Frankenstein's Creature: the Monstrous Tenor of Self-knowledge

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SELF- KNOWLEDGE**

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Abstract

This paper brings forth an overview of the most important historical events that reverberated and introduced Europe to the 18th-century world. In addition, it provides substantial contextual information regarding the political climate in West Europe, states the reasons for the outbreak of French Revolution as well as touches on the American Revolution in the second half of the 1760's. Furthermore, it is concerned with the theoretical aspect of Romanticism, names the era's greatest authors and philosophers as well as literary achievements. As well as that, this paper provides an outline of innovative concepts and characteristic Romantic genres such as the gothic novel reinvented by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. However, the focal point of this thesis is to introduce the reader to several different approaches to reading *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, with emphasis on the feminist perspective by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Except for that, the paper explains the Creature's path to self-knowledge and exploration of oneself through several critical views, accentuating the position of Diane Telgen.

Key words: *political climate, French Revolution, Romanticism, gothic novel, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus, self-knowledge*

Table of contents

Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life's work *Frankenstein* is not only considered to be a world-renowned classic, an inventive and psychologically profound gothic novel, a pioneer of science fiction, but also an inspiration behind numerous novels and film adaptations. This paper puts forth Mary Shelley's brief biography which touches on numerous difficulties and challenges that the author experienced throughout her life. Also, it explains the importance of her travels, the relationship she had with her family as well the immense influence her mother's work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) had on her writing. Furthermore, it illustrates the night Shelley commenced writing the ghost story that changed her life. This paper offers a theoretical overview of the most important concepts that emerged in the era of Romanticism, with emphasis on the terms gothic and supernatural. Also, it specifies several Romantic authors who influenced both their peers and successors with their creativity and imagination, as well as brings forth the comparison of several gothic novels and explains their differences in terms of setting, characters and supernatural events. Additionally, it provides an analysis of Mary Shelley's innovative approach to writing a gothic novel and introduces the unprecedented character development she brought in her work. Among a variety of critics that committed to uncovering different layers the novel offers, a few of the ones whose interpretations have been implemented into this paper were by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, David Hume, Franco Moretti and Diane Telgen. Upon considering several approaches to reading *Frankenstein*, the outlook I found especially intriguing is the feminist perspective on the characters and the possible gender duality of Mary Shelly's creations. With that said, this paper also conveys John Locke's idea of "tabula rasa" and how it was implemented into the Creature's development throughout the novel. Moreover, this paper focuses on the Creature's path to self-discovery and emphasizes the importance of learning and reading about both reality and fiction. The aim of this paper is to present a range of diverse opinions, as well as to offer a historical and theoretical background of the Romantic era and the tendencies immanent in the 19th- century literature.

1. Mary Shelley's Literary Vision

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (born on August 30, 1797, and died on February 1, 1851 in London, England) was an English novelist best known for being the author of the gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus.* She was the only daughter of philosopher and political writer William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, a reputable early feminist and author. Shelley's mother was recognized for her commitment in regards to social and educational equality for women for which she expressed her passion in the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1782), one of the earliest works of feminism. As well as that, Wollstonecraft was the advocate for an educational system that allowed women to express themselves without the feeling of guilt, shame or incompetence. On the other hand, her husband William Godwin was a respectable philosopher, historian and novelist as well as an advocate for "atheism, anarchism and personal freedom". (Britannica). After her mother's death, Shelley's father remarried and had a child with his second wife Mary Jane Clairmont with whom she never had a mother-daughter relationship.

Due to her father's and stepmother's decision, Shelley was deprived of formal education, but had an interest in reading and writing from an early age. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Shelley was "taking her books to Mary Wollstonecraft's grave in St. Pancras' Churchyard" and read. (Gilbert, Gubar, 223) Even though she had never met her mother, she was probably heavily influenced by her literary career, given the fact she published her first poem *Mounseer Nongtongpaw* (1808) fairly early, while being only ten years old.

A turning point in Mary Shelley's life was meeting Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of the most important English Romantic poets and, a few years later, her future husband. Even though Percy was married and Mary was still under age at the time they had met, the two started a relationship in 1814 and married at the end of 1816. Prior to writing *Frankenstein*, Mary "studied her parents' writings, alone or together with Shelley, like a scholarly detective seeking clues to the significance of some cryptic text." (Gilbert, Gubar, 223)

The Shelleys frequently travelled across Europe, but the destination that had a tremendous influence on Mary's work life was visiting Switzerland with Percy and a few friends. Challenged to write a horror story, nineteen-year-old Mary Shelley began working on her most successful novel, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus,* published anonymously in 1818.

Shelley's life was filled with tragic deaths. Her mother died from birth complications, her half-sister committed suicide, she lost her daughter at birth and her husband drowned in 1822. Despite that, she continued to write and publish her work *Valperga* (1823), *The Last Man* (1826), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), and other to support her only son. As well as that, she was committed to carrying on her husband's legacy and publishing his late work. Mary Shelley died of brain cancer at the age of 53.

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (1818) was indisputably Shelley's life's work. The novel was adopted into popular culture and became the exemplar of a few film adaptations, as well as the inspiration behind numerous authors that attempted writing modern thrillers and horrors, a trend that has continued to this day.

