

# Literary Construct of Otherness in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
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**Literary Construct of Otherness in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern  
Prometheus***

Submitted in partial fulfilment requirement for the B.A. in English Language and Literature  
and Philosophy at the University of Rijeka

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## Abstract

In this paper, I will be presenting my thesis on the literary construct of otherness in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*. Shelley's work has been a staple of popular culture for over two centuries, since 1818, when it was first published. The concept of otherness applies to *Frankenstein* through its monster – the “Other” is that which stands in opposition with the norm, with the “Self”. I shall endeavour to contextualize the novel in the historical and modern literary criticism. This paper will corroborate the concept of otherness, shining light on the feminist readings of Shelley's novel, as well as the feminist relation to otherness. Furthermore, the point of view of the queer otherness will be utilized, showing *Frankenstein's* long lasting impact in the LGBTQIA+ community. The relation of otherness with race and colonialism will also be touched on. Finally, this paper will address the hidden otherness in science itself.

Keywords: *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, selfhood, Other, Otherness

## Introduction

For this paper, I have chosen the topic of the literary construct of Otherness in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. The concept of otherness stems from the idea that the 'Self' poses its opposite 'Other' in order to understand and identify itself. It is how we come to develop our consciousness as children, through interaction with others and differentiating them from ourselves. However, in this paper I will be focusing on a different meaning of otherness – one which denotes the difference between the hetero-patriarchal Western 'Self' and the different versions of 'Others' it poses. The reason for this 'othering' is so that those in power can maintain that position by keeping those they deem different oppressed. While there are many types of otherings, this paper will focus on the feminist, post colonial and queer understandings of otherness. In addition, I will be focusing on the way in which all these different concepts of otherness converge in one literary work - Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Shelley's ground-breaking novel, seems to be the perfect story through which to explore the concept of the 'Other'. Frankenstein's famous monster is one of the best portrayals of otherness in literature, from its first publication in 1818 to today. Shelley's life is a fascinating insight into her own position as 'Other', in opposition to the eighteenth-century male 'Self', which equipped her with a unique perspective and inspiration to create this story.

I will first start by presenting the historical and contemporary criticism of the novel as it sets a good base for the exploration of my thesis. From when it was first published, the novel has been a success, but there have been positive and negative responses to it. Through the works of Johnson and Moers, this paper will be attempting to explain the 1800s misogyny, which met not only Shelley but her novel as well. It will be presenting the idea of the female 'Other' by Simone de Beauvoir in order to connect feminist criticism with *Frankenstein*. Next, the concept of the post colonial 'Other' and its connection to Frankenstein's creature will be explored. Afterwards, the paper will focus on the concept of the 'Other' as it pertains to queer theory, most specifically the transgender community and its deep connection with Frankenstein's

monster. And lastly, it will briefly touch on the concept of the ‘Other’ present in the scientific community, connecting Shelley’s scientist with modern science and its connotations.

### **1. Historical vs Modern criticism of *Frankenstein***

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was only eighteen years old when she wrote *Frankenstein*, which would go on to be viewed as the first, and most popular to date, science-fiction novel. She pioneered the use of scientific methods in the creation of her famous monster, taking on a brand new venture of storytelling. She described the story as appearing to her in a dream and compiling what she referred to, a transcript of that dream. She wrote:

“I saw - with shut eyes, but acute mental vision - I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion.” (Shelley, 2021, 6)

*Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is a prime example of Gothic fiction, a genre that came about parallel and opposite to the Romantics, written by women; with the intention to scare. Though, most Gothic novels made use of the supernatural, such as ghosts and hauntings, Shelley’s novel was unique in its representation of terror. Her monster was both a metaphor and an actual character, combining two seemingly contradictory but fascinating aspects of the story. The scientist’s own horror initially stems from the fact that a metaphor came to life and walked out into the world, making space for a new kind of literature of horror (Moretti, 1997). Mary Shelley, herself, claimed she wrote *Frankenstein* with the intention to “speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror - to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart” (Shelley, 2021, 5).

The novel came about as a result of a writing challenge between Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Polidori and Mary Shelley – Byron suggested they all attempt to write a ghost story, similar to the ones they were reading at the time. *Frankenstein* was the only one that was actually completed, and went on to become one of the most famous stories in the world (Shelley, 2021).

