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Which is the Human Here, and Which the Monster?

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* gave birth not only to a new genre of literature, but also to new literary tropes. The continual study of this novel is pursued by many, and is largely because of its eternal themes. One can examine the many implications of humanity through this novel and gain insight into its creations. The character of Frankenstein's monster recurs again and again in pop culture. His story manifests itself in popular shows such as *American Horror Story* and movies such as *Prometheus*. The Creature himself is a hybridization of technology and human.

Many have said that the Creature is not the first hybrid by referring to the Minotaur of Greek mythology. The Minotaur was created by manipulating a bull to desire and satisfy Pasiphae, King Minos' wife. Yet, Daedalus, the Minotaur's creator is also seen as a monster by scholars (Lestel 261). Society's fascination with monsters began long ago, yet it is still present and thriving. The vampire phenomenon that is currently sweeping through the world (e.g. television show *True Blood*) caused a backlash from many. Fans of the classic monster claimed that vampires are meant to be terrifying and horrific, but the mobility authors like Stephanie Meyers have with these monsters is because they are human.

Pop culture's most popular monsters include ghosts, vampires, zombies, and werewolves. Interestingly, they are portrayed with human features, and are not used only in the horror and science fiction genres. Ghosts are seen as friends in the franchise *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, and

a vampire even appears on *Sesame Street* for children. *Frankenstein* effectively shows that humanity's monsters are not different from humanity itself. Humans are not different from monsters. Culture's different fears create monsters to ease discussion, distancing people from these beings. Victor Frankenstein and the Creature are both shown as monsters because they both commit crimes against society's norms, and parallel each other in many ways. Monsters mirror humanity's tendency to be grotesque. All humans are monsters, just as those who we perceive as monsters are humans.

As the entirety of Frankenstein's stories are related through the scientist himself to Walton, it is evident that he recognizes similarities between himself and the Creature. He uses the same vocabulary to describe his own actions and those of the Creatures. A highly educated man, Victor is not limiting his vernacular without motive. Upon the night Victor "beheld the accomplishment of my toils" (Shelley 55), he is horrified to see the amalgamation of body parts he infused life into. At first, he describes the creature as "it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (55), but he later moves on to acknowledging him with a human pronoun, "His limbs" (55). Initially, Victor does not recognize the humanity or likeness of his eight foot tall creation, but he identifies with him shortly after the Creature's awakening. Shocked by his success and recognition that he created something with human capacity, he abandons his experiment and tries to sleep off the surge of catastrophe. Unfortunately, he does not find peace in his sleep, and wakes from a hellish nightmare, "I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed" (56). Like the Creature, he awakes from sleep convulsing and terrified. The Creature, who knows

nothing about himself is likely even more terrified upon his arousal. In the first moments of the Creature's inception, we are already seeing parallels between him and the human.

Alone in physical appearance and isolated from human society, the Creature is still able to contribute to it. Although he is of his own species, he crosses boundaries by performing behaviors that are inherently human. After saving a little girl from drowning, the Creature is shot by a man affiliated with the girl. His kindness is not thanked for and no one appreciates him. When he lives with the De Lacey family, the Creature also exhibited kindness towards them. He helped cut wood for the fires to save Felix's time, and he did not steal their food because he could live on a coarser diet. These behaviors are not against the standards of the human species, but rather those of a humanitarian. However, whereas most humanitarians are rewarded with recognition for the same behaviors, the Creature is punished.

People have long believed altruism as a trait exclusive to humans. Crime writer, and life peer in the House of Lords, Phyllis Dorothy James says, "Unlike animals, we have the means to destroy Planet Earth, or to make it a safer place in which all living creatures can live" (James 29). While the Creature is post-human and not of the same species as the De Lacey family, or the young girl, he still tries to make the world a safer place for these living creatures. Rather than exploiting the De Lacey family with his stealth and strength, he chooses to be altruistic. Many human characters in this book behave the opposite, and "create desolation." Frankenstein is irresponsible for his creation, abandoning the Creature upon his birth to sleep off his doings. The man who shoots the Creature, instead of showing gratitude, assumes that the Creature is dangerous and harmful, and behaves destructively. These characters have been behaving according to the negative binary of the human paradigm James sets forth. While none of the

human characters have actually destroyed the physical world, they have participated in the destructive thought process that makes the social world difficult to inhabit for many, and nearly impossible for some. Upon the realization that he cannot participate in the social world, the Creature first turns to destroying Planet Earth and then to destroying his creator's social world.