The night the Creature opened its eyes

The short story about how she got the inspiration for writing *Frankenstein* was told by the author herself in the introduction of the novel's second edition. In the text, Shelley primarily points out her passion for writing which was prominent from an early age. While she was young, the author was mostly preoccupied with writing short stories, so one could say she was no stranger to the art of prose. The turning point in Mary Shelley's life was visiting Switzerland with three friends, one of which was Lord Byron, the famous writer of *Childe Harold*. Lord Byron was also the only one of the group who, in the words of Mary Shelley, "put his thoughts upon paper." (Shelley, 192). Even though it was summer, heavy rain forced the group to stay indoors for days upon end. Eventually, Byron's idea of each of them writing their own ghost story surfaced, so the three accepted it and commenced pondering the endless possibilities that writing in such a distinct genre brought. Interestingly, Mary Shelley struggled in coming up with an innovative concept for a few days, but never wanted to give up. Her unquenchable thirst for a

monstrous image plagued her for many nights when finally, one night, an imaginary but vivid scenery of a "pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together" captured all her attention. (Shelley, 192) The sudden movement of the Creature the student assembled indicated it was alive while its frightening exterior made the author's blood run cold. The thrill and excitement of the said image immediately forced Shelley to put it all on paper while the loudest thought in her mind was "if I could only contrive one which would frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened!" (Shelley, 192)

2. The English Romanticism Culture, Custom and Art

The Romantic era can be defined as a fruitful artistic movement that originated in Europe at the end of the 18th century. It was a time of radical commotion and modernization that was marked by many social, political and historical changes, most of which occurred in the late 1780's. According to a respectable philosopher and literary theorist Isaiah Berlin, the beginning of the Revolution could be described as a sudden shift in opinion, values and interest that dominated the 18th century society. He depicts the Romantic Movement as a "passionate protest against universality of any kind", so the people no longer believed in universal truths, universal opinions and morals. (Berlin, 8)

The exact breakthrough in the conscience of the Europeans occurred in the second half of the 18th century. More specifically, Berlin stresses the 1760's as the beginning and 1830's as the end of the Revolution of thought. However, even though a majority of literary theorists and historians agree on the ending year of the said movement, there seems to be a disagreement in terms of its exact starting point. Namely, authors consider various events that occurred in such a hectic period and try to weigh their importance to assign a certain year to the commencement of the Revolution. As well as that, except for the exact time frame, there seem to be many possible definitions of Romanticism as a whole. For example, Stendhal aims to roughly explain the contrast between romantic as the "modern and interesting" versus classical being the "old and dull". (Berlin, 14) On the other hand, Friedrich Schlegel, one of the greatest and most influential German philosophers, emphasizes the importance of individuality of expression in Romanticism.

Even though the exact year of its beginning is not specified, the event that certainly marked the Romantic era as a whole was the French revolution. According to Richard Heath Dabney, "the French Revolution was not a product of chance, not an accident, but the inevitable result of complex and resistless forces which, for nearly a hundred years, had been slowly but surely undermining the old foundations of the French society". (Dabney, 6) Except for the many outcomes of the Revolution, its main goal was to destroy the privilege among the wealthy and powerful Feudalists, and give the voice and rights to the common people. Dabney goes on to contrast the two of the most influential Western European countries, England and France, in terms of their political climates, and points out the importance of the legislative assembly such as the English Parliament. According to Britannica, France was divided into different classes depending on education, wealth and inheritance of the people. Dabney argues that "the privileged classes led lives of licentious ease, while the toiling millions groaned under their grasping tyranny". (Dabney, 13) In addition to that, an important aspect of the French revolution was the unfair tax regulations. Due to the fact the nobles were exempt from paying certain taxes, the rich became richer, while the peasants became poorer. However, as it was previously mentioned, the Revolution did not occur as a spontaneous event, but rather as a culmination of several different causes that severely influenced the lower class. Conjointly with the French Revolution, it is important to mention the significant success of Napoleon, one of the central and most influential people in European history. The wars he waged molded France, along with Germany and England, into being the greatest European force of the West in the period of Romanticism. Apart from the French Revolution, some of the key political events during Romanticism extended beyond the borders of Europe. Therefore, it is important to mention the American War of Independence, the separation of thirteen Great Britain's North American colonies to form the United States of America. (Britannica)

In addition to artistic expression such as literature, fine art and music, Romanticism paved the way for innovative like-minded philosophers to speak freely, as well as for many discoveries in science to transpire. With that said, philosophy could be considered the backbone of Romanticism because of its ability to be included in a variety of creative concepts. Although the political sphere was dominated by the strongest Western country, France, the intellectuals with numerous philosophical reflections that influenced the overall period of Romanticism were

German. Some of the most important representatives of the "revolution of thought" were Friedrich and August Schlegel, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller. Even though many philosophers sought inspiration in Ancient Greeks such as Plato and Aristotle, they ultimately influenced Romantic writers and artists with their own thoughts and ideas. From Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* to Kant's transcendentalism and Fichte's freedom and autonomy, we can conclude that German philosophers had a significant impact on different spheres of art as well as the Romantic era as a whole. In addition to philosophy, Romanticism abounded in numerous scientific discoveries, some of which were the ones from Luigi Galvani, Alessandro Volta, Johann Wilhelm Ritter etc.