Shelley referred to her novel as a ‘hideous progeny’, in her introduction to the novel, she asked “How I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?” (Shelley, 2021, 3)

Over two centuries have passed since Mary Shelley put her dream to paper and released it unto the world. Throughout its existence, the reception had been both negative and positive, sometimes all at once. Readers regard with horror, Frankenstein’s creature and his actions, while also sympathizing with him on his tragic journey. They judge the scientist for his monstrous act of creation and subsequent abandonment of the same, while still feeling for him in the torturous aftermath of his penance. These conflicting feelings are one of the reasons why the novel still has a visceral impact on its audience.

Mary Shelley’s own experiences bled into her creation of *Frankenstein*, making it a profoundly original piece of literary artistry. Her experience with motherhood is what set her apart from other female writers of her time. She first became pregnant at sixteen, with Shelley - who was already married at the time; dealing with near constant pregnancies and child loss for the next five years, making her uniquely qualified to compose such a poignant story of birthing a monster (Moers, 1985).

Barbara Johnson (1982) posed the theory that the novel showcases a relationship between monstrosity and being a parent. *Frankenstein* presents two conflicting parenting modules; Frankenstein’s own childhood and his creature’s as the polar opposites. Johnson (1982) finds the ending for the two characters being equally torturous and isolating, to be a statement on the impossibility of finding the true answer to what proper parenthood is.

When *Frankenstein* was first published in 1818, it was a striking success. However, many people assumed the novel to be the work of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley’s husband and famous poet - given that it was first published anonymously, but bore a dedication to Mary Shelley’s father, whom he was a proud admirer of (Johnson, 1982). Mary Shelley had all the makings of an author, as both of her parents had been successful in the field. In the introduction to the novel, in 1831, she acknowledges; “It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing. As a child I scribbled, and my favourite pastime during the hours given me for recreation was to ‘write stories’” (Shelley, 2021, 3).

Her father, William Godwin wrote *Political Justice*, while her mother Mary Wollstonecraft was the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Johnson, 2014). Shelley had in fact infused

her story with ideas from both her parents, influenced by the classic novelists and poets as well as the scientific developments of her time, which she was privy to through her immediate circle (Moers, 1985, 94). Unfortunately, her youth and gender lead to the belief that “she was not so much an author in her own right as a transparent medium through which passed the ideas of those around her”(Moers, 1985, 94).

In a review, Sir Walter Scott claimed that “The author seems to us to disclose uncommon powers of poetic imagination”, while Lord Byron wrote “Methinks it is a wonderful book for a girl of nineteen—not nineteen, indeed, at that time.” (Lepore, 2018). A conservative parliament member, John Croker, had declared the book a “tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity”, denouncing it as immoral, propagating radical ideas and insane ramblings (Lepore, 2018).

Moretti (1997) claims that Frankenstein’s creature was a new kind of monster - a total monster, a dynamic modern creation, threatening the entirety of the world, not just a specific microcosm in which such creatures historically resided. Therein lies the main source of fear. Modern monsters have to be eradicated because they threaten the world with their immortality and the devastation they cause (Moretti, 1997). The monster is used to place all the horrors of society outside itself – into a physical creature who they can blame, hate and eradicate (Moretti, 1997). Frankenstein himself claims to have created not man, but a “race of devils” (Shelley, 2021, 136)

Sir Walter Scott and likeminded critics, had found issue with the means by which the creature develops his faculties; he learns language by observing the De Lacey family, learns to read and understand the world through the books he found in the forest – they found that this was absurd and laughable, that no one could ever acquire knowledge in such crude and barbaric ways (Lepore, 2018). However, as Lepore (2018) points out, the creature’s path to education resembles closely that of ‘the slave narrative’ – those born into slavery had to find alternative means of acquiring knowledge, language and literacy, just like Frankenstein’s creature.

He who dares to take on the monster would by default become the representative of his race and society, a hero in the face of the horrifying ‘Other’ (Moretti, 1997). Mary Shelley’s monster was depicted as resembling the Africans in opposition to the European whites, thus the creature stands in for black slaves (Lepore, 2018). The link between Frankenstein’s monster and black slaves could be seen in the 1850s “in American political cartoons as a nearly naked black man,



signifying slavery itself, seeking his vengeance upon the nation that created him” (Lepore, 2018).

