

Lucy and the Monstrosity of Female Sexuality In Dracula

The concept of the 'monstrous' is a central theme of Bram Stoker's novel, Dracula. In fact, one could argue that the central theme of the book is to define exactly what constitutes monstrosity. Webster's Dictionary defines 'monstrous' as "horrible; hideous; shocking", or "hideously wrong or evil; atrocious". This definition is telling but it does not give the whole story. Clearly the idea of the monstrous not only includes physical appearance, but also has a mental connotation as well - of "wrong" or "evil". But what is evil? What is wrong? These questions are one of Stoker's chief concerns throughout the novel. The character Lucy is an excellent example of the 'monstrous' theme of the novel - few could deny that the details of her untimely demise, her reincarnation as a night-walking ghoul, and her subsequent exorcism contain monstrous elements. But Stoker's definition of the monstrous goes deeper. It is Lucy's voluptuous sexuality that makes her vampire incarnation particularly monstrous. Stoker uses Lucy to equate female sexuality - specifically the contrast between purity and wantonness or the transformation from innocence to sexuality - with the 'monstrous'.

During Dracula's attack on Lucy in Whitby, sexual imagery is used to suggest that Dracula's power lies in carnal desire. This is most strikingly obvious when Mina, who is the narrator of the scene, comes upon Lucy laying on a bench immediately following her encounter with Dracula. "Her lips were parted, and she was breathing, not softly as usual with her, but in long, heavy gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full at every breath", writes Mina (). This labored breathing seems to suggest that some sort of passionate sexual act has just taken place. The focus on her lips further strengthens this point. Stoker purposefully calls the reader's attention to Lucy's lips and "long, heavy gasps" to imply a comparison between Dracula's 'attack' and sex. The description continues: "As I came close, she put up her hand in her sleep and pulled the collar of her nightdress around her neck. Whilst she did so there came a little shudder through her, as though she felt the cold. [...] I dreaded lest she get some deadly chill from the night air, unclad as she was" (102-103). Of course, the image of Lucy as "unclad" strengthens the sexual tinge that this passage has. But the first part of this quotation is also important - if Lucy "felt the cold", only "As [Mina] came close", then the careful

reader can infer that Lucy did not feel the cold up until that point. This is strange - Lucy has been outside, at night, in barely any clothes, for some time already, and yet for some reason she does not feel cold at all until after Dracula leaves. This fact hints that Lucy has a sort of lustful desire for Dracula, and that their 'activities' gave her pleasure, satisfaction, and warmth. One may be tempted to chalk the sexual imagery in this passage up to an analogy to rape. However, this particular piece of evidence seems to indicate that there is something more going on here than simply the sexual domination of an innocent, nubile young girl. It hints that the sexual passion flows both ways, and that Dracula holds a carnal attraction for his victims, just as they do for him. This idea is strengthened by Mina's description of Lucy the morning after these events have taken place: "Lucy slept till I woke her and seemed not to have even changed her side. The adventure of the night does not seem to have harmed her, on the contrary, it has benefitted her, for she looks better this morning than she has done for weeks" (104). Why does Dracula's attack impart Lucy with energy and vigor? One might expect Lucy to be weak and withdrawn after her encounter with the bloodsucking creature, and if that were the case then the analogy to rape might be apt. However, her apparent good health suggests that Dracula is not merely 'preying' on Lucy in a one-sided relationship, but he is actually lulling her into a mutual, unholy pact, in which both sides benefit. Thus, it is not Dracula's sexuality that is presented as truly 'monstrous' - it is Lucy's.

In describing Lucy as a member of the Un-Dead, Dr. John Seward not only gives her a sexual connotation, but implies that it is the contrast between Lucy's new, sexualized incarnation and her original "sweetness" that makes her particularly monstrous. He writes, "we saw a white figure advance, which held something dark at its breast [...] My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognized the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamant, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness" (226). In this case, not only is Lucy's "voluptuous" appearance seen as terrifying (as during Dracula's attack), but it is specifically the voluptuousness where there was previously "sweetness" and "purity" that qualifies the scene as monstrous.

Seward later sums up this fact when he describes Lucy's vampiric body laying in the tomb: "She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there, the pointed teeth, the blood stained, voluptuous mouth, which made one shudder to see, the whole carnal and unspirited appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet

purity." (229). Again, the word "voluptuous" is used to describe Lucy's new self. It would seem an unusual choice to describe what is essentially a monster: certainly, it has a negative connotation, but does not seem to be a truly 'monstrous' quality - that is, until we view it in the context of a contrast between Lucy's former "sweet purity" and her newfound "carnal and unspirited appearance". What makes this all the more interesting is that, for Seward, it is the "blood stained, voluptuous mouth", not "the pointed teeth" which "made one shudder to see". Essentially, it is Lucy's undisguisedly sexual aura that disgusts him more than her actual bloodsucking activities. This is an interesting revelation, and strongly supports the idea that it is Lucy's sexuality more than anything else that makes her 'monstrous'.

This idea is further backed up by the earlier part of the passage, which introduces Lucy's figure as "white" with "something dark at its breast". This parallels the earlier description of Lucy as a "half-reclining, snowy white figure" with "something, long and black, bending over" her, during her first encounter with Dracula (102). In both cases, the contrast between "white" and "dark" serves to reinforce the idea of a contrast between purity and evil. This juxtaposition of colors, though fairly insignificant itself, parallels the more important juxtaposition between the 'old', "sweet" Lucy and the 'new', "voluptuous" Lucy, strengthening it and adding to its significance.