Synchronously with philosophy, nature could be considered the backbone of Romanticism as well. Therefore, it could be said that the most famous arts were those that people could experience by watching or listening, i.e. fine arts, music and literature. In regards to fine arts, Romanticism mostly displayed motifs found in nature as well as idyllic landscapes. According to Bobinac, "originality, innovation and stylistic pluralism" were some of the more prominent characteristics of Romantic art. (Bobinac, 64)

Accordingly, some painters turned to portraits depicting ancient heroes, geniuses, historical heroes and modern-day heroes, instead of martyrs and saints which were glorified in previous periods. Similarly, musical expression was focused on glorifying art, and some of the most prominent Romantic musicians were Schubert, Schumann, and Chopin. It is important to note that music and literature were extremely connected, so many poems were also intended for singing.

As previously indicated, Romanticism abounded in various art forms with no exception in literature. What is more, we could consider literature as being the most diverse because of its numerous genres. Lyric was dominated by ballads and odes while epics were focused on fairy tales, short stories and novels. As well as that, it is important to note that genres such as the gothic novel sprang from Romanticism and continued in the upcoming centuries. With the growing interest of the public in the supernatural, genres such as horrors or thrillers became more prominent over time, so, in the 20th century, during the Golden age of Science Fiction, motifs

such as the extraterrestrial, aliens and parallel universes sparked tremendous interest in the consumer. The creativity in the field of fiction transcended all boundaries and the trend continued to this day as well as translated to the art of cinematography.

When referring to Romanticism, it is important to reflect on a different, but indispensable tendency to describe the world. An innovative approach of writing about fantastic events and creatures surfaced among writers of both poetry and prose. The coexistence of such divergent types of imagination justified the popularity of the Romantic tendencies to this day. Romanticism presented different ideas and executions of interesting themes and never before seen concepts that excited the public. We could say that Romanticism introduced two types of authors - the ones mostly focused on writing about death, monsters, derelict abandoned castles, apparitions and spectres, and the ones writing about the perfect and idyllic aspects of life. As previously mentioned, authors mostly focused on "darker" concepts were not limited to writing only in a certain type of literary genre. On the contrary, in the same way Romanticism brought variety in concepts, it also encouraged diversity in terms of genre. Therefore, concepts such as supernatural settings and fantastic events were not limited to only poetry or prose. In fact, authors such as Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797) not only introduced an innovative concept of nature confronting a man, but also brought a supernatural environment in which the entirety of the plot unfolded at. As well as that, Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan* (1797) depicted experimenting with opium as a way of gaining insight into different spheres of the mind and imagination. However, Coleridge was not the only one who used aspects of supernatural forces and inexplicable events in his poetry. Famous authors such as Byron in *Manfred* (1816) or Keats in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1819) both skillfully approached the concept of occult and fantastic in their work. All three of the authors are celebrated to this day, with their works being some of the prime examples of the supernatural concept in Romanticism. In addition to the gothic novel, the so-called women's novels flourished in the late 18th century. Some significant female authors, besides Mary Shelley, were Sophie La Roche, Charlotte Smith and Ann Radcliffe.

However, before referring to any of the aforementioned writers' success, it is important to mention and explain the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft and her work A *Vindication of the*

Rights of Woman (1792). According to Gilbert and Gubar, Mary Wollstonecraft had rebellious tendencies since she was young and not yet involved in writing nor in the women's rights advocacy. The author encouraged kindheartedness, fairness and equality, all of which she implemented in her personal life, as well as her work later on. The rights and wellbeing of her friends and family was something she was passionate of preserving, even though she herself was not financially adequate enough to provide for them to an extent she wanted to. Eventually, Wollstonecraft turned her passion for women equality into writing. Even though her own life was filled with hardships and difficulties, Mary never wavered her mission – to point out the problems and discrimination that women faced, and call out the behavior which they no longer found acceptable. Gilbert and Gubar describe Wollstonecraft's successful book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1782)* as "a justification of women's rights and an attack against the wrongs inflicted on women." (Gilbert, Gubar, 135) Due to the fact Mary Wollstonecraft died a few days after having her daughter Mary Shelley, Shelley was deprived of conversations on the topic her mother was so passionate about. However, the influence her mother and her work had on Shelley could never be denied. As well as that, the significance of philosopher, historian and novelist William Godwin must not be omitted either. Mary Shelley was heavily influenced by both of her parents and was often found reading their work "on her mother's grave". (Gilbert, Gubar, 254) In the following pages, this paper will explore Wollstonecraft's ideas through the eyes of her daughter Mary Shelley who, interestingly enough, took an entirely different approach in expressing her opinion on the topic of women's rights. We could say that Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* creates ambiguity and complexity, all of which with further exploration ties into the feminist ideas discussed by Wollstonecraft.