The biggest question posed by critics, is the classic one of nature versus nurture – was the means of his creation, or his abandonment of the creature Frankenstein’s biggest fault? Perhaps it is both the act of unnatural conception and the social ostracism he was subjected to, that created Frankenstein’s monster.

In his rejection of his creature, Frankenstein destroys any chance of finding out if his monster could have become anything other than a monster, had he simply cared for it. It isn’t only the horrifying mode of its creation that makes him who he is, it is his father’s and society’s subsequent violent rejection that cements the creature’s fate.

Moretti (1997) argues that the relationship between Frankenstein and his monster can also be read as that of the capitalist and the working man – the scientist has no choice but to create the monster, but he also wants to destroy it since it poses a threat to him. The fear of the monstrous ‘Other’ is the fear belonging to those who are afraid of having “produced [their] own gravediggers” (Moretti, 1997, 86).

There are many possible readings of Shelley’s novel, but this paper will focus on those in regard to the concept of ‘Otherness’.

## **2. The Concept of Otherness**

The Cambridge dictionary defines “otherness” as “being or feeling different in appearance or character from what is familiar, expected, or generally accepted”. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Otherness has been an invaluable tool for man to develop his own identity. The ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ stand in opposition so that the ‘Self’ might describe itself; without ‘Other’ the ‘Self’ would be without identity (Khaoula, 2019). This rings true for all people, regardless of gender or social standing – we all learn about our identities as children through observing the ‘Other’ outside of us. Only once we have grasped the difference between the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, as separate beings, do we cognitively develop into rational creatures. However, there is another use of this concept of otherness and that is to subjugate and isolate those we deem different than us. Historically, the Western patriarchal world order has used this idea of the ‘Other’ in

order to maintain power over women, people of colour and non-western cultures as well as those of lower social and educational standing (Khaoula, 2019). We need only look at modern anthropology as a guiding light into the concept of otherness – portraying non-Western cultures as alien and contradicting – creating the idea of the human ‘Other’ under the pretence of scientific development and the understanding of humanity (Sarukkai, 1997). The term ‘othering’ was proposed by Gayatri Spivak to describe the process in which a “hegemonic discourse creates its ‘others’” (Khaoula, 2019, 33).

Simone de Beauvoir (1956), in her work “*The Second Sex*” proposes that the concept of the ‘Other’ stems from the male-female relationships, and women’s subjugated position in relation to the male in the hetero-patriarchal structure of the world. She claims that:

“Once subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is none the less a necessity to him: he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself.” (De Beauvoir, 1956, 159)

In simpler terms, he uses his counterpart to describe all favoured aspects of himself, in opposition to his ‘Other’, while projecting all that he dislikes within himself onto the ‘Other’ as well - creating a dynamic in which he cannot exist without his ‘Other’, even though he deems himself above it. De Beauvoir (1956, 159) states that “ true alterity – otherness – is that of a consciousness separate from mine and substantially identical with mine”. The two become inseparable, one cannot exist without his ‘Other’. It is only in relation to other people that one can exist and fulfil their purpose. As de Beauvoir (1956, 159) rightfully points out, people wish to elevate themselves by reducing their ‘Other’ to ‘slavery’ – demanding he exist for their transcendence but not allowing him to flourish in his own right.

The concept of ‘Other’ has been used, especially in literature, as a way to point out these complex dynamics and shine a light on their negative aspects. Otherness reduces people to outcasts, forcing them to live on the fringe of society, rejected as fully conscious human beings with their own qualities and faults. ‘Othering’ dehumanizes those deemed different and subjects them to violence while simultaneously representing them as both weak and dangerous; it spreads through racial, gendered, cultural and epistemic otherness (Khaoula, 2019).

Thus, there is overlap between the language of otherness in relation to colonization and race, and the subjugation of women in a male-centred society – both are ‘othered’ from the white hetero-centric patriarchal norm which has been asserted throughout history. The

disproportional relationship between master and slave, and man and wife, are almost identical in the Western dialectic.

