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**Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: The Creature's Attempt at
Humanization**

By Noelle Webster

May 2011

“I began the creation of a human being” – Victor Frankenstein (Shelley 54). This is a short yet powerful statement from the eponymous character of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein is a man from a privileged family who becomes obsessed with pursuing scientific advancements, and is eventually able to create a living being. While Victor does succeed at creating a living being, he does not succeed at creating a human being. The creature becomes excluded from society, and tries to humanize himself through knowledge of language. To begin with I will do a close reading of Mary Shelley’s novel, analyzing selected scenes. I will be looking at what, according to the novel, makes something human and what excludes the creature from humanity. Victor’s creation attempts to humanize himself and become part of society, but ultimately is unable to do so. The first chapter will deal with the way the creature is excluded. He attempts to join and be a part of the community, but is met with constant and violent rejection. I will look at what motivates the people’s prejudice against the creature. The novel suggests that the creature cannot be accepted as human because he is a singular being, and therefore cannot be a part of a community. Since Victor made the creature, there is not another being that is the same as him. He is singular in appearance, and in the way he was made. His singularity makes it so that the creature cannot relate to humans. Without the ability to relate, he cannot be human.

In the second chapter I will be looking at the creature's acquisition of language as an attempt to humanize himself. The creature tries to use language as a way to relate to humans, thus trying to compensate for his singular appearance. He uses his acquired language in hopes of making relations, in order to become a part of the human community. He desires companionship and goes to considerable lengths to be accepted. The creature recognizes that people communicate through sounds, and that these can result in specific emotions. The creature desires to use this to make connections that will enable him to live alongside humans in a community. The creature is intelligent and is able to speak and reason, yet is not recognized as a human by society. He is able to voice his concerns, but due to the way he looks he cannot be considered human and is therefore denied the rights of man. This means he is unable to defend his crimes as a human normally would. He is labeled a murderer, but is not allowed to speak on his behalf despite being quite eloquent. The creature's ability to reason and communicate does not allow him to be a part of the human community. He does not have a being that is similar to him physically, and therefore is excluded.

Chapter One: The Creature's Exclusion

Creation Scene

The first scene I would like to look at is the actual moment when Victor gives life to his creation. Victor, narrating the story to Walton, writes

It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. Shelley 58

Victor has been working on creating life for quite some time, and now that the moment has arrived his anxiety is so intense that he can barely handle the feeling. There is no hesitation here, and Victor does not appear to be worried about any dangerous consequences. He is focused and eagerly anticipating his creation being given life. However, it is interesting to note Victor's choice of phrasing when he says he "might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at [his] feet". I feel that in this phrasing Victor is specifying his creation as something distinctly not human. Victor calls the creation a "lifeless thing". A description such as this is extremely cold and could be describing anything from a table Victor has in his house to a piece of garbage. He does not even say it is a lifeless body, but merely a thing. To bring the creation to life, Victor will "infuse a spark of being". The word "being" is an abstract term, and not something that is specific to humans. Exactly what will be infused with the lifeless thing is not specified, and the result is a creation that does not belong to any specific category. The creature's status as a being is ambiguous, and he is already being excluded by Victor in the sense that he is already referring to the creature as something that is not human. Also interesting is that Victor notes that the creature is lying at his feet. The visual is of the creature being physically below Victor. This gives the impression of Victor being elevated above the creature,

both literally and figuratively. The implication of this cold description is that Victor is something superior to the creature. At this moment, not only his status but also his body is superior. Victor is a human, and the creature is currently a “lifeless thing”. Victor clearly does not recognize the creature as a human, and in fact sees him as something inferior. The creature is just a “thing”, he is an object. Therefore, Victor does not see him as a being that could be part of the human community.

In the same passage Victor goes on to say that “...by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs” (Shelley 58). This is the exact moment where the creature is given life. The movements of the creature described here do not give the impression of how a human moves. Victor’s initial perception of his creation is something whose movement is really quite odd. Victor sees “the dull yellow eye of the creature open”. The creature does not open his eyes, but is rather described as the eye simply opening. It is as if the eye is opening, but not being opened. Not only that but the eye that is revealed, instead of being white like a person’s eye normally is, is a dull yellow. Overall this is quite an eerie image, and I feel it is not a description of a normal human movement. The creature is moving as if it is a thing and not a living being. After this Victor says that “it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs”. The limbs are not described as a voluntary movement on the creature’s part. It does not give the impression of someone moving their limbs. Instead, it is as if the limbs are objects being moved by something else. The words “convulsive”

and “agitated” also imply jerky, unattractive movements. Again, the image is not that of how a human moves, and is overall unsettling. It is as if the creature’s movements are involuntary. His body appears to be moving without the creature deciding to do so, and later in the novel it is the creature’s inability to control his passion and actions that cause him to commit murder. This apparently involuntary movement causes him to do things that will not allow him to be accepted into society. Also noteworthy is that here Victor is still referring to the creature as “it”. The creature has now been given life, but Victor’s initial reaction is that the creature is an “it”. Victor is telling this story to Robert Walton after the events have occurred, but when remembering the moment Victor first saw the creature move, his description uses “it”. This again implies that the creature is an object, and not a person. This does not seem intentional on Victor’s part. It implies that at the initial moment of seeing the creature, there is an instinctual bias against him. Remembering how he felt in that moment, Victor can only describe his creation as an object.