Stoker specifically chooses Lucy to embody this monstrous sexuality because of particular traits she had during her life. Much earlier, after receiving three separate marriage proposals in one day, she writes, "why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them? Here I was almost making fun of this great hearted, true gentleman. [...] Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all the trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (66). Here, Lucy's playful, innocent perplexity at receiving all these proposals highlights her coquettish, 'nubile', inherently sexually attractive appearance and personality. Lucy is presented as not only beautiful, but tantalizing, even 'sexy'. But this is a different kind of sexiness than the one that she embodies later on as the Un-Dead. Here her desirability arises from her unavailability; she is still innocent, though flirtatious, and her childlike playfulness emphasizes this. Her rhetorical question, at the end of this quotation, however, is only half-joking, and her reference to "heresy" seems to come from an ingrained doctrine, not from any personal sense that her suggestion is wrong. It is this flirty, coquettish personality that make Lucy so desirable as a sexual

partner to Seward, Arthur, and Quincey, and why those three find her later incarnation as a scandalous, even raunchy sexualized female so upsetting.

The reader views the events surrounding 'Lucy as a vampire' through the filter of the men who are sexually interested in Lucy, and this is an important consideration to take into account when analyzing their reaction to Lucy. Stoker reminds the reader of this at several points during the scene in the churchyard, including when Seward describes vampire-Lucy's voice. "There was something diabolically sweet in her tones, something of the tinkling of glass when struck, which rang through the brains even of us who heard the words addressed to another". In discussing this important quotation, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Seward is, or was, a suitor of Lucy - someone who desired her as a sexual companion - who was rejected by Lucy. Here, he is watching her address her preferred man - Arthur Holmwood - and so Seward's narrative can not help but be tinged with jealousy, even sexual frustration. This comes even farther to the fore when Seward writes, "the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing. Had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight. As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed in a voluptuous smile" (226). What has caused this abrupt change in Seward's regard for Lucy? Abrupt it certainly is, since Seward can pinpoint the exact moment at which it occurred. Is it her merciless attacks on young, helpless children that angers him? Is it her hatred for them? Is it her unnatural life after death? None of these things seem to bother Seward overmuch. Instead, it is Lucy's "voluptuous smile", her "carnal and unspirited appearance", her "wantonness", that destroys Seward's love for Lucy. In short, her independent sexuality and break from her innocent, "sweet purity", makes her undesirable as a sexual partner. Lucy is nothing short of a female who has removed herself from the pedestal and become sexualized, and as such she garners hatred from the males in her life.

So how do three sexually frustrated young men fix the problem of an 'uppity' female who deserts her expected sexual role? Through a symbolic rape-act parody, of course. Arthur's exorcism of Lucy in the tomb is an imitation of rape, and as such represents the forceful return of Lucy into the standard female sphere.

Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then

he struck with all his might. The thing in the coffin writhed, and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions. The sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it. The sight of it gave us courage so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault. (231).

The act of driving the "mercy-bearing stake" into Lucy's "flesh" while she writhes in "contortions" evokes the image of dominant sexual intercourse. Meanwhile, the comparison to Thor - a symbol of unflinching manliness - reminds the reader that the goal of this act is to restore the 'normal' state of sexual roles - with the female as an unsexualized, unassertive object of adoration and the male as a dominant, protective figure. This object is evidently a success, shown by Van Helsing's statement to Arthur that "you may kiss her" (232). This innocuous romantic act is the perfect embodiment of the innocent, pure type of relationship that best suits these men. What they interpret as Lucy's happiness and rest is actually their own at having their dominant positions restored. Thus, the destruction of the 'monstrous' coincides with the destruction of independent female sexuality.

When one 'reads between the lines' in Dracula, it is obvious that complex gender relations play a huge role in the novel. Whether Stoker was criticizing the anti-female sentiment of his times, or whether he was just as sexist as the rest and was actually demonizing female sexuality, is not clear, nor is it important. The message stands on its own. The fascinating relationship between the idea of the 'monstrous' and female sexuality shines through Lucy's actions, as well as the views of her by other characters. The horror of her encounter with Dracula, the monstrosity of her Un-Dead activities, and her final exorcism, are all related to her tantalizing sexual desirability during her life.

Works Cited:

Stoker, Bram, and Brooke Allen. Dracula. Danbury: Barnes & Noble, Incorporated, 2004.

Language and its Impact in Frankenstein

Linguistic Interpretation in Frankenstein

How mutable are our feelings, and how strange is that clinging love we have of life even in the excess of misery! (Shelley, 128). Such is protagonist Victor Frankenstein's reflection on the nature of sorrow in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Human feelings are truly *mutable*, possessing a malleable quality when subjected to various circumstances. The mind tends to *cling* to specific emotions as it continues to love life when exposed to the *excess* of misery. It may thus be concluded that certain circumstances, objects, even words possessing a dramatically miserable quality have the power to mutate human emotions in an extreme and polarized manner. This idea is clearly demonstrated in Victor's portrayal of his futile pursuit of the monster throughout the novel. The tragedy of Victor Frankenstein is exaggerated in its description, as the scientist disingenuously employs dramatic language to describe his selfish struggle, thus drawing unworthy sympathy from his audience.