3. Gothic Novel – The Age of Romanticism Prose

The first gothic novel in English was *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole. The said novel was written in 1764 and, as with most gothic works, was heavily inspired by "the medieval romances of the 12th and 13th centuries" which were then intertwined with "elements of contemporary realist fiction of the 18th century." (Britannica) When considering chronology, we can conclude that gothic tendencies correspond to the period of Romanticism, even though some "would like to deny the relationship altogether." (Hume, 282) When it comes

to innovation of thought and execution prior to Mary Shelley, it could be said that the publishing of Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) started a gothic novel revolution. The controversial plot revolves around a monk who signs a Faustian pact with the devil and takes pleasure in immoral acts. The novel is filled with uncensored images of violence, murder and incest, making it seem more brutal than, for example, *The Castle of Otranto,* which could seem tame in comparison. When it was published in 1796 by Joseph Bell, containing only Lewis's initials, the novel was generally well-received. However, when Lewis decided on publishing under his full name, *The Monk* was heavily criticized and even accused of blasphemy and sacrilege. (Hume, 287)

When it comes to the terminology issues, writers such as James Foster in his *History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England*, heavily disagree with the term "gothic". Foster considers works such as Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to be a representation of "a special development of the sentimental novel". (Foster, 262) On the other hand, Robert D. Hume argues against that claim and rather makes a distinction between Terror and Horror-Gothic novels. In his work *Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel*, Hume differentiates the two on the grounds of emotion that it projects on the reader. He goes on to claim that while reading Terror-Gothic novels such as *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* a "reader who is repelled will close his mind to the sublime feelings which may be roused by the mixture of pleasure and pain induced by fear". (Hume, 285) On the other hand, Horror-Gothic novels such as *Frankenstein* or *Melmoth the Wanderer* "attack him [the reader] frontally with events that shock or disturb him." More specifically, according to Hume "Horror-Gothic assumes that if events have psychological consistency, even within repulsive situations, the reader will find himself involved beyond recall". (Hume, 285)

With that said Hume's work was heavily inspired by Ann Radcliffe's essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry.* In fact, Radcliffe's innovative approach to an essay in the form of a short story was the backbone of later developments and thoughts on the topic of gothic novel, one of which is Hume's essay *Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel.* Furthermore, Radcliffe was the first to introduce the differences between terror and horror, even though the presented ideas were further developed over the years. The said essay involved two

women who talked to pass the time while travelling, each giving their own opinion on the topic of differentiating horror and terror. When it comes to the distinction that Radcliffe and Hume assert, one can understand the differences between the two with ease. Moreover, after reading *Frankenstein*, one can also notice the layers the story offers. For example, the novel *Frankenstein* that this paper explores Hume described as "both a skillfully constructed book and one of real psychological insight". (Hume, 285). The story does not only revolve around murder and blood, but rather has an underlying message hidden behind an engaging story.

Even though the Creature murdered several people in cold blood, the reader feels a sense of compassion and understanding. With that said, the distinction that Radcliffe and Hume explore narrows the possibility of *Frankenstein* being a horror gothic novel, rather than just a gothic novel. The exciting story captivates the readers attention and gradually lures them into possibly feeling guilty. Without the emotional involvement of the reader, *Frankenstein* would only be a story about a scientist and his creation. It could therefore be said that the novel is not one dimensional, but rather a story about prejudice, discrimination and alienation of misunderstood individuals.

English Romanticists such as Keats, Coleridge and Wordsworth "turned to 'imagination'" in terms of their writing, so their poems often included natural elements and human behaviour such as thinking, dreaming and reflecting. However, in terms of gothic novels, the aspect of imagination progressed in a way that awoke feelings of fear and terror, rather than peace and calm. This gothic approach affected more than just literature, so its prominent influence could also be seen in the fields of art and architecture. The gothic impact was mostly manifested through frightening sceneries and creatures transcended through different mediums. As previously mentioned, writers and critics such as Radcliffe and Hume differentiate between different types of gothic novels while the main distinction they make is reliant on the feeling that the work projects on the reader. Therefore, I find it important to compare the firstling of the gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) which encompasses "typical" gothic motifs such as castles, graveyards and ghosts, to Shelley's *Frankenstein,* often also referred to as the first science fiction novel, which does not rely only on the visual aspect of fear but has an ambiguous and unconventional message.