Victor then goes on to explain his reaction when he realizes he has successfully completed his endeavor, and the creature is now an animated being. His reaction is that of horror. He states:

How can I describe my emotions at the catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! -- Great god! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion and straight black lips. Shelley 58

Victor had originally imagined the creature as beautiful. The initial concept was forming something beautiful and aesthetically pleasing to the human eye. But the creature turns out to be something that humans cannot stand to look at. Victor had been working on making the limbs proportional, and selecting features that were pleasing. He uses human bodies and bases the concept of the creature of what humans would find appealing. Yet the result is terrifying. The creature has flowing black hair and good-looking teeth, but all these features accomplish is an overall more horrifying effect. The beauty in those aspects only creates a more stark contrast with the hideousness of the creature. He is made from human parts and in human likeness, but is not seen as a human being. Even though he is meant to look human, it is as if there is something inherently inhuman about him. Only moments before this, Victor had no hesitation about giving this body life. If he had seen the body as this ugly previously, I do not think Victor would have gone through with the animation process. Victor doesn't see his creation as hideous until it's too late, and this change in perspective happens in an instant. An explanation for this is that Victor was so wrapped up in his endeavor that he could not see what he was doing with reasonable judgment. He was so involved in his own fantasy that he could not see what he was creating. I think there is a little more to it, however. I think that Shelley is implying that no matter what efforts Victor had gone to, the creature would have been hideous. Victor puts a massive amount of effort into building this body, and his goal is that of beauty. It is only at the exact moment that the creature has been given life that Victor becomes horrified. He immediately describes the

creature in ways that are negative. The lifeless body was not horrifying to Victor, but the instant the creature has life he is terrifying. There appears to be something inherent in the creature that is terrifying to humans, giving them an immediate bias against him.

After Victor describes the creature, he continues describing his reaction to what he has accomplished. He says

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room...unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. Shelley 58-59

Here Victor is noting the fact that he quickly changed his view on the creature. He has spent almost two years of his life completely focused on his task, even at the expense of his own personal well being. Yet his beautiful dream is now completely gone and all Victor sees is horror. With the same amount of intensity that he desired to complete his task, he now desires to take back and forget the experience. Victor is “unable to endure the aspect of the being [he] had created”. He genuinely cannot stand the sight of the creature. If there was a person who should be able to overcome the creature’s physical presence, it is Victor. Not only is Victor the creator, but he also put so much of his own time and effort into the creature. But the creature’s body is too hideous. Furthermore, Victor attributes his change in feeling to “human nature”. This contrasts with the horrifying description that the reader is just given of the creature. Here Victor is

explaining the creature's disgusting body, and explaining his reaction to it as human nature. Humans will instinctively deny the creature because of the way he looks, yet the creature is made from human bodies and most desires to belong to the community of humans. By sheer definition, the creature cannot have "human nature." Human nature is a way of behaving that all humans are born with. It is a phrase that describes the way humans are inclined to react to situations based on the fact that they are humans. It is something that humans have naturally, but since the creature is not a naturally occurring being he does not have human nature. The creature will also be unable to understand human nature. He is not equipped with the knowledge of how humans behave, and does not understand it. The creature is not a human that was born, he is a being that was made. Therefore by definition he is lacking human nature, and it is this human nature that causes people to exclude the creature.

Victor goes on to tell Walton the following:

Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived. Shelley 59

Again, Victor is reiterating that a human cannot accept the visual appearance of the creature. He is implying that there is something within humans that will not be able to support the idea of the hideous creature. It is as if there is something inherent in the creature that is making his rejection an inevitable absolute. This passage also supports my previous statement that it is only when the creature actually has been given life that he becomes so hideous. Victor states that the

creature's lifeless body had been ugly, but once life had been infused and the creature began to move the image completely changed. Lifeless, the creature poses no threat. Now that he has been given life, the creature threatens to upset society. The creature is now something that is "such as even Dante could not have conceived". This is of course referring to Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. In *Inferno*, Dante travels through the levels of hell and encounters numerous monsters and horrors. Yet Victor is saying that even Dante, who can conceive all of these monstrous things, could not have envisioned the creature. That is an extreme jump from merely being "ugly" just a moment before. It is the fact that the creature is now alive that is so horrifying.

The creature is so horrifying because there is no other being similar to him. People are unequipped to deal with the sight of the creature. Victor made the creature, he is not something naturally occurring in nature. Therefore people cannot deal with him naturally. The reaction is to reject what one is seeing, because it should not exist. People have a visual prejudice against him; they assume he is a monster because he is ugly. People relate to each other due to having things in common, but visually the creature cannot relate to humans. There is no other being like him, so the creature cannot start his own community in which to exist. He is forced to look for one to assimilate into. But the humans are unwilling to accept something that looks the way he does physically.