In telling of his struggle to control his monstrous creation, Dr. Frankenstein creates an agonizing depiction of emotional torment. He uses vocabulary that is so strong and startling the reader cannot help but be convinced that Frankenstein's distress directly correlates with the tragic heroism embodied in his pursuit of the monster. The doctor describes the awful burden of his responsibility to the monster, stating, "...But I felt that I had no right to share their [man's] intercourse. I had unchained an enemy among them, whose joy it was to shed their blood and to revel in their groans. How they would, each and all, abhor me, and hunt me from the world, did they know my unhallowed acts and the crimes which had their source in me!"(136). With this mournful statement, Victor places himself in a dire position in the reader's eyes. Using dark, unsettling language, he describes his creation in chaotic, demonic terms, explaining that as it has been "unchained" it will relentlessly *shed* the *blood* of all humans and *revel in their groans*. Victor is subsequently allowed to assume the role of the victim, for though he is responsible for this fiend, he transforms the general public into a monster as well. He piteously describes mankind's reaction to his folly by saying that they would *abhor* him and *hunt* him as punishment for his crimes. Victor's audience is thus forced to sympathize with the protagonist, seeing him trapped in a desperate, frightening situation. Although he refers to his acts as *unhallowed*, the reader feels that the scientist's unfortunate situation expiates him from blame. The audience

instead sees Victor's willingness to face the wrath of the monster and the general public as courageous, and thus his crusade against his creation as heroic.

Frankenstein's use of vocabulary, however, contrasts with that of the linguistically adept Henry Clerval. Unlike Victor, a man of science, Clerval's, "...literary pursuits differed wholly from those which had occupied [his friend]," for he, "...came to the university with the design of making himself complete master of the oriental languages..."(44). His life's work is the study of words and their connotation. As a "master" of language, Clerval's diction is precise and direct in its meaning, for he understands the power of words. In his description of the Scottish countryside, Clerval explains to Victor:

...this country.... pleases me more than all those wonders. The mountains of Switzerland are more majestic and strange; but there is a charm in the banks of this divine river, that I never before saw equaled. Look at that castle which overhangs yon precipice; and that also on the island, almost concealed amongst the foliage of those lovely trees; and now that group of labourers coming from among their vines; and that village half-hid in the recess of the mountain. Oh, surely, the spirit that inhabits and guards this place has a soul more in harmony with man, than those who pile the glacier, or retire to the inaccessible peaks of the mountains of our own country. (113)

Rather than looking upon the world with disdain and despair, Victor explains that Henry felt "as if he had been transported to Fairy-land, and enjoyed a happiness seldom tasted by man,"(112). He embraces life and nature, and does so in an emotional yet lucid manner. The description of mountains as "majestic and strange," contrasts that of the foliage as "lovely," however, this comparison serves merely to enhance the reader's understanding of nature, rather than to obstruct it with partiality. His choice of words is powerfully descriptive, yet free of overly dramatic elements that might skew interpretation. Clerval, with his mastery of language, is essentially, "...a being formed in the 'very poetry of nature.' His wild and enthusiastic imagination...chastened by the sensibility of his heart," (113). His eloquence leaves no question as to his meaning.

While Clerval's diction is reliable in interpretation, Frankenstein's own means of description appears less credible. Frankenstein himself admits that his woeful diction is cumbersome, as he states that, "...the only check to [Clerval's] enjoyments was my sorrowful and dejected mien,"(115). He explains the profound impact language has in its interpretation, as he recounts the nature of his childhood education, stating:

We learned Latin and English, so that we might read the writings in those languages; and so far from study being made odious to us through punishment, we loved application, and our amusements would have been the labours of other children. Perhaps we did not read so many books, or learn languages so quickly, as those who are disciplined according to the ordinary methods; but what we learned was impressed the more deeply on our memories. (19)

Victor thus recognizes the power of language, explaining that it has the power to be, "...impressed the more deeply on our memories." Mere word choice may not be overlooked in one's expression of thought. Yet, although the young scientist loves the application of language in reading and writing, it is unclear whether he truly understands how to use words eloquently. Victor admits the unconventional nature of his education by explaining, "...we did not read so many books, or learn languages so quickly, as those who are disciplined according to the ordinary methods..." As Victor has little familiarity with conventional language practices, one may no longer trust the accuracy of his description. With unconventional teaching being "impressed" on Victor's memories, the reader's interpretation of the English language is inevitably at odds with that of the protagonist.

As the reader is forced to question Victor's dramatic vocabulary, he or she is thus compelled to reconsider the nature of the scientist's pursuit of his creation. Any lamentation of his struggles may not be interpreted as genuine. One must reconsider Victor's final plea to Walton to avenge his death by killing the monster. Although he portrays his mission to be sacrificial in nature, Victor's pursuit of the monster is a vindictive crusade for self-aggrandizement. Depicting himself as a chivalrous human being, Frankenstein futilely attempts to convince the audience that his mission is one of benevolent purpose. The scientist claims that he has engaged in something greater, a holy "pilgrimage" in which he is a "minister of vengeance," for, "...William, Justine, Clerval, Elizabeth, [his] father..." and the good of mankind. Fancying himself a martyr for his cause, Frankenstein explains that he shall selflessly "endure the hardships," of his pursuit alone (115). Yet amidst such lofty justification, the true nature of Victor's crusade subtly erodes his benign image. It is clear that Frankenstein's mission is motivated by his own pride, for the language that he uses to describe the journey is selfish and personal. He deeply "desires" to kill the monster, for it will "...satisfy [his] vengeance," (115). The extent to which Victor is invested in this crusade is intense, revealing that his feelings expand far beyond the sympathy of mankind. He treats the pursuit with a competitive nature, his goal being to force the monster to meet his demise. Victor refuses to be defeated in this competition of life

and death, declaring that, "...he [the monster] shall not escape [the punishment of death]," (115). Fearing that he will die before the monster, thus denying him, "...the rest [he] so much desire[s]," Victor renders the struggle eternal, extending it far beyond his earthly existence (115). He pleads with Walton to, "..., swear that he shall not live -- swear that he shall not triumph over my accumulated woes and survive," (115). Rather than playing Walton's sympathy for those who have been murdered by the beast, Frankenstein tries to convince the man to kill the monster out of sympathy for his own "accumulated woes," thus blatantly directing the purpose of his mission from a humanitarian to a vengeful cause (115). Victor yearns for the satisfaction of knowing that the monster has been destroyed, for even in death he cannot rest until the creature has passed. Thus the duality of Victor's vocabulary is made apparent. He attempts to evoke a compassionate response from his audience by employing words with religious connotations, defending himself as an oppressed missionary carrying out a sacrificial crusade. The underlying vocabulary of this plea, however, proves to be, "...actuated by selfish and vicious motives..." and the reader may not judge his viewpoint as right, "...for [he] may still be misled by passion,"(162). Victor is unable to objectively express his ideas in words, for his diction presents too much emotional connotation to be interpreted accurately. The protagonist thus proves himself to be an inherently unreliable narrator in all his descriptions.