The Creature observes the cruelty of men, and behaves accordingly. He destroys the village he found comfort with the De Lacey family because of their rejecting him. When he chances upon William, he believes that a child would not be so prejudiced to his ugliness. Yet, even the most innocent boy calls the Creature, "ugly wretch! you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces--You are an ogre"(169). His hope that he could have some understanding from another human being on this Earth is lost. The only human who has demonstrated any kindness to him is the De Lacey family's old blind man. Courtesy that is given to any other living being he has seen is not available to him; he has no rights, and nobody cares. The beauty of humanity is something the Creature can only view, and not participate in. Overwhelmed by envy, despair, loneliness, the Creature exhibits for the first time, a crime against humanity by murdering the child to bring those same emotions to Victor, "I, too, can create desolation" (Shelley 170). He observes that humans have the same traits that they expect him to have, and behaves just like all the humans he has encountered. The distress they cause in him, and each other--as evidenced by Safie's story--is something he too can create. Like the altruism of the human, destruction of the human is something he does as well. The killing of a young child is monstrous, but it is not limited to mythical creatures or those that look like the Creature. Every day, murders are reported through all streams of media. Humans commit these crimes regularly, and these murderers too are called monsters. The Creature, like humans, has found, "the means to destroy Planet Earth" (James 29).

When the Creature pleads for help from his creator, Victor rejects the request abruptly. He has spent all day listening to the tale, and without much consideration at all, he makes up his mind with snap judgment. It takes more appeals to pity for Victor to agree, but the Creature does not have to request a female counterpart so cordially, “instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you” (173). His impressive physique could have ensured the creation of a female counterpart easily, but instead he attempts to solicit a favorable reaction through human communication. Reasoning is also often associated with animals of high intelligence, and thus humans. In the 2004 dystopian science fiction action film *I, Robot*, the line between artifact and human is observed. The protagonist Del Spooner is saved by a robot during a car accident involving another vehicle. Both cars land in the water, and the other car contains a young 12-year-old girl. A robot comes to save them as its purpose is to protect humans, but it is only able to save one because the cars are sinking too quickly. The robot saves Del Spooner instead of the girl because of life potential calculations. Spooner gives his story as proof that reasoning is a human trait. He says with remorse, “Any human would have known that,” specifically, to save the child, and not the grown man. It is what sets humans apart from robots, which he perceives as dangerous, or monstrous. The Creature exhibits a capacity to reason on par with what we expect of a reasonable adult, even though his birth was recent. His verbal maturity is even higher than that of Frankenstein. As demonstrated, Frankenstein threatens instead of reasoning, a key difference between just any artifact and a human. In this scene, it is Victor who lacks this characteristic. Just as Spooner sees the robot without reasoning abilities as malignant, Victor exhibits this trait of monstrosity. Frankenstein may not have the tragic physical appearance of a monster, but his personality is not very different from what we would expect from one.

The Creature has the characteristics of a zombie as he is a mix of body parts from different bodies brought to life. Noam Chomsky, one of the most famous intellectuals of the United States discussed with curious students America's simultaneous fascination and anxiety over zombies. Based on other historical occurrences (e.g. slave revolts), he deduced, "it is kind of just a recognition, at some level of the psyche, that if you've got your boot on somebody's neck, there's something wrong. And that the people you're oppressing may rise up and defend themselves, and then you're in trouble." ("Noam Chomsky"). By first creating the Creature, and then abandoning him, Frankenstein oppressed him. The rejection to nurture the Creature is taking away what he was supposed to be born with. The social norm implies that each child is supposed to be born to parents who are to love and care for them. Most people in this world have a family to turn to, and the orphans of Earth receive care from others so that they too can have a chance to fulfill their own desires. When family fails the child, they have society to turn to. The Creature's only family deserts him and society further rejects him. Victor is aware of the Creature's tale, and although he has more power over the Creature (i.e. his ability to create a life partner, his mobility within social structure), he is extremely afraid because he is aware that he is oppressing someone like him, and not some thing.

Victor's downward spiral accelerates as he oppresses the Creature. When the Creature comes back to reason with Victor, he shows considerable intellect and depth. Victor accepts the Creature's request for a life partner. The prospect of not being lonely anymore was very profound for the Creature, and Victor's breaking that promise was a form of oppression. This betrayal seems especially cruel because of how the Creature expresses his adversities. The tales of the De Lacey family invokes sympathy for the Creature. He appears to be very human in these

stories and the motive behind his request for a female counterpart feels reasonable, and even responsible. Victor knows all the suffering the Creature went through, but he still destroys Creature's could-have-been life partner, "tore to pieces" (Shelley 205). His oppression causes the Creature to reveal his malice, and Victor recognizes that he is in trouble. Retaliation is a very real human fear, as Chomsky explains. Man created zombies in literature to express this fear, that the people who we have wronged will treat us the same. Victor's recognition that the Creature could do unto him what he did to the Creature shows that Victor sees a terrifyingly human autonomy in the Creature.