Maureen McLane, in her essay *Literate Species: Populations, "Humanities," and Frankenstein*, writes that

As both Foucault and Francois Jacob note, species was defined in this era according to the persistence of the visible structure. For the creature, to be

"of the same species" is to look alike, however "deformed and horrible" that might be. Species here seems to follow a logic of appearance. It seems less a scientific category denoting classes of beings which reproduce their like over time than a perceptual-social category which organizes the possibility of contact among beings. Creatures of different species will "not associate" together. Aesthetic revulsion precludes social interaction. This has been repeatedly demonstrated by the visual paranoia the monster induces and the semiological riddle he presents. McLane 975

McLane is saying that the very idea of a species is to look similar. If beings are of a different species, they are not meant to associate together, or form a community. The idea of species is not something that people would look at scientifically during the time the novel was written, but on a more social level. So because of the fact that the creature does not look like humans normally do, he is of a different species and therefore not a being that would be accepted socially. McLane notes that this is evident in the way that people react to his appearance, and that is something with which I agree. Unable to relate to humans through physical means, the creature will attempt to relate through language. He will attempt to use language to communicate with people, and therefore make a connection to the human community. This will be discussed in the second chapter.

In regards to this scene in the novel, I would lastly like to look at what happens directly following Victor's rejection of the creature. The creature's appearance has greatly upset Victor, but we see that only after seeing a human friend of his does Victor calm down. It is human nature to feel better when one is near someone similar to oneself. This is what happens to Victor. Victor has left his house and has begun to wander because he does not wish to deal with the

event that has just occurred. Victor's description of what he views includes the following phrases:

"Morning, dismal and wet, at length dawned"

"[I] felt impelled to hurry on, although drenched by the rain which poured from a black and comfortless sky."

"I continued walking...endeavouring by bodily exercise to ease the load that weighed upon my mind."

"My heart palpitated in sickness of fear...not daring to look about me"

Shelley 60

Victor is extremely distraught. Everything around him he perceives as bleak, and his only desire is to find a way to forget about what has just occurred. These phrases show that Victor is completely distressed. It seems as if he will not be able to calm himself or become cheerful for quite some time. Yet Victor is almost immediately cheered up when his friend Henry Clerval arrives to visit. Victor says that

Nothing could equal my delight on seeing Clerval; his presence brought back to my thoughts my father, Elizabeth, and all those scenes of home so dear to my recollection. I grasped his hand, and in a moment forgot my horror and misfortune; I felt suddenly, and for the first time during many months, calm and serene joy.

Shelley 61

This again is a major mood shift in Victor. He goes from completely distraught to almost euphoric. Upon seeing Clerval, Victor is flooded with memories from his home and his childhood. This makes him happy. This demonstrates the distinct contrast between the creature and Clerval, a human. Victor is remembering his childhood and home, and this is something the creature does not have. It sets

him apart from humanity. It is also interesting that it is in the moment that Victor grasps Clerval's hand that he finally feels calm and joyful. Clerval's hand and body is that of a human. There is comfort and connection there for Victor. The creature does not have this, either. His body may be made up of human parts, but his body is not that of a human. The creature's body causes such an alarm to Victor that he becomes terribly distraught, and this is only cured when he sees and connects with a human body. I think it is important that the two bodies cause opposite effects.

The Creature Enters a Village and the Creature Saves a Young Girl

I would like to briefly look at these two scenes because they further demonstrate the creature's desire for community and also the visual prejudice that causes his rejection. After the creature leaves Victor's apartment, he comes across a hut.

He says

At length I perceived a small hut...This was a new sight to me; and I examined the structure; with great curiosity. Finding the door open, I entered. An old man sat in it, near a fire, over which he was preparing his breakfast. He turned on hearing a noise; and perceiving me, shrieked loudly, and quitting the hut, ran across the fields with a speed of which his debilitated form hardly appeared capable. Shelley 108

This is the first human that the creature encounters after leaving Victor's, and the man's reaction is to shriek and run. In fact, the old man runs faster than a man of his age should even be capable of doing. However, after this happens, the

creature is not upset, he is merely enchanted by the hut and proceeds to eat the man's food. He does not seem to understand the man's reaction to him. This implies that the creature must learn to understand human emotions, and was not created with the knowledge. A human would normally be able to recognize that something was wrong when the man shrieked and ran, but the creature was merely surprised. This is showing that the creature lacks basic knowledge of human emotions and human nature.

The creature then continues on and finds a village. Upon viewing the village, he says

How miraculous did this appear! the huts, the neater cottages, and stately houses engaged my admiration by turns. The vegetables in the gardens, the milk and cheese that I saw placed at the windows of some cottages, allured my appetite. One of the best of these I entered; but I had hardly placed my foot within the door before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel, quite bare, and making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had beheld in the village.

Shelley 108-9

The idea of this community is greatly appealing to the creature. He finds it fascinating and desires to be there. Once again people are scared of him, and this time they attack him. The creature, having been hurt, now realizes that this reaction to him is not okay, and there is something wrong. He does not realize that he looks different yet, and therefore does not understand why he cannot enter the village. He finds refuge and wishes he could join the village. This is showing the creature's lack of knowledge of human behavior, and how he is excluded because of it.

In another scene, the creature saves a young girl from drowning. He watches the girl slip and fall into a river, and he says

I rushed from my hiding-place, and, with extreme labour from the force of the current, saved her, and dragged her to shore. She was senseless; and I endeavoured, by every means in my power, to restore animation, when I was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a rustic, who was probably the person from whom she had playfully fled. On seeing me, he darted towards me, and tearing the girl from arms, hastened towards the deeper parts of the wood. I followed speedily, I knew not why; but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun, which he carried, at my body, and fired.