Victor Frankenstein's use of dramatic terms manipulates the reader's understanding of the events of the novel. Although seemingly genuine at first, Victor's lamentations when compared to the musing of the linguistic Clerval seem lofty and forced. It is clear that the scientist does not possess the ability to genuinely express thoughts into words. One is thus forced to reconsider the true meaning of his mournful speech. Victor's diction proves weak under critical analysis and the drama of his words gradually falls away to reveal a less heroic theme: selfishness. Victor takes his belief in the mutability of human emotions to heart in his writing, hoping that the power of his words and his "excess of grief" have the ability to sway the opinion of the reader in his favor. His lack of literary craftsmanship and linguistic understanding, however, prove to be his downfall.

Works Cited:

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1994.

The Monster of Representation

French Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne once wrote, “To the most knowing and ablest men, everything will therefore be monstrous.” This line carries with it the weight of a warning carefully developed within the pages of Mary Shelley’s iconic *Frankenstein*—that if each of us follows our intelligence as far as it leads, what is beyond that barrier is the monstrous and disordered; that the existence of

monstrosity is governed by certain and specific restrictions; and



that, if we were to venture beyond those restrictions, we would discover for ourselves, the monstrous. Frankenstein’s monster gives this warning even more of a voice, when, commenting on Volney’s *Ruins of Empires*, he says, “Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and

base?” (119). It is here, through Frankenstein’s monster, that Shelley introduces yet another central idea: representation. And indeed, monstrosity and representation complement each other in *Frankenstein*: The disharmony created by the physical representation of the monster serves as the primary cause for his monstrosity.

Simultaneously, the ambiguous representation of creator and creation forms the foundation upon which Frankenstein’s monstrosity develops.

To look at the former in another way: Frankenstein’s monster is a reflection of the monstrous nature of representation. Victor Frankenstein, then, may deliberately choose the monster’s “gigantic stature” as an expedient in his work; but when that

work is completed, its significance is beyond the pragmatic (32). As Victor says, “How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains I had endeavored to form?” (35). The size of the monster underscores a faulty relationship between the outside and the inside of his body, as well as a lack of harmony on the exterior. His features are contiguous without any substantial ground, contrasting either too much or too little, and are not even distinguishable as external features from the arteries and muscles also visible on the surface. Evidently, the monster’s body is seen as having no depth and no coherence.

This physical monstrosity of Frankenstein’s creature, then, may be said to relate to problems in the representation of man as an individual, or a figure in society. In Volney’s representation, the human species appears to be no less incoherent than the monster’s appearance. And in fact, it is almost as if Victor sees in his creation the breakdown of the concept of man into an irreconcilable and diverse assortment of individuals or of qualities within individuals—a breakdown that essentially leaves representation as a disordered, baseless, and monstrous affair. And thus, with the creation of the monster, Frankenstein no longer has the unity in diversity so characteristic of his early relationship with Elizabeth: “Harmony was the soul of our companionship, and the diversity and contrast that subsisted in our characters drew us nearer together” (18). Instead, one is reminded of Frankenstein’s monster’s body as the composition of stolen body parts, and the grotesque countenance of the monster that results. It is therefore this inability to rise from disordered particulars to form an organized whole—from individuals, or from mental or physical qualities

within the individual—that defines one aspect of the representational crisis that produces Frankenstein’s monster.

A further aspect of monstrosity is related to the idea of gigantism and the distortion of perception that it produces. It is this distortion of perception, in essence a form of confusion among humans, which gives rise to monstrosity. Consider, for instance, the relationship between Victor and Elizabeth. In his youth, Victor is given the orphan Elizabeth as a “present,” and she becomes his “more than sister” as he grows up (17). Their life together is idyllic, until their mother, in an attempt to cure Elizabeth of the scarlet fever, albeit successful, herself catches the fever from Elizabeth. Mrs. Frankenstein dies, saying, “Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to my younger children” (24). The illness thus passed between these two women is the physical manifestation of a psychological confusion among the identities of “sister,” “mother,” and “wife” that persists throughout Victor’s story, and it ultimately forms the dramatic basis for Victor’s relationship with his creation, the monster. Evidently, there seems to be a conflict between familial and sexual roles that can be resolved only through illness, violence, or death. In effect, this form of “contagion” is caused by the problem of fitting individuals to more general concepts within the process of representation.

The importance of this concept of ambiguous identities becomes more evident when one considers how Victor and his monster establish a kind of kinship through the confusion in their roles as monster and creator. Perhaps this confusion is what Frankenstein is referring to when he comes to speak of himself as “the slave of my

creature,” to which the monster replies, “You are my creator, but I am your master” (111, 122). Interestingly enough, the monster, at a later point, claims, “I was the slave, not the master, of an impulse, which I detested, yet could not disobey” (164). This ambiguity as to who is subject to whom, along with the patterns of role reversals, is continuous with Victor’s life after the creation of his monster, and is irresolvable as long as they both continue to live—there can be no reconciliation. Understandably, Victor cannot, or perhaps subconsciously refuses to, recognize his kinship to his monster because in doing so, he would lose his identity in the chaos reflected in the monster’s appearance. Or, to put this in other words, Victor would no longer be able to use his perception of the monster as a means of displacing his own monstrosity. For this reason, Victor can only recognize himself in the monster in a demonic form: “I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind... nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (51). Paradoxically, in distancing himself from reality, Victor only justifies his own monstrosity even more, thereby nurturing it. Such fear of confronting reality is thus the true tragedy of Victor’s situation, and the main reason why he is incapable of breaking free from his unhealthy and continuous cycle.