Even though the novel revolves around a daunting humanoid creature and takes place in vivid frightening places, it does not rely simply on the aspect of fear. It could be said that the author took a different approach to writing a gothic novel and tried to conceal a message of female rights and equality in a literature piece dominated by men. With her work, Shelley opened up the innovative possibility that every male character could actually be a woman in disguise. From the fact Victor 'gave birth' to its child and then abandoned him, to the fact the Creature was not able to speak or read, we could conclude the author carefully considered the protagonist characters to be understood in a dual manner. As well as that, Shelley has also shown immense talent in character development, but, innovative character choices and specific settings at which the story took place were not the only aspects of Shelley's work that were different to the pre-existing gothic novels. In *Frankenstein*, not only did the author decide to focus on an aggrieved and misunderstood individual, she also managed to conceal a message about sexism, stereotypes and prejudice about women. As well as that, up until the publication of *Frankenstein,* the consumer was mostly presented with stories in which the protagonist is also the story's hero. However, we could say that this novel shines a light on a possibility that not every main character is a good person. For example, in the beginning of the novel, Victor was described as misunderstood and restricted. Accordingly, such a smart initial presentation of events indirectly makes the reader feel sympathy towards the said character. However, as the story progresses, the reader is faced with the fact that the person they felt so badly about is actually not deserving of it. Namely, Victor's behaviour towards his creation makes it easy for the observer, in this case, the reader, to judge the entirety of the situation and possibly change their mind. Therefore, the innovation in character development and surprising turn of events make the reader sympathize with the monster instead. With that said, it is also important to refer to the possible influences that made an impression on Shelley. Because of the many layers that we are faced with unravelling when it comes to the characters and allegory in the story, we can assume the author purposefully inserted a point to ponder for the readers. With emphasis on her reading list, according to Gilbert and Gubar, Mary's reading "was often an emotional as well as an intellectual event of considerable magnitude." (Gilbert, Gubar, 223). Having said that, we can understand why the story about Frankenstein is considered not to be one-dimensional, but rather a story with layers of ambiguity that require open-mindedness and history knowledge.

4. Allegory in *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*

In Moretti's work *Signs Taken for Wonders*, the sentence: "Like the proletariat, the monster is denied a name and an individuality." (Moretti, 85) contains one of the underlying ideas this paper wants to argue. It is necessary to refer to the issue of the previously addressed positions of women in the patriarchal society of the 19th century. The references to women being "derived" from men can be associated with the supernatural relationship of this novel's protagonist Victor and his Creature. According to the biblical Creation myth, Eve was created from Adam's rib, and if we consider Shelley's novel, the Creature is made out of human body parts. Furthermore, Christians believe that God created man, so can we equate the role of God with Victor due to the fact he was the creator of his Creature? Some critics also refer to this issue as Victor's God complex.

If we think about it in that way, it is easy to embark on endless connections and references that are visible in this novel. Some of them are obvious, and some, perhaps too stretched to seem believable. However, the indisputable fact is that up until the 19th century, women faced the problem of individuality and expression, as well as misunderstanding and disrespect of the opposite sex. Besides that, if we take into account the legacy of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, a radical protofeminist, isn't it unusual that Shelley's ideas conveyed in the novel so obviously contradict them? At first glance, this seems to be a book in which men have a dominant role, but if we scratch below the surface, we can argue that the case is actually the opposite.

The three monsters

Moretti compares the three generations of monsters – Walpole's Ghost, Stoker's Dracula and Shelley's Creature. He specifies that the main difference between them is their lifespan, and refers to Walpole's Ghost as the epitome of gruesome and frightening in a true gothic environment. Moretti explains that a ghost's life begins with a person's death while the Creature is a humanoid monster made by a third party, in this case, by a human. Disregarding the fact it is made out of human body parts, its lifespan, unlike the one of a human, is not exactly specified.

Also, when taking into consideration the common knowledge about vampires, one of their most prominent characteristics, except roaming around at night to find victims and drink their blood, is their immortality. Therefore, both Frankenstein's Creature and Dracula need to be killed in order to die. However, unlike vampires who have to have their heart pierced with a wooden stake, the way for the Creature to be killed is unknown.

Apart from Dracula's and Creature's lifespan and the way it can be ended, Moretti touches upon the fact that unlike Walpole's ghost, Dracula and Frankenstein's Creature are a far greater threat to mankind. Because of its unnatural size and enormous strength, an encounter with Frankenstein's Creature is extremely dangerous, and most likely – deadly. On the other hand, an encounter with a vampire most likely ends with a painful stab, more specifically, its teeth on the victim's neck. For this reason, Moretti concludes that separating those two deadly beings into different times and places is vital for the survival of human race.

What is in a name?

I would like to refer to Moretti's statement about denying a woman's name and individuality and connect it with the author of the novel in question. When thinking about the importance of a name, I would like to discuss Mary's half-sister Jane mentioned in the first chapter of this paper. It could be said that Jane, who later changed her name to Claire, experienced a certain "identity crisis". In addition to that, I would also like to mention the example of the author and her mother sharing a name Mary Wollstonecraft. Mary Shelley was named after her mother and the two had the same name and surname until the author of *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* married Percy Bysshe Shelley and added his last name to her own. Except for that, Mary Shelley "built" her reputation on the name Shelley and not her maiden name. Although it is sometimes still a part of tradition to name children after parents or grandparents, it can actually be argued that people are deprived of their individuality because of it. Some could therefore find themselves pressured to maintain the importance that their predecessors had without actually identifying with them. While parents probably have the best intentions when naming their child after someone, it is possible that those children feel pressured to meet the expectations that name carries.