Shelley 143

The creature's instinct here is to immediately save the young girl. That shows benevolence in him. Yet it is assumed by the man that finds them that he is attacking her, and he grabs the girl and flees. The creature then follows after them, and he says he is not sure why he does so. I feel it is because he so desires to be accepted. These people react poorly to him, and now that he understands this emotion, he desires to follow them. Even though people are rejecting him, he still follows them because he desires to join them. I also find it interesting that the creature says the man aimed the gun "at [his] body". He does not say that he "aimed the gun at me", but "at my body". Once again it is the creature's physical body that is the problem. The creature has just committed a good deed, but is punished for his actions due to the way he looks. Similarly, the creature helps a family living in a cottage, but is also met with fear and rejection.

The Creature's Encounter with the Cottagers

At this point in the novel, the creature is relaying his story to Victor. The creature has been chased out of a village, and he is now taking refuge in a small hovel. Here he is able to view a family living in a cottage. He becomes enamored with watching the family. After his first day viewing them, the creature says

I lay on my straw, but I could not sleep. I thought of the occurrences of the day. What chiefly struck me was the gentle manners of these people; and I longed to join them, but dared not. I remembered too well the treatment I had suffered the night before from the barbarous villagers, and resolved, whatever course of conduct I might remain quietly in my hovel, watching, and endeavouring to discover the motives which influenced their actions.

Shelley 113

The creature was met with screams when he walked into a village, and he was chased out violently. This was his experience with humans. Now he is exposed to a family, and he is in awe of how they treat each other. Even though this is the creature's first time viewing a family, he immediately desires to join them. The creature desires to be a part of a community, and desires to make connections. The creature identifies most closely with humans, and that is the species he desires to join. He also shows his intelligence by deciding that he should wait to show himself to the cottagers. He wants to try and gain a better understanding of them before he attempts to join them. This is extremely reasonable and shows a desire for the creature to learn the ways of man. The way that the creature says he "endeavour[s] to discover the motives which influenced their actions" shows that he is hoping to humanize himself. However it also shows that he does not currently understand human interaction. He does not understand why a person

does certain actions. This can be explained by the fact that he only just gained life, but it also implies that the creature is perhaps missing the knowledge that humans are born with. It is the lack of human nature. He wasn't born with a knowledge of human emotion, or knowledge of how humans are inclined to act. It implies that inherent difference between the creature and man that the creature is attempting to overcome.

So the creature goes on observing the cottagers and learns their daily routines. He figures out that they are poor and hungry, and that collecting firewood for them is helpful. He says

I discovered also another means through which I was enabled to assist their labours. I found that the youth spent a great part of each day in collecting wood for the family fire; and, during the night I often took his tools, the use of which I quickly discovered, and brought home firing sufficient for the consumption of several days. Shelley 114

Due to his help with the firewood, the youth was then able to repair the house and work in the garden. So here we see the creature actually becoming part of the community, even if he does so invisibly. He is joining in everyday activities, and helping other people's lives become better. Even though he is helping, the creature is still forced to do so out of sight. His physical appearance is excluding him.

The creature goes on observing the cottagers to better comprehend people. He begins to understand them, and becomes attached to them. He says the following:

The gentle manners and beauty of the cottagers greatly endeared them to me: when they were unhappy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys. I saw few human beings besides them; and if any other happened to enter the cottage, their harsh manners and rude

gait only enhanced to me the superior accomplishments of my friends.

Shelley 115

The creature has become enamored with the cottagers and his mood shifts with theirs. He feels connected with them. What I find significant here is that this connection seems to immediately cause the creature to feel prejudice against those who are not the cottagers. This is showing the instinctual rejection of those outside of what one is familiar with. This prejudice against those other than the cottagers also seems to be rooted in a difference in appearance. He notes the “beauty of the cottagers”, and this is what endears them to the creature. Yet the “harsh manners and rude gait” of other humans that he sees lead the creature to believe that the cottagers are superior. He is viewing these other people, and deciding that they are inferior to the cottagers. This is showing that a bias against others happens instinctively and quickly. It is interesting that the creature bases his assumption that the others are inferior to the cottagers based on what he perceives visually. This is the exact prejudice that he is trying to overcome, yet he displays the same fault. Just like humans, he has an intrinsic quality that makes him prejudice against those with whom he is not familiar. He has identified with the cottagers, and therefore sees all others as inferior. He admires the cottagers for their beauty, yet this is something the creature does not have. He is trying to learn from the cottagers in order for them to look beyond his exterior and accept him, but he is susceptible to the same way of thinking that excludes him. It is something that one cannot help but feel, and this is why the creature will find it impossible to be accepted.

I would now like to move to when the creature introduces himself to the blind De Lacey, because this scene really highlights the idea that it is not only the visual prejudice against the creature, but also that it is in human nature to reject those that are different. Hoping that De Lacey's blindness will allow him to accept the creature, and then later help him be introduced to the other cottagers, the creature speaks to De Lacey alone. After allowing the creature to enter the cottage, the conversation starts as thus, with De Lacey as the first speaker:

“By your language, stranger, I suppose you are my countryman; -- are you French?”