It is thus ironic, in view of all these complexities related to representation, that Victor Frankenstein also voluntarily plays the role of the editor of the novel. In the words of Robert Walton,

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected them in many places; but principally in giving his *life and spirit* to the conversations he held with his enemy. “Since

you have preserved my narration,” said he, “I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity.” (156)

Victor again seeks to overcome textual corruption by animating the manuscript, claiming to give it “his life and spirit.” In doing so, Victor is changing its representation. With regards to his previous attempts at just that, he does indeed seem to be a man who never learns his lesson. So to his ignorance, Victor is faithful to the end, faithful to the death.

Works Cited

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994.

“Overlooking the Monstrous: A Vindication of Frankenstein’s Creation”

Within Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, Captain Robert Walton is exposed to the horrifying and enthralling story of Dr. Frankenstein’s creation. Through Frankenstein’s narration, the characteristics of his creation are revealed-- Walton is shocked by his descriptions of the “wretched” and “abhorred” creature. The use of this charged language defines Frankenstein’s creation before his presence is felt within the novel, drawing readers to the conclusion that the creature is indeed, monstrous. Remarking upon his ‘son’, Frankenstein staunchly labels him a monster, creating an emotional upheaval with his usage of the term. Though Shelley illuminates the creature’s feelings of apathy, regret and compassion, the creature cannot express its “humanity” due to the negative connotations of the word “monster”.

Before the creation of Dr. Frankenstein’s “Adam”, Victor’s descriptions of his life are optimistic and hopeful. However, with the arrival of the ‘monster’, Frankenstein is plagued with overwhelming dread-- he condemns his judgment and declares his creature a “wretch” though he had “[...] selected his features as beautiful” (Shelley, Frankenstein, 31). Frankenstein’s initial disgust and affliction for the monster conditions

readers to dread the presence of the monster, though he has not yet a developed character. Early on, it is understood that the wretchedness of this monster precedes his actions towards humanity, as evidenced by Victor's escape from the creature. He describes to a rapt Walton that he "[...] took refuge in the courtyard [...] 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" (42). The anticipation of the 'monster' is partially fueled by fascination with the "unnatural", thereby motivating readers' preconceptions of the creature. The language surrounding Frankenstein's creation is immovably negative-- Frankenstein's disgust highlights the creature's "unearthly ugliness" which "rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes" (63). The rejection of Victor's "son" emphasizes the monster's undesirable nature, as well as enforcing the idea of the unnatural. The nameless creature is also reflective of Victor-- without a name to attribute his actions and "human" characteristics, readers deflect back to Frankenstein's perceptions of his creation. Shelley creates an upheaval at the term "monster" in the culmination of Victor's anger-- he angrily declares him a "[...] monster" and a "fiend", thereby cementing his image as a violent and monstrous being (76). In further condemnation, Frankenstein seethes that the "[...] tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes" (ibid). The guilt and hate that rests upon the 'monster' also serves to hide Victor's conceited actions against nature in the attempts to glorify himself. The spiteful language Victor employs surrounds the monster and shrouds him in violent imagery, leaving the reader to extricate him from the established prejudice.

In the early moments of the creature's consciousness, he is rejected by his creator and is forced to embark upon an unending search for redemption from his 'accursed' birth. The fatalistic relationship between Frankenstein and his creation is also established early on, as the creature forever looks towards Frankenstein for acceptance and absolution. However upon being "disowned" and repudiated by humans, he adopts an overwhelmingly cynical view of humankind. Confronting Frankenstein, the creature bitinglly declares, "You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man!" (74). As the creature's admiration of his 'master' slowly ferments as anger and violence, readers are exposed to his revulsion and self-hate. The creature's actions are brought to light by Victor, who exposes mostly horrifying elements of their relationship, preferring to overlook the creature's

initial naïveté. After fleeing from the disgust incited by his presence, the creature observes the peaceful lives of villagers with yearning. Gradually, the creature begins to embrace humanity's perception of himself, provoking a desire for both self-destruction and death. He describes his feelings of desperation, stating "[...] 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" (79). The disparaging reality surrounding the creature causes him to submit to the description of the monstrous. Though he expresses "human" qualities such as knowledge and empathy, the eventual rejection of any perceived humanity forces readers to witness the destructive powers of the creature, which defines him until his last encounters with Victor. Suspicions of the creature's destructive abilities are 'confirmed' by the acceptance of his title as a monster, as well as the unraveling sanity of the creature.

