society" (Grado EN Estudios: 2016)

viii Mark A. McCutcheon, *The Medium Is the Monster Canadian Adaptations of Frankenstein and the Discourse of Technology* (AU press: 2018).

IX Critics who are of the opinion that Mary Shelly herself wanted to articulate the idea of punishing the overreacher, or the one who dares the divinely powers, when adding a Greek mythical figure to her title to become *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. In Greek mythology, Prometheus is ascribed to bring knowledge and illumination to human beings against the will of other gods who wanted to keep power for themselves. Therefore, Prometheus was severely punished, he was shackled to a rock to make an eagle eat his liver every day but every night, it grew back. This was his eternal retribution. See, for example, Hope Moncrieff, A.R. *Classical Mythology*. Senate, London, 1994, and *Hornblower, S. The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2012. And, on the relationship between Frankenstein and Prometheus see, for example, Hustis, Harriet. "Responsible Creativity and the 'Modernity' of Mary Shelley's Prometheus." *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, vol. 43, no. 4, 2003, pp. 845–858. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4625101. See also, Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (UK: Routledge, 1990).

x Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (UK: Univ. of Edinburgh, 1956), p.3.

xi Mary Shelley*, Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p.30.

xii See Christopher Marlowe, Michael Keefer (ed.), *Doctor Faustus: a 1604-Version Edition* (Petersborough: Broadview Press, 1991).

xiii Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p.30/1.

xiv Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p.23.

xv Some critics are inclined to find a kind of homoerotic desire that shapes Walton's interests, sympathy and admiration for Victor; on this topic, see, for example, Daffron, Eric. "Male Bonding: Sympathy and Shelley's Frankenstein." Nineteenth-Century Contexts 21.3 (1999): 415-35. Web. 9 Feb. 2013. See also, Favret, Mary A. "A Woman Writes the Fiction of Science: The Body in Frankenstein." *Genders* 14 (1992): 50-65. Print.

xvi Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p40.

xvii Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p41.

xviii Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p41.

xix Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p45.

xx Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p46.

xxi Ibid.p.43.

xxii On colonialism in the novel see for example, Jordon N. Brown, An Imperial Monstrosity: Colonialism in Frankenstein, in EH 469 (April: 2025), https://www.slideshare.net/JordonBrown/an-imperial-monstrosity-colonialism-in-frankenstein. Accessed 09.07.2021

xxiii Ibid.p.77.

xxiv Ibid. p.77.

xxv Ibid.p.77.

xxvi See Philip Ball, "Frankenstein' Reflects the Hopes and Fears of Every Scientific Era" in *The Atlantic* (APRIL 20, 2017) https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/04/franken-science/523560/

xxvii Mary Shelley, p.86.

xxviii Ibid., p.86.

xxix Peter Brooks, "What is a Monster?" (According to *Frankenstein*) in *Body Work* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, l993), pp. 199-220; reprinted in *Frankenstein/Mary Shelley*, ed. Fred Botting (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 81-106.

xxx Shelley, p.99.

xxxi Ibid.p.99.

xxxii Ibid., p.92.

xxxiii Ibid., p. 94.

xxxiv On the question of identity and identity crisis, see for example, Neil J. MacKinnon and David R. Heise. *Self, identity, and social institutions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. And, Erik Erikson, Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History**.** New York: W. W. Norton, 1958, John Kunkel. Encounters with Great Psychologists: Twelve Dramatic Portraits**.** Toronto: Wall & Thompson, 1989. There is a considerable introduction to psychological theorists, including Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. See also Henry Louis Gates. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. See Gregory, Chase Paulina (2019). Reading and Writing As/if: US Literary Criticism and Identity. Dissertation, Duke University. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/10161/18832.

xxxv Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. P. 55 (italics in original).

xxxvi Kristi Haas, "Name and Identity in Young Frankenstein." University of Notre Dame Open Course Ware. n. page. Web. 14 Nov. 2013. <http://ocw.nd.edu/political-science/mary-wollstonecraft-and-mary-shelley/frankenfilm/name-and-identity-in-young-frankenstein-by-kristi.>. Accessed 16 May 2020

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xxxviii William Shakespeare,(ed.A.N.Jeffares), *Romeo and Juliet* (London:Yoek Press, Rpt. 2001), II.ii.43.

xxxix Shelley, p.94.

xl David Lee Clarke, ed. *Percy Shelly's Prose, or the Trumpet of a Prophecy*,(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954), pp.54-5.

xli Shelley. P.88.

xlii Ibid., p.78.

xliii Sam Leith, "Frankenstein's monster makes a logical and emotional appeal" in *Financial Times,* October 31 2018.

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xlviii Shelley, pp.77-8.

xlix Ibid. p.111.

l Ibid., p.104.

li Ibid., pp.28 -9.

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liii Compare Josephine Johnston, "Victor Frankenstein as Creator and Casualty: Traumatic Responsibility" in *Franken Book* (30 April: 2018), https://www.frankenbook.org/pub/traumatic-responsibility/release/3. Accessed 07.07.2021.

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