“No, But I was educated by a French family, and understand that language only. I am now going to claim the protection of some friends, whom I sincerely love, and of whose favour I have some hopes.”

“Are they Germans?”

“No, they are French. But let us change the subject.”

Shelley 135-136

The very first thing that De Lacey would like to know is if the creature is French. He immediately inquires as to what group of people the creature identifies himself with. People instinctually distinguish themselves into groups based on similarities. Here the similarity is based on language, and the creature is attempting to make a connection based on the language he can now speak. After the creature says he has been educated by a French family, he goes on to explain his desire to meet with people he loves. All De Lacey would like to know in response to this is if the people are German. Maureen McClane, in her article *Literate Species: Populations, "Humanities," and Frankenstein* writes:

Europe exists as a category over and against the strong persistence of "native" lands and languages-note that the "European" Victor is soon denominated a "foreigner" by Robert Walton. The turning of a fellow "human" and "European" into a specifically Genevese French-speaking "foreigner" shows how humans identify each another through increasingly

differentiated and estranging categories. The monster strains against and defines the limits of these kinds and levels of classification. McClane 965

The creature wants to be a part of humanity, but within that there are even further boundaries that the creature cannot overcome. The creature was not born, he was made. Titles such as “French” and “German” can not apply to him. The creature wants humans to overlook his physical appearance, but there is more than that separating him from humans. He is a completely singular being, and therefore cannot connect with any kind of community. Even if his monstrous appearance could be overlooked, the creature has no way of identifying with other humans. Humans are biased against other humans that are not the same as them, and the creature is much more different than, say, a man from another country.

De Lacey goes on to say “Do not despair. To be friendless is indeed to be unfortunate; but the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity” (Shelley 136). De Lacey is trying to tell the creature that the hearts of men are loving, and that the creature should not despair. He describes this as “brotherly love and charity”. De Lacey is just using a common phrase when he says “brotherly love”, but it is also very telling. Once again it is a form of prejudice already instilled within someone. The creature is no one’s brother. He does not, and can not, have a family. Even though De Lacey is saying that men are full of love, this love is meant for those that can be considered “brothers”. The novel is implying that humans have a natural compassion for other humans, but that this does not apply to the

creature. Later in the conversation, De Lacey says "I am blind and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere. I am poor and an exile, but it will afford me true pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature" (Shelley 136). De Lacey's blindness has afforded the creature some time to speak, and the creature's grasp of language has persuaded De Lacey that he is sincere. Even though De Lacey is unaware that he is speaking to a monster, he specifically notes that he will try to be helpful to a "human creature". De Lacey is unknowingly biased against the creature. He claims he is willing to help, but this help will only apply to a human, which the creature is not. Learning how to communicate will not be enough to humanize the creature and allow him to be accepted.

The Creature's Murder of William Frankenstein

At this point it has been established that the creature is, simply, ugly. But simply being ugly is not a quality that merits the intense rejection of the creature. In Denise Gigante's article *Facing the Ugly: The Case of "Frankenstein"*, she writes

In fact, in *Frankenstein*, the term "ugly" emerges at the precise point when the speaking subject is about to be consumed by such incoherence. Descending the Mer de Glace after a traumatic encounter with the Creature, for example, Victor describes the wind "as if it were a dull ugly siroc on its way to consume [him]" (F, 176). While the sirocco is as invisible as wind and hence cannot, strictly speaking, qualify as ugly, his pathetic fallacy is apt. For as the "contaminating life" of the Creature spills out from his overstretched skin to pursue Victor physically and

psychologically, it threatens to "consume" him and the entire symbolic order in which he is implicated. Thus while it is couched in admittedly boyish terms, William Frankenstein's fatal encounter with the Creature- "monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces" (F, 169)-contains a fundamental insight into the nature of ugliness itself: the ugly is that which threatens to consume and disorder the subject.

Gigante 569

Gigante is putting forth that the creature's ugliness comes from the threat that he represents. Because the creature is a new life form, his presence is threatening to humans. He is unknown, and therefore perceived as dangerous. It is the concern that the creature's existence will "consume" the current order of society that makes him so terrifying. It is the fact that the creature cannot be identified by anything previously known that causes people to react to negatively to him.

The example Gigante uses is the creature's encounter with young William Frankenstein.

After the cottagers reject the creature, he leaves his hovel in great despair. He then comes across William. He says

At this time a slight sleep relieved me from the pain of reflection, which was disturbed by the approach of a beautiful child, who came running into the recess I had chosen, with all the sportiveness of infancy. Suddenly, as I gazed on him, an idea seized me that this little creature was unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity. If, therefore, I could seize him and educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth.

Shelley 144

The creature, still desperate in his loneliness, is hoping that William's youth will allow him to accept the creature, as William is so young that he will not yet be prejudiced. The creature's thought is that the prejudice against him is something that is learned or perhaps taught by society. The idea is that William has not

been alive long enough to have been affected by other people's prejudice. The creature hopes to form William into his companion. He continues:

Urged by this impulse, I seized the boy as he passed and drew him towards me. As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream; I drew his hand forcibly from his face and said, "Child, what is the meaning of this? I do not intend to hurt you; listen to me."

He struggled violently. "Let me go," he cried; "monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me and tear me to pieces — You are an ogre — Let me go, or I will tell my papa."