Like readers of Shelley's Frankenstein, Captain Robert Walton is met with a suspension of disbelief, and upon accepting Victor's narration, becomes subject to his version of the fantastic. Walton is eagerly exposed to Victor's dramatized history, describing his friend's "full-toned voice" and "lustrous eyes [that] dwell on me with all their melancholy sweetness [...]" (14). Through this glowing depiction, readers learn of Frankenstein's tortured relationship with his creation. However, as Frankenstein's health falters towards the climax of violence and destruction within the story, Walton's emotional connection to Frankenstein is revealed-- Walton rhapsodizes, "What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity, when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin!" (156). Much like Shelley's readers, Walton's personal bond with Frankenstein conditions him to take his biased revelations as truth-- Dr. Frankenstein's impassioned recitations stir "cheerful auguries" within Walton, as well as kindling a hopeful spirit within his crew (158). As Frankenstein espouses his grief at his own wretchedness, the vulnerability offered by his narration brings readers to almost sympathize with his pains, though upon further examination, were brought on by himself. Walton, however, reserves most of his judgment for the creature until his personal encounter with him. In Frankenstein's death, the eventual destruction of his creature are reflective only of the monster's actions and are never related to his creator. As the novel draws to a close, readers witness the regret expressed by the creature, highlighting the re-discovery of the last human element within the creature. However, upon the renunciation of his birth, the creature does not vindicate himself, but his creator, whom he declares the "[...]

select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration among men [...]” (165). In his last moments, the creature’s overwhelming grief sheds light on his last sliver of humanity. However, with his declaration of self-destruction, the creature erases any lingering beliefs about his innocence, thereby delegating much of the blame upon himself. The bias within Frankenstein’s narration is discovered through the rapt emotional responses that it inspires within Walton, as well as Shelley’s audience.

As readers examine the language within Frankenstein, the use of the word monster is revealed to define aspects of the creature-- with its inflammatory nature, the word creates a bias that is never lifted from his character. Shelley’s use of the term incites an emotional response to the gradually more violent actions of the creature, as described by Frankenstein. The use of the term must be distinguished in order to clarify the presence of the ‘monster’ within the story-- the creature is declared a ‘monster’ upon its creation, and the implications of if it are unending. To extract the ‘monster’ from Frankenstein’s creation, Shelley’s use of language must be examined, as only through Walton’s narration do readers view his character.

Victor Frankenstein: Perpetrator of His Own Demise

Although not everyone is eligible enough to become scientists, it is important to note that scientists originate from regular humans. Most humans share similar traits; they are curious about the world around them and have good intentions despite selfish desires. Victor Frankenstein, the main character in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, possesses these characteristics as well. What distinguishes him from others is his relentless drive to discover the mystery of life for the sake of mankind. Despite his honorable intentions, he gets caught up in egomania in the process, and is unable to accomplish his goals. Driven by selfish motives, Frankenstein’s monomaniacal pursuit of science is futile for without morality, the acquirement of knowledge becomes a destructive and desperate vindication of his own egocentricity.

Frankenstein’s initial craving for knowledge propels him towards a purposeful mission for the betterment of mankind. Even as an adolescent, Frankenstein has always exhibited a curiosity for the world and determination to discover the “hidden laws of nature” (18). He is convinced that the only plausible route towards this discovery lies within the study of science because “in other studies, you go as far as others have

gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder” (18). Thus, at a young age, he begins educating himself with the boundless amount of knowledge that scientists of past generations have acquired. When he discovers alchemy through the works of Cornelius Agrippa, he exclaims, “A new light seemed to dawn upon [his] mind” (20). This “light” he refers to symbolizes knowledge, which can illuminate and uncover the hidden secrets in nature’s darkness. His professor explains to him:

“[Scientists] were men to whose indefatigable zeal modern philosophers were indebted for most of the foundations of their knowledge. They had left to us, as an easier task to give new names, and arrange in connected classification the facts which they in a great degree had been the instruments of bringing to light. The labors of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind” (28).

Although the professor believes that the works of generations past have enormous impacts upon the present, he also alludes to the fact that science, no matter how beneficial, is bound to have mistrials and errors. More importantly, his usage of the words, “however erroneously directed,” foreshadows Victor’s later pursuit of science for his egocentricity. Nevertheless, his brief warning about science’s side effects have little effect on young Frankenstein because Frankenstein is fully convinced that the studying beyond nature’s offerings for the sake of mankind will keep him satisfied. He admits his love of manmade creations when he says, “During my youthful days discontent never visited my mind; and if I was ever overcome by ennui, the sight of what is beautiful in nature, or the study of what is excellent and sublime in the productions of man, could always interest my heart, and communicate elasticity to my spirits” (116). Here, he denounces nature as nothing but “beautiful” scenery for him to enjoy when he is bored. True happiness for him lays within the “productions of man”, in this case education, and more importantly, science. Despite Frankenstein’s initial pursuit of science for enjoyment and mankind, his actions would soon answer his professor’s warnings.

Although Frankenstein initially pursues science to better mankind, his success catapults him into depravity, and forces him to enclose himself from humanity. Even though science has determined his destiny since he was young, his professor’s insight on its benefits offered Frankenstein a whole new perspective on its potential rewards. The professor’s words made such an impact upon Frankenstein’s psyche that he recalls,

“As [the professor] went on, I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being...soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose” (28). Although Frankenstein tries to display his chivalrous side to society, he, like most, has an egotistic twin, whom he refers to as his “palpable enemy.” As his selfish other half begins to strangle, or corrupt his inner morality, Frankenstein forgets about his humanitarian cause, and formulates a hoggish goal of achieving fame by setting a scientific precedence. His soul exclaimed, “So much has been done...more, far more, will I achieve...I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (28). His infatuation for scientific glory blinds him to the negative side effects his professor briefly implied. Thus, driven by the need to fulfill his egocentricity, Victor ends up creating a monster which becomes a hazard to society and to his own mental state. After the deaths of his loved ones, Victor feels more devastated than ever. He confides to Walton,

“I wandered like an evil spirit, for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description horrible and more, much more (I persuaded myself) was yet behind. Yet my heart overflowed with kindness, and the love of virtue. I had begun life with benevolent intentions, and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice and make myself useful to my fellow beings. Now all was blasted: instead of that serenity of conscience which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and from thence to gather promise of new hopes, I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe” (61).