Over the years, a major change in society enabled a growth in accessibility of different goods including literature and art. However, even with overwhelming amounts of information which are constantly available to the average reader, mistakes surrounding the novel *Frankenstein* still exist. For example, in terms of popular culture, people refer to the Creature as Frankenstein and are often times unaware of it actually being the last name of the Creature's creator. Even though a possible explanation of this occurrence could be that the name Frankenstein is considerably more recognizable and memorable than just "the Creature", many people referring to it in that way are still in the wrong. Lastly, the fact that the story about Frankenstein and his Creature was first published anonymously, ties into the whole idea of name importance. Given that Mary Shelley was only 19 years old when she finished writing the novel and was not yet a famous author, it was often thought the novel was actually written by Percy Bysshe Shelley, her husband. With that said, the publication of *Frankenstein* in 1823 was an ultimate confirmation that the author of the novel was actually Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.

Victor and his child

According to Moretti, the comparison of a 19th-century woman to Frankenstein's Creature is not the only one we can make when reading the novel. According to Gilbert and Gubar, Victor, although portrayed as a misogynist, could actually be thought of as a woman himself even though he does not give birth to his child, but rather makes it from other people's remains. Nevertheless, he does so in his own image and likeness, the same way God created Adam according to the book of Genesis. As previously mentioned, some critics argue that Victor has a God complex, meaning he views himself as the Creator as well as the force above all others. What could make this comparison bizarre is the fact Victor is a scientist, and it could be said that the field of science to this day has disputes with religion. We can conclude that even though he as a scientist denies the existence of God or the divine force that created the universe, at the same time he considers himself to be exactly that. Upon analyzing critical works such as Moretti's *Signs Taken for Wonders* and Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman at the Attic*, I concluded there are two ways to approach the interpretation of this novel, more specifically the actual "birth" of the Creature – either it was made by Victor in his image and likeness to reference God and its power, or Victor is actually a female character in disguise.

Considering the aforementioned possibilities, the idea that Victor created a monster to resemble himself poses a question if it is possible that he actually constructed a physical version of his unsightly mind. Namely, even though Victor is an intelligent individual and primarily an ambitious scientist, it does not change the fact that we eventually find out he is not a good person. From selfish behavior to insensitivity, in time, Victor's personality becomes uglier than the body of an actual monster he created. Taking that into consideration, if we compare the vivid description of the Creature which states that it is made out of several different human body parts, in that way making it disproportionately large and terrifying, we can conclude Victor's "inside" matches the Creature's "outside". Furthermore, this instance resembles the plot of Wilde's novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* published in 1890, in which the protagonist's portrait becomes uglier because of a real person's behavior. The hideous portrait remains hidden while the protagonist remains young and beautiful in real life. In the same way, the physical appearance of the Creature could actually be considered a representation of Victor's inner state - the Creature miserably wanders around the world feeling misunderstood, while Victor lives his ordinary life and ignores the fact he created an enormous threat to human kind.

5. Gender equality and representation in *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*

The only thing the Creature wants is to have a "normal" life. Therefore, he believes he deserves to be treated as a person should. He believes he has a right to an opinion, education, the right to socialize and be respected. Women, as it has been said before, were deprived of such rights in the 19th century, so in this case we can again relate the similar positions of the Creature and women in the 19th-century society. Firstly, I would like to touch upon the fact the Creature wants, or rather believes, he should have a female partner. He explicitly wants a partner who is "as deformed and horrible as myself!" (Shelley, 120) He thinks that such creature would understand and comfort him, as he currently feels alienated and alone, because the two would share the same destiny. Even though the Creature is not a person, it has feelings that we as humans experience and understand so we cannot but sympathize with him.

When referring to an earlier claim about Victor's mind and soul, it is important to note that the real proof of that lies in his selfishness. At the Creature's request to create him a partner

and get peace for himself and all the world in return, Victor coldly rejects him. Could his response be an act of selfishness in wanting the Creature to suffer and be lonely as much as he is, because, as I mentioned earlier, Victor identifies with his Creature on a deeper level, or does he think he is actually doing the world a favor by not doubling the already dangerous threat? After all, can he trust the angry and dangerous Creature to guarantee he will disappear from the face of the Earth if he does him such a delicate favor? Even though he states a few reasons as to why it is ultimately better not to create him a female companion, the exact reason why Victor ultimately rejects it is not specified in the novel. However, one of the reasons stated in the story is the fact he does not want the two creatures to breed. Victor also argues that the female creature would look even uglier than the male, as well as it would be aggressive and want to kill people out of boredom. Moreover, doctor Frankenstein thinks that the female creature might reject the male Creature because of his appearance and run off to mate with the human species instead to have half-monster-half-human children, and such behavior could result in the world having an entirely different problem to face. With that said, it is necessary to critically approach the reasons Victor states. Because of the fact he does not want to create a partner for his Creature, Victor lists the aforementioned reasons as an excuse to reject the Creature's request, even though upon further analysis, these reasons could also be read as disguised stereotypical comments directed towards women. Although a female creature would not be of human species by nature, Victor makes prejudicial comments about women, while, say, with a male Creature, he does not do the same. For example, he comments on a possibility that the female creature would be uglier than the male, even though he can in no way be certain of it. As well as that, Victor believes that the female creature would be more aggressive or promiscuous than the male Creature, even though there are no evidence to support that claim. Moreover, in many species males are the ones who are more aggressive and have a stronger physique than the females. With that said, are these comments here for a reason, that is, does Shelley list them as a critique of those who think in that way, or as a sarcastic response to the given prejudices? The issue of refusing to create a female monster can be observed on a deeper level as well. If we take Victor's love life into account, we can conclude that the closest opposite sex relationship he has is the one with Elizabeth, his stepsister, even though they are not at all blood related. Considering the incestuous nature of their relationship, the potential partnership which the Creature would have with his female companion is actually rather similar. If we consider Victor to be the "mother", or rather, the