"Boy, you will never see your father again; you must come with me."

"Hideous monster! let me go. My papa is a syndic — he is M. Frankenstein — he will punish you. You dare not keep me."

Shelley 144

William reacts with the same horror as all those previously. The creature attempts to explain that he intends no harm, but William's reaction is that of strong rejection. In fact, he assumes the creature's motives are to eat and destroy him. As Gigante pointed out, he is afraid of literally being consumed by the creature. He bases this solely on the way the creature looks. He also threatens to get his father. Again, the familial ties that the creature cannot have are brought up. William feels he is in trouble so he desires to get his father. He also mentions that his father is in a position of power, pointing out even more levels within society that exclude others. William's rejection of the creature implies that it is not only that society teaches people to be prejudiced, but that there is an instinctual prejudice against the creature. Despite William's youth and innocence, he sees the creature and reacts extremely negatively. William should not have learned to be prejudiced at this point, but reacts the same way as all the

others. The creature cannot overcome this inherent characteristic of humans that appears to reject him.

These scenes all illustrate that the creature's physical appearance is crippling to him. All who see him are horrified, and assume the worst of the creature. His creator who spent almost two years constructing him, villagers, and youth alike all reject him. His figure is so horrifying that people seem to be genuinely unable to look at him. It goes further than that though. Shelley seems to be implying an inherent quality in the creature that makes him unacceptable to humans. Victor's initial reaction is that the creature is an "it". Even De Lacey, who cannot see the creature, seems to be excluding him from humanity by the way he speaks. William's reaction to the creature shows that the rejection is instinctual, and not something that is learned. Despite the creature's attempts to enter society, he is a singular being and therefore outside of humanity. He is unnatural, and therefore lacks human nature. He is excluded based on these facts, but he tries to overcome this prejudice by acquiring the ability to speak. The creature attempts to create relationships through language, and hopes that this will allow him to overcome the barrier created by his physical appearance and become a part of human society.

Chapter Two: The Creature's Acquisition of Language

Despite being met with fear and aggression, the creature still greatly desires to form relationships with humans. He is intelligent so he understands that his body is ugly and frightening, and he longs for a way to make people look beyond his appearance so that he may enter society. The creature becomes aware that people communicate through sounds, and decides that he must gain this ability before presenting himself to any more people. His hope is that this knowledge will allow him to be accepted.

The creature discovers language when he is observing the cottagers.

His reaction is the following:

By degrees I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communication their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it.

Shelley 115

Here the creature realizes that people can communicate. He is able to understand that the sounds people make are a way of relaying thoughts and ideas to others. What the creature finds most interesting, however, is that these sounds can cause different emotions in the person listening. He finds this power to be "godlike". The fact that these sounds can create different expressions and

emotions in others is fascinating to him, and he sees it as a kind of mystical power. The creature greatly desires to understand this form of communication, and it is easy to see why. Thus far the creature has been met with fear and violence. He is now witnessing that certain sounds create certain reactions, and is hoping to understand how this works. The creature's desire is to be able to join these people, and therefore wants to learn how to create a positive reaction in them. He hopes learning this form of communication will achieve this goal. He is trying to overcome what separates him from the humans and sees these sounds as a way to humanize himself.

To further make this point, the creature goes on to say the following:

I easily perceived that, although I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure; for with this also the contrast perpetually presented to my eyes had made me acquainted.

I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool: at first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and 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.

Shelley 116-117

The creature is explicitly stating his hope that gaining knowledge of language will allow him to make the cottagers overlook his physical appearance. He is also noting here that by watching the cottagers he is constantly reminded of their difference in appearance. Watching them, he sees that they are beautiful. Then he views his reflection in a pool, and he is terrified. Much like humans respond to him, the creature is startled by the image. In fact, he too rejects it. He does not

believe what he sees, and has to convince himself of the truth. This greatly upsets the creature, though he realizes in hindsight that he was not yet aware of just how crippling his appearance would be to him. At this point he still hopes to be able to learn a way to be recognized by humans, but by the time he is telling his story he has realized that he will never be accepted.

Maureen McLane explores whether or not literature is a plausible means of humanizing the creature in her essay *Literate Species: Populations, "Humanities," and Frankenstein*. She writes the following:

Shelley's corporeally indeterminate but decidedly literate monster asks us to consider whether literature-taken in all its bearings- was or is indeed a useful "line of demarcation between" human and animal. The fate of the monster suggests that proficiency in "the art of language", as he calls it, may not ensure one's position as a member of the "human kingdom." Shelley shows us how a literary education... presupposes not merely an educable subject but a human being. McLane 959

Due to the fact that the creature's knowledge of language does not allow him to enter society, McLane feels that literature is not a useful way to differentiate between human and non-human in the novel. She feels that a literary education "presupposes...a human being" according to Shelley. So even though the creature is trying to use literature as a way of humanizing himself, it is futile because he would have to have been a human in the first place. Studying literature and language cannot make something human.