Another characteristic that is unique to humans, James says, is empathy, "An animal has no concept of reality outside its own life and that of its young, and its place in the herd...we have the capacity to imagine and sympathise with the emotions including the pain of others" (29). While the Creature has no family, the Creature's first "herd" is the De Lacey family. He learns his language through them, learns about the world through them, and plays a role in their domestic life, even though he goes unnoticed. He recognizes the difficulty they have to face when putting food on the table and keeping themselves warm. His actions were to alleviate those challenges, but his understanding is not limited to the family.

Upon Frankenstein's death, he reveals his conflicting and complex emotions. The Creature is capable of a wide variety of emotions, and is seldom experiencing only one. When he finds his creator dead, he is not angry that he was not the killer, instead he says, "I pitied Frankenstein; my pity amounted to horror: I abhorred myself" (Shelley 271). The Creature is remorseful of all he has done. Guilt plagues him, even though Frankenstein has oppressed him. Frankenstein's creation, who has experienced almost nothing but loss, can imagine how

Frankenstein has felt throughout all these years. The task of sympathizing with one's oppressor proves extremely challenging for many. James also says that humans sympathize with other species. This is why we have animal shelters, make documentaries like *The Cove*, and protest the fur trade. The Creature is a mixture of human and technology, and can be seen as a separate species because he is likely unable to procreate with a human female. He recognizes his cursed uniqueness but still connects with the pain of other species. A monster would not be guilty, it is supposed to be vicious and cruel. Philosopher Dominique Lestel of École Normale Supérieure says, "an artefact remains a prisoner of what it is" (259), as in something engineered acts only one way and never another. The engineered Creature does act vicious as Frankenstein had anticipated from the beginning, but he has also been kind, and recognizes his own cruelty. A monster isolated from humanity who operates completely outside acceptable humane behavior, would not recognize that anything wrong had been done.

The kindest person the Creature encounters is the blind father of the De Lacey family. His blindness is another way to show that he is missing part of what it means to be human, yet this trait enables him to be the most charitable character. Before the Creature exposes himself to the rest of the family, he goes to the blind man for help. The Creature is treated with courtesy and welcomed, but he knows that the man is unafraid because he cannot see him. To gain the acceptance of the other members of the family, the Creature pleads with the man, "a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster" (158). He knows that people recognize his ugliness and enormous stature as threatening and malicious. Ugliness and physical uniqueness create fear within humans.

The insecurity of being perceived as ugly and thus malignant makes one extremely prejudiced against those who do not have widely accepted traits. Dr. Nathan Heflick of the University of Kent says, "when people were lead to believe they had a negative trait, they were more likely to see this negative trait in others...they were less likely to think they had the trait themselves" ("We See in Others"). Religion has far-reaching effects on culture. To this day, people believe we are born into sin, and that unrighteous thoughts and actions purchase a one way ticket to eternal hell and misery. When people perceive themselves guilty of monstrosity, they look for someone more monstrous to degrade to raise themselves. This fatal prejudice plays out when Felix returns and attacks the Creature on sight. Felix assumes that the hideous Creature was going to hurt his father, and has no sympathy for him. The Creature's ugly humanness appearing to Felix as that of a sinful wretched person. Because he seems to be sinful and wretched, Felix expels the Creature from his home. Felix is monstrous in his physical attack on the Creature but he does not see himself as the monster. He sees himself as the great human being protecting his loved ones from an ugly thing, blind to his own cruelty.

Fear of our own terribleness helps us create humanoids we call monsters. Seeing this amplified horror eases our own insecurity, but this does not take away the fact that we are monsters. Most interpretations of monsters allow room for conscious sentience, making them human. Humans are perfectly capable of committing all the wrongs that monsters are portrayed to carry out on a regular basis. We can carry them out just as often if we so wished. There is a reason why popular culture often confuses the Creature with his creator, Frankenstein. We cannot tell which one is really more monstrous. The parallels between Frankenstein and the Creature make it difficult to not refer to them with the same name. Prejudice has played a large

role in what and who society despises and exploits. What society tell us is monstrous, we deflect onto others for our own emotional convenience, sometimes creating self-fulfilled prophecies like the Creature. Given investigations into monstrosity like *Frankenstein* and modern day page-turner *Twilight*, it is not so radical to see that the monsters are within ourselves. Fictional monsters do not have a monopoly on destruction and humans do not have a monopoly on kindness. We live between the gray, and can exhibit any type of behavior.

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