parent of the Creature, then he would also be the mother to the Creature's potential partner, his other "child". Moreover, given that Victor is probably unaware of his relationship with Elizabeth as being wrong and unnatural, is it possible that he is thinking differently when somebody else is concerned, especially so because he would be responsible for its start? It is therefore necessary to re-invoke the possibility that Victor could actually be creating a version of himself when creating the Creature. Could Victor's refusal to contribute to an incestuous relationship be interpreted as his avowal of the morally dubious rapport with Elizabeth? The answers to these questions as well as the issue of Victor denying the Creatures request of a companion are left for us to only speculate about.

A covert autobiography

Upon reading *Frankenstein,* it is important to understand the implications and underlying messages that the story entails. Although the novel is considered to be the pioneer of science fiction, over the years, a variety of respectable freethinking critics tried to find and separate different layers the story comprised of. For example, authors such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar dedicated their collaborative work *The Madwomen in the Attic* to introduce the possibility of *Frankenstein* actually being a feminist novel. Moreover, the two offered an interesting perspective that the two male protagonists in the story actually represent women. With that said, authors go on to further characterize Victor as a female character giving birth to its child, equating his parental role to the one a mother would bare. As well as that, the two agree on the issue of Victor, a male figure, refusing to create a female companion to the Creature to be an act of prejudice and misogyny. Another aspect of the book explores the objectification women face due to their appearance, so Gilbert and Gubar illustrate the issue of the Creature being rejected and misunderstood due to its exterior. Except for the two authors, Moretti also tackles the issue of patriarchal society of the 19th century, advocating for female emancipation and name importance.

Considering Shelley's life journey and the importance of her travels, one can realize the role different locations have in the novel. Namely, Diane Telgen goes on to argue the author

purposefully chose Geneva, England and the Swiss Alps to emphasize destinations that greatly impacted her own life. For example, visiting Switzerland was a turning point in Shelley's life, given that it was the place she began writing her life's work. Also, Telgen contrasts the Romantic tendency to conform to idyllic picturesque sceneries with the gothic inclination towards secluded and gruesome environments. She also refers to the possibility that such an atypical gothic setting was chosen to accentuate the contrast between the Creature's outer appearance and the beauty of the surroundings. Except for the scenery, the uncanny resemblance in Shelley's and Victor's early life was perhaps not accidental. Primarily, both Victor and the author suffered the loss of their loved ones. For instance, Victor's mother Caroline died from scarlet fever, while Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin suffered the consequences of poor medical care just a few days after giving birth to her only daughter. In addition, the two also lost their partners. Victor's wife Elizabeth died on their wedding night, while Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned in a boating accident. Not only did they lose their partners, they also both lost their siblings. As well as that, if we consider Gilbert and Gubar interpretation on Victor being a mother, one cannot omit the fact both him and Mary had a son. Furthermore, given that Mary grew up without motherly care, she was keen to learn about her mother's literary legacy. After her father shortly remarried, Mary Shelley was deprived of formal education and subjected to exploration of her interests on her own. Drawing a parallel between the author and her novel, Victor's father was not supportive of his son's decision to learn about certain topics nor pursuing his education in science. However, both Mary and Victor took the initiative to achieve their ambitions regardless of their parents' limitations. Similarly, another aspect of Frankenstein's and Shelley's life refers to the importance of their work. Both put great efforts in understanding the matter of their creation, be that a scientific project or a piece of literature. More specifically, the time spent researching and assembling i.e. writing, in both cases equated to approximately two years.

6. Tabula rasa

When writing this complex novel, Shelley was not only influenced by literature written by her precursors and peers. Namely, critics seem to agree she also found inspiration in philosophy, with emphasis on the celebrated minds such as Rousseau and Locke. For example, it could be said that Locke's concept of "tabula rasa" or the idea that our mind is "blank" at birth

and we are to enhance its abilities through socializing and experiences came to life in the character of Frankenstein's Creature. According to Diane Telgen, Shelley "wanted her readers to understand how important the Creature's social conditioning was to his development as a conscious being." (Telgen, 186) With that said, the author subjected the Creature to various realistic situations and gave it the power to better itself by learning and understanding the environment that surrounds it. As previously noted, Victor's choice to abandon its child affected the progression of events later in the novel. Due to experiencing rejection, the Creature was bound to run and hide, acting in the same way a neglected child would. It craved attention from its father by locating him and trying to communicate its needs and wants, unfortunately, with no positive outcome. After not receiving what it wanted, it swore to Victor he will regret such a selfish decision and vanished. According to Amy B. Shuffelton "readers see the monster shift from sympathetic identification with humanity to outraged desire for vengeance." (Shuffelton, 64)