In her article, McLane is concerned with what kind of literature the creature reads in the novel in the process of his self-education. She notes that "When he embarks on his own tale of the 'progress of [his] intellect' we soon discover that his learning involves not the 'science' of 'modern chemistry' (or any

other natural science) but rather the 'godlike science' (107) of 'letters' (114)" (McLane 70). McLane is noting the difference between Victor and his creation. Victor's studies have been scientific, while the creature's studies have been in the humanities. McLane goes on to say that "The differential status of "letters" (the monster's material) and of natural philosophy (Victor's domain) illuminates how "the idea of the humanities" increasingly delimited and defined itself against natural science" (McLane 970). This view of the conflict between Victor and his creature implies that each is symbolic of what they study. This idea is that the conflict between them is about science versus humanities. I find that this simplifies the struggle in the novel too much, and does not do enough to explain the plight of the creature. Victor's studies in science take root in his desire to test his own boundaries. Victor wants to find out what he is able to do with his knowledge, and also to surpass those in his field. The creature's motivation seems more innocent to me. The creature's desire to educate himself is to become a part of society, and to be recognized as human. While both desires begin with a desire to be recognized, Victor's is to surpass humans while the creature's is to become human.

McLane's finds problems with the argument, but notes the following:

What this simplification allows, however, is an opportunity to explore the novel as a diagnosis of the embodied use and abuse of different knowledges. The novel proposes, in its history of the monster, a remedy for the horrifying body which science has produced -- the humanities.

McLane 71

I definitely agree that the creature attempts to make up for his appearance through his acquisition of speech and the ability to communicate. McLane's

extrapolation from this idea is that Shelley proposes that the study of humanities is trying to fix the consequences of studying science. This makes sense to me. Before the creature's narrative portion of the novel, Victor narrates his own story. When Victor tells his story, he comes across as arrogant and also wrong for pursuing his scientific endeavor as he does. The result of his research is something considered as hideous by all, including Victor. Then the creature tells his story, and it describes his realization that he is aesthetically different from humans and that humans find him ugly and terrifying. His narrative goes on to describe, his realization that people communicate through speech and that this is something he must master if he wishes to be a part of society. Here the creature realizes how important language is, and clearly hopes it will be the factor that allows him to enter society despite his physical appearance. Science gave the creature his life and body, but he hopes that gaining knowledge of language will allow him to better his situation.

McLane had mentioned the "use and abuse of different knowledges". Victor abuses his scientific knowledge when he endeavors to create a living being. The creature's education though does not appear to be an abuse of knowledge. He has the desire to converse with people and be a part of their society. Language and literature are ways of humanizing himself. As I explained in Chapter One, however, this fails the creature. He is rejected by the cottagers and then by William, despite his ability to speak to them. His grasp of language though does convince Victor to hear his story. Upon seeing the creature, Victor's response is to try and get rid of him. After hearing the creature request that he

listen to his story, Victor is moved by his eloquence. Victor states that "...I weighed the various arguments that he had used, and determined at least to listen to his tale. I was partly urged by curiosity, and compassion confirmed my resolution" (Shelley 104). This illustrates the persuasive power of language. The creature had noticed that when the cottagers would communicate with each other they could elicit emotional responses from the other person. This is what the creature desired, and here he is able to evoke compassion in Victor. After the creature has finished telling Victor his story, Victor states the following

His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred. Shelley 149

So while the creature's physical body still causes feelings of horror in Victor, it is clear that his story has caused Victor to feel compassion. Victor wants to console the creature and debates giving into the creature's request for a mate. Victor says "I had no right to withhold from him the small portion of happiness which was yet in my power to bestow" (Shelley 149). While Victor eventually denies the creature a mate, it is evident that the creature's persuasiveness has affected Victor in this conversation. The creature learned how to effectively portray his situation and was able to evoke an emotional response in Victor.

To further look at language as relation, I would like to look at Peter Brooks' discussion on this in his article *Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts: Language and Monstrosity in Frankenstein*. Brooks states that "In any specular relationship the Monster will always be the 'filthy mass'; it is only in the symbolic order that he

may realize his desire for recognition” (Brooks 593). This is once again stating that the creature’s appearance causes him inevitable rejection. Recognition can only come in a symbolic form. He can never be human, but he would like to be considered a part of the community. He would like companionship. He notes that in the conversation I just mentioned between the creature and Victor, the creature has established his first relationship. It is through language that this relationship was made possible. Only through the creature’s testimony was Victor able to feel compassion for him. Brooks says the following:

The close of his narrative suggests the importance of language as relation. In arguing that Frankenstein must create a female monster to be companion to the male, the Monster asserts that only in communication with a similar being can he ‘become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded’ (p. 149) Brooks 593

The creature has realized that despite his ability to communicate with humans, they will not accept him. So he desires another being that is analogous to his own being. With another being that looks similar, the creature would be able to simulate the aspects of human life that he has desired. He will have companionship, and will not be met with fear and hatred. Because of the fact that he is the singular being of his kind, he is excluded from “the chain of existence”. If he has another being of his kind, he will have someone to converse with.

After the creature relates his story to Victor, Brooks notes the following:

...that language springs from passion rather than need: need cannot form the necessary social context for voiced language since its effect is to scatter men; and need can make do with the barest repertory of visual signs, gestures, imperatives. Passion, on the other hand, brings men together, and the relation of desire calls forth voice. It is hence no accident

that what language first reveals to the Monster is human love. And it is again no accident that his rhetorical plea to his creator ends with the demand for a creature whom he might love. Brooks 594

Brooks is saying that voiced language is not a necessity. People can function and survive on only a few gestures. It is because of passion and desire that language was developed. Since language is born out of passion, it is able to portray the emotion of love to the creature. The creature then uses his acquired speech as a means to express his desire for a mate that he can love, and will also love him.