Here, he realizes that although he had begun with good intentions at heart, his actions contradicted all the benefits science was supposed to bring him and society. Thus he is “seized” by a “sense of guilt” because not only is he responsible for the “deeds of mischief” his monster has committed; he knows that his creation resulted from his selfish motive to achieve fame rather than to save humanity. As a result, not only will he never achieve “serenity of conscience” for what he has done to society, he will never achieve his goals and apprehends that all is “blasted” (61). After this epiphany, he focuses on destroying his evil creation that has ruined his life and potential career. This new pursuit of his scientific creation however, becomes yet another vindication for his egocentricity disguised in the form of a humanitarian crusade.

Although Frankenstein discovers the dangers of extending beyond natural boundaries, his refusal to

direct Walton onto the right path proves that his egocentricity as well as personal failures have consumed his desire to serve mankind. Throughout the novel, the reader perceives that Frankenstein is determined to prevent Walton from going on the same path that led to his own decadence. After succeeding in his search for the “light” of life, Frankenstein changes his opinion of science and warns Walton that it will only bring trouble:

“What had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation of the world was now within my grasp...I see by your eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted: that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story...I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. 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.” (31).

Here, Frankenstein’s contradicting words shatter the perception of his role as a teacher, and illuminates the true purpose of his story: self glorification. Despite discovering the secret of mankind, he confesses that he will not share it with Walton. If he has decided to remain as its sole guardian, then why is he purposely leading Walton on instead of just letting him fend for himself? Frankenstein however, convinces Walton to “listen patiently until the end” because he will “not lead [him] on...to [his] infallible misery”. Why should Walton waste his time listening when first, Frankenstein has refused to share his secret, and second, Frankenstein has already disclosed that scientific pursuits will always end in inevitable misery?

Frankenstein discloses to Walton that the acquirement of knowledge beyond nature’s limitations is a dangerous craft. If so, then why is he still attempting to share his knowledge with Walton? The words that he juxtaposes have a pattern of inconsistency and hidden meaning. He warns Walton against knowledge but is still determined to pass his story to him, though not in its entirety. The moment before his death, he warns Walton against the pursuit of science one last time, “Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed” (162). Once again, he alludes to his own experience when he warns Walton against ambition and the

“innocent” desire to distinguish himself in science. He tries to persuade Walton that accepting and embracing nature will bring him true happiness. Although he mentioned previously that Walton’s attempt at scientific discovery are futile just like his own, he adds that “another may succeed”, meaning that despite his attempt to guard the secret for himself, he fears that another person may stumble upon it and share it publicly. Even though he seems to have learned the lesson that selfish motives could only result in failure, in reality, he is angrier at himself for failing to achieve fame rather than creating a hazard for humanity. Thus, he recites his tale to Walton as a final attempt to achieve his long awaited fame in death. Frankenstein’s refusal to enlighten Walton fully stems not only from his selfish insecurity, but also from his professor’s negligence of science’s potential for errors.

Despite pursuing science for personal reasons, Frankenstein’s egocentricity cannot take all the blame for his actions. Had he received a complete education from his professor, he would have been able to control his obsession before it became perilous to society. Even though his professor had insinuated the potential for science to become dangerous, he manages to convince Frankenstein that the pursuit of science, no matter what its consequences are, will always be beneficial. Similarly, Frankenstein never educates Walton to the best of his abilities and leaves many details up in the air. Although Frankenstein warns Walton against pursuing science, he does so out of fear that Walton will uncover the secret and bask in his glory, not out of compassion. While both Victor and his professor understand that the “light” of mankind is impossible to locate, they continue striving for it to keep humanity optimistic of its existence. If this is the case, then is Mary Shelley suggesting that the study of science and education in general is flawed, futile, and possibly a scam?

Works Cited:

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994.

“The Dead Calmness of Inaction: Death and its Antithesis”

In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, Shelley presents the reader with two types of characters. The first, characters such as Elizabeth and Clerval, are meant to be dismissed due to their *divine*, inhuman traits. Possessing a perfection that the rest of the human race cannot call its own, Elizabeth and Clerval carry no importance to humanity. Shelley demonstrates this by stating:

The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home. Her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us... And Clerval... might not have been so perfectly humane, so thoughtful in his generosity- so full of kindness and tenderness amidst his passion for adventurous exploit, had she not unfolded to him the real loveliness of beneficence, and made the doing good the end and aim of his soaring ambition (19).

Elizabeth, described as “saintly” and shining as a “shrine-dedicated lamp,” is inspiration for the rest of the household. Elizabeth’s image is a divine image; her eyes, “celestial” remind of heavenly goodness. She is something to be admired, and seems to be present only for the amusement and necessity of others, as phrases such as “her sympathy was ours” and “her celestial eyes were ever there to bless and animate us,” suggest. Elizabeth is ungoverned by her own self-interest and desire, and Clerval is portrayed as much the same. Clerval is described as “perfectly humane;” the oxymoron of human perfection, impossible to achieve, shows the illegitimacy of Clerval’s character. Clerval, as shown, is a product of Elizabeth’s saintly influence. While these two characters provide a foundation for Victor, they hold no depth for themselves. Shelley’s portrayal of them as impossibly good and kind shows her intention for their dismissal in importance and consideration. This leaves the remaining main characters: Victor and the Monster. Obviously complex in emotions and significance to the plot, Shelley intends these characters of central importance of the novel, and therefore human. This, in turn, poses a greater question; what makes these characters as human, and are there unifying themes that these human characters share? The obsession with revenge, a pulsing life force and drive present in both of the character’s minds, is the governing motive of Victor and the monster. This revenge, this inner desire for destruction and death, is the common bond between them and humanity in Shelley’s Frankenstein. Revenge is a forced reaction to a series of unjust events. Shocked by the death of Justine, Victor summarizes the birth and reasoning of revenge by stating, “Nothing is more painful to the human mind than, after the feelings have been worked up by a quick succession of events, the dead calmness of inaction and certainty which follows and deprives the soul both of hope and fear” (61). Here, by stating “the *dead* calmness of inaction,” *Victor* compares the shocked state he is forced into with death. By continuing this analogy, it can be stated that life, death’s antithesis, can be likened with action and aggression, the opposite of calmness. Revenge, falling under this category of action, would seem to restore the life that these events destroy. This death brings with it a depravity of “both hope and fear;” indicating that life, in Victor’s opinion, would be one thriving with both of these elements. Revenge, therefore, is a logical and systematic reaction to the void caused by painful happenings, and will work to restore the elements of life lost in this process. Revenge, while working to restore life, also regenerates the extinguished elements of hope and fear that Victor laments the loss of. After the shock of Clerval’s death, Victor plunges into a traumatic state which is difficult for him to conquer. Victor describes his return to sanity, attributing it largely to his returned desire for revenge:

Liberty, however, had been an useless gift to me had I not, as I awakened to reason, at the same time awakened to revenge. As the memory of past misfortunes pressed upon me, I began to reflect on their cause- the monster whom I had created, the miserable daemon whom I had sent abroad into the world for my destruction. I was possessed by a maddening rage when I thought of him, and desired and ardently prayed that I might have him within my grasp to wreak a great and signal revenge on his cursed head (147).

Victor describes liberty as a gift to pursue his own self-interest. The presence of this revenge transforms his “useless gift” into a valuable possession. By equating reason with revenge, Victor’s consumption with this idea is revealed. The once greatly intellectual scientist has replaced theory and knowledge with rage and hatred. But this is not truly a replacement, for it is his “memory of past misfortunes” that awakens this dormant feeling, a feeling present even in his studious past. Victor has freed the monster for “*my* destruction,” and his memories, forcedly “pressed” onto him, cause him to fear, as he believes the Monster’s sole objective is his own destruction. Revenge is thus born to combat the Monster, and, more importantly, to combat “the dead calmness of inaction” that had taken control of Victor in his traumatic state. Victor re-awakens to reason when revenge flows once again through his veins, and begins to feel a “maddening rage.” The hope that had been “deprived from his soul” is simultaneously restored, shown by Victor’s “desire and ardent prayer,” to complete his revenge. Victor’s return to revenge accompanied by a rebirth of elements he states necessary to

life.¹

Revenge, a strong human feeling, is likewise present in the mind of the Monster. In reaction to his brutal treatment by Felix and his family, the Monster expresses his burning emotions, stating, "Despair had not yet taken possession of me; my feelings were those of rage and revenge. I could with pleasure have destroyed the cottage and its inhabitants, and have glutted myself with their shrieks and misery" (97). The Monster declares that, while "despair" is an object that "takes possession," it is "rage and revenge" that are to be described as "feelings." Rage and revenge, therefore, are the natural emotions that are part of humanity, and are not foreign intruders like despair. The Monster describes the act of taking revenge with words such as "pleasure" and "glutted," indicating the large amount of satisfaction it brings. This revenge brings a sense of completion and is a central theme in the Monster's mind.

Revenge is a life-giving force, and the desire for destruction and violent justice is inherent in both Victor and the Monster. The Monster, in anger and fury against Victor's refusal to provide him with a mate, exclaims:

Are you to be happy while I grovel in the intensity of my wretchedness? You can blast my other passions; but revenge remains- revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food! I may die; but first you, my tyrant and tormentor, shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery (123).

The Monster has become self-sufficient, relying purely on his hatred and revenge for life. He describes it as a "passion," his greatest passion, which cannot be eliminated. This passion allows the Monster to survive. The Monster states that he is forced to "grovel"² in his "wretchedness;" this is of paramount importance, because it shows that the Monster, even in his wretched state, is able to derive pleasure. This revenge, this feeling of hate, is so strong that it enables the Monster to enjoy the most wretched of situations, to gain life from this hateful source. Victor makes a similar declaration on the power of revenge, stating, "Revenge kept me alive; I dared not die, and leave my adversary in being" (149). Victor's struggle, his physical and mental pain and loss are held at bay by this desire for revenge. While death seems a welcomed relief, Victor clings to revenge, knowing it will keep him alive. Revenge and destruction provide life to the desolate, supply the spark of humanity.

Victor and the Monster's desires provide a foundation for the rest of humanity. Shelley's usage of the Gothic Novel to convey such a horrific view on human nature is extremely effective because of the novel's frightening aspects. While defining Victor and the Monster as human, Shelley uses her other characters, such as Clerval and Elizabeth, to create a foundation for the goodness of the story. Just as, "the saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home" (19), so does her presence create a reference point for the reader to see what is truly good. This reference point shows how far Frankenstein and the Monster are from true good, and how they drift much closer to evil. Victor, through the Monster, creates life. Revenge, however, creates life in both of them, infusing in them a strong will to live. A bloody hatred fuels the two protagonists, and blurs the line between hero and villain, forcing both Victor and the Monster to be placed somewhere in the middle. It is exactly this middle point, halfway between two ideals- good and evil, god and beast- that defines man.

Victor's statement of fear being a necessary component of life is also supported by his saying, "I had been the author of unalterable evils, and I lived in daily fear lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new wickedness... There was always scope for fear, so long as anything I loved remained behind. My abhorrence of this fiend cannot be conceived. When I thought of him I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed, and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed" (62). Fear, to Victor, is a very real feeling. In describing his fear, Victor's thought process brings him directly to his sense of revenge and hatred, from "love" to "abhorrence." This is no accident; while revenge does restore life, it does simultaneously restore life's effects, and fear, as stated previously by Victor, is one of them.