Except for the aspect of drama and speculation as to where the Creature was headed, the idea of a "child" reaching out to his parent and being rejected projects the feelings of compassion in the reader. Wandering for some time, the Creature came across the De Lacey family. At first, the Creature selfishly stole food when the family was not around, but eventually, when it realized the family was poor, it tried to do small acts of kindness for them. Hidden, after observing them for a while, the Creature finally felt like it could belong, especially so because the family seemed understanding and loving. Unfortunately, impressions gained through watching from afar were not accurate. With the exception of the blind father who gave the Creature a chance by talking to him, the two De Lacey siblings were immediately intimidated by the Creature's frightening exterior. Once again, the Creature found itself lost and alone, plotting its revenge against its creator and the world.

The path to self-discovery

Throughout the novel, except for social conditions, Shelley emphasizes the impact literature and reading have on one's personal growth. The first encounter with the importance of literature commences with Victor accidentally coming across books written by a famous but heavily criticized Renaissance philosopher, Cornelius Agrippa. In the same way Shelley and her

friends were compelled to stay inside due to the poor weather when deciding to write ghost stories, Victor Frankenstein read the aforementioned books on a rainy family vacation and instantly developed a passion for science. However, it could be said that the lack of understanding Victor later projected on his "child" was rooted in his father's disapproval of his early interests in Agrippa and the field of science. Despite his father's lack of enthusiasm towards his son's fascination with the newly found interests, Victor still persevered in learning more and, eventually, relocated to be able to study. In regard to the Creature's literature interest, as well as the previously mentioned character development, Shelley thoroughly considered the importance of reading that affected its humanness and betterment. From Plutarch *Lives* to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, the Creature gained insight into human intellect as well as emotion. All three works were of great importance for its further personal growth and understanding of the human race, as well as contributed to its knowledge of language and communication for which the Creature had a desire to learn.

Character contrast

Throughout the novel, various characters show vulnerability, compassion and generosity towards others. However, according to Telgen, "Victor's self-centered actions are shown in stark contrast to those of his family, friends and even strangers." (Telgen, 187) From his parents adopting orphaned children to Victor abandoning his only child, a major difference in parental approach is visible from just the two events in the story. Except for that, it is also important to mention the characters who looked after others in times of sickness and need. For example, Caroline Frankenstein took great care of her adopted daughter Elizabeth when she was suffering from scarlet fever, even though she ended up dying from the consequences of the disease. Similarly, Victor's best friend Henry Clerval made sure Victor recovered from the shock and terror of creating a monster in his laboratory, even though he was not aware of the said supernatural event at all. Furthermore, a crucial moment in the story was the death of Victor's younger brother William, who was strangled by the Creature as an act of revenge and hatred towards its creator. Cleverly, by planting evidence, the Creature managed to successfully make Justine seem responsible for the killing. Shockingly, even though Justine was innocent, she was unable to defend herself and therefore took the fall which resulted in death penalty. Although Victor was aware of the culprit, he kept quiet and let Justine take the blame, which again proves

his selfishness and lack of empathy. With that said, another character that showcased good will and intentions was Elizabeth, Victor's adopted sister. Even though Justine willingly admitted to a crime, Elizabeth did not find her words to be true and promised Justine she believed her intentions were pure.

Conclusion

This paper offers an overview on European history and changes that molded the 18$^{\text{th-}}$century society. It explains the political climate and lists several most important events and movements which inspired Romanticists to create art, music and literature. It provides a short biography of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life and describes the influence of her parents Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and William Godwin. It briefly explores author's difficult childhood and how she found motherly love in reading her mother's work, emphasizing the philosophical book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which molded Shelley into being a strong, opinionated woman. It discusses the significance of one's name, and lists a few of Mary's closest relatives and friends who were faced with the pressure of being named after important people, including herself. Moreover, the paper recounts an interesting story of how the idea for Frankenstein and his Creature came about, as well as compares Shelley's innovative approach to writing her gothic novel with the works written by Walpole, Stoker and Lewis. The said novels were categorized and compared according to Robert D. Hume and Ann Radcliffe's essays on the differences between horror and terror. The paper also focuses on defining the Romantic era and the most important novelties it brought, accentuating the terms gothic and supernatural. It

compares Romantic authors such as Keats, Coleridge and Wordsworth and how they incorporated supernatural events in their poetry and prose, while underlining the importance of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life work *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus.* The influence of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's aforementioned book translated into Shelley's gothic novel which, according to several critics mentioned in this paper, conveys a powerful feminist message. Moreover, this paper introduces several possible views on the ambiguity of the novel as well as character development. It explains the concept of "tabula rasa" coined by the world-famous philosopher John Locke, and explores the possibility of it being the idea behind creating the Creature's path to self-discovery. As well as that, this paper compares the lives of Shelley and Victor Frankenstein, finding similarities in many aspects of their lives. Therefore, as Gilbert, Gubar and Telgen argue, there is a possibility that *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* is actually a covert autobiography of its author, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.

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