Brooks goes on to say that

The Monster's initiation in language, then, unerringly discovers language to be on the side of culture rather than nature and to imply the structures of relation at the basis of culture. The discovery is a vital one, for the side of "nature" is irreparably marked by lack, by monsterism. Brooks 594

Brooks suggests that the reason language is not able to humanize the creature is because language can only aid in making relations based on culture and not nature. Learning how to communicate does not change the creature's nature. The creature's nature is still designated as "monsterism". Therefore language was not enough to humanize the creature.

Once again we are seeing that the creature's problematic body cannot be humanized. In Diana Reese's article *A Troubled Legacy: Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" and the Inheritance of Human Rights*, she debates whether the creature should be given the rights of man, and thus considered human. The most important issue is the creature's ability to speak. The ability to speak and use language to express oneself is a distinctly human trait. Reese states:

The monster should by all rights inherit the rights of man and the citizen: he is possessed of sensibility and can reason on his own behalf. By virtue of both of these capacities he becomes able to voice a claim. It is precisely the voicing of his particular claim, however, that leads directly to the paranoid escalation of the Doctor's response, that is, Dr. Frankenstein's fear that the monster will also "inherit the earth" and threaten the common good of mankind. The monster's projected social being is precisely what Dr. Frankenstein has come to regard as a direct threat to his own.

Reese 53

Reese feels the creature's ability to reason and voice his concerns are the reasons he should be given the rights of man. This is also the exact reason Frankenstein becomes intent on ridding the world of the creature. On the one hand, the creature possesses the very human trait of speech, and appears to be able to reason. On the other hand, this ability of the creature is exactly what makes him such a threat, and therefore is denied. As I mentioned in chapter one, it is this threat on the way society currently is that is so terrifying to the characters in the novel. The creature disrupts the current order or society by merely existing, and this causes people to be frightened and to reject the creature.

Another paradox that Reese discusses is how the creature relates to the justice system. The creature, having taken human life, is labeled a murderer. However, it is under human law that the creature can be labeled as such. It is paradoxical because while it is human law that shows the creature to be a murderer, he is not actually recognized as a human. Upon first seeing the creature, Victor does not want to converse with him. Victor is absolutely disgusted and wants to destroy him. Victor's reaction is the following:

‘Devil,’ I exclaimed, ‘do you dare approach me? and do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! and, oh! that I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!’ Shelley 102

Victor clearly looks down on the creature. He does not recognize him as a human being. Victor would be contented to kill the creature and not feel guilty or morally wrong. Because the creature is not considered a human, Victor would be able to kill the creature and it would not be considered murder. Even human laws are excluding the creature.

Reese looks at the following quote from Frankenstein:

The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me, and then if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands. Shelley 103

This is a good example of the creature’s intelligence and eloquence. He is pointing out that even the worst of men are allowed to defend themselves before judgment is passed. The creature has the ability to speak in his own defense, but is not given the opportunity. He is not recognized as a human and therefore is not given the right to defend himself. The creature also points out that while Victor has labeled him a murderer, Victor does not see a crime in killing the creature. Reese says that “The daemons drama immediately emphasizes the fact that the laws can only identify him as a perpetrator, but not as a victim, apply to embodied subjects; beyond that they apply specifically to human bodies, the humanly embodied subject” (Reese 54). So while the laws are able to condemn

the creature, they do not allow the creature to be a victim of a crime. The laws that show the creature as a criminal can apply to embodied subjects, but to be a victim you must have a specifically human body. Despite all the creature's efforts, the fact that his body appears the way it does makes it so that he will never be recognized as a human, and is therefore outside of human law.

The creature's rejection in the novel is due to the nature of his being. People are instinctively prejudiced against those who are different, and form relations with those who are similar. The creature is the only being of his kind, and therefore cannot belong to any community. The idea of a species was based on if beings looked the same, and the creature does not. His existence is so frightening to those who see him not only because he is ugly, but because his existence threatens to cause disorder in society. As he is not a human, the creature lacks human nature. He needed to learn to understand human emotions; it was not something of which he was initially aware. The novel suggests that it is due to the nature of his body and his creation that makes him inherently not human. There is something inherent in humans that creature does not have.

The creature attempts to make up for his physical appearance and learn the ways of man. He watches the cottagers and acquires the ability to speak eloquently. But this attempt at humanization fails, as he is still excluded from the human community. The creature is able to evoke some compassion from Victor,

but in the end Victor changes his mind. The people in the novel are completely unwilling to try to understand and accept the creature. He is a being capable of emotion and reasoning, yet because of his physical body he is completely excluded. It is human nature to reject those that look different from yourself. The creature's body does not allow him to be considered human, and he therefore is not afforded human rights. Language is a cultural aspect, and therefore the creature's acquisition of it does not afford him humanity. His nature remains the same, and his nature is not human. When Victor does not give the creature a mate, he denies him ever having acceptance. The creature needed a similar being to be accepted, as he would never be allowed to enter human society. Being the only one of his kind, the creature was destined to exist outside of humanity.

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