One key aspect of the concept of the 'Other' is the fear associated with it. Portraying the 'Other' as dangerous, violent, immoral and savage all leads to creating an atmosphere of fear that permeates society, which in turn shuns this 'Other' and turns it into a monster (Moretti, 1997). Man represses the dark parts of his psyche and projects it onto the monstrous 'Other', causing anxieties to rise and create violent circumstances in which the 'Other' is perceived, unfairly, as a threat (Moretti, 1997). As Frankenstein states "There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies" (Shelley, 2021, 82).

Moretti (1997, 102) states "The repressed returns, then, but disguised as a monster. For a psychoanalytic study, the main fact is precisely this metamorphosis".

This dynamic has not changed much throughout the centuries; while slavery has been abolished and women have been awarded civil rights, after much strife, still the language of 'otherness' permeates even our daily interactions in the modern world. The language used to once describe slaves and colonized countries, is now used to describe the oppressed countries in the middle East etc.

Applying the mentioned understandings of the concept of 'otherness' to Shelley's novel, we might view *Frankenstein* as a work portraying the 'Other' both as a literal monster, as well as a metaphor for its own 'othering'. Indeed, the story is a prime example of otherness. The creature, dubbed a monster by his creator and society, is in every possible aspect 'Other'. Physically he is disproportionately big, unappealing, frightening to look at; he is an abandoned child, a frightening 'Other' forced out of the human world through violence; he is a hopeless creature who does not belong, craving companionship yet consistently denied it. Frankenstein's monster is a stand in for the black 'Other', fighting to be a free and equal member of the human race, yet unable to escape the 'race of devils' his father and master has given him. He can represent the female 'Other', constantly kept at the fringe of society, voiceless and powerless against his oppressors. He can be seen as a metaphor for queer identity, always hiding, never allowed to walk among the humans for risk of violence. He is a transgendered monster, a body made by unnatural means into something that defies binary labels. He is the 'Other' in every possible way.

It is impossible for Frankenstein to recognize himself in his 'Other' in fear of losing his own imagined identity. He projects onto his monster that which he cannot and will not accept within himself – refusing to accept his own monstrosity (Cottom, 1980).

### **3. Feminist reading of *Frankenstein's* Otherness**

The history of human civilisation has been overwhelmingly defined by patriarchal rules. It has been men in charge of governments, men in charge of their wives and children, men in positions of power, greedily fighting to keep that position uninterrupted by the 'Other'.

Simone de Beauvoir, in 1949, described the 'Other' by focusing on the “male-dominated culture that represents Woman as the sexual Other to Man” (De Beauvoir, 1956). In western society it has been predominantly white heterosexual men, who have held the power and control over everyone else, including education and knowledge - after all, we know history is written by the victors. In order to keep their power, men have fought to maintain their hold over women – to keep women dependant on them by any means necessary; legal, social and familial – therefore woman is the ultimate 'Other' (Khaoula, 2019).

However, women are not content to simply stay the subject of men forever, and have for centuries been fighting to end their oppression and find independence and liberation through the feminist movements. This has in turn threatened men, and they have been fighting to stop women from acquiring rights; historically, through suffrage and legal ownership of men over women, and today still in unequal pay and daily threat of violence against women. Men view women's becoming subjects as an attack on their 'Self' – “he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself” (De Beauvoir, 1956, 159). Therefore, if woman would cease to become the 'Other' to his 'Self', he would risk losing that which makes him who he is, his own identity - since so much of male identity resides in his superiority over 'Other'.

Men have viewed women as the object in which they found their 'Other' without having to feel threatened by them into becoming the object, the 'Other' who is “the inessential, who never goes back to being the essential”, one that willingly accepts man's sovereignty (De Beauvoir, 1956, 162). How much this ideal of the female 'Other' is vital to men and the patriarchal order, can be witnessed by looking at every myth of creation that has been constructed, especially in the most prominent legend of Genesis, where man is made by God, but woman is made from

man *for* man (De Beauvoir, 1956). By posing woman as ‘Other’, as myth, he keeps her imprisoned within unyielding contradictions – she is holy, she is demonic, she is mother, she is whore, she is manipulative but also malleable - “woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary” (De Beauvoir, 1956, 162-163).

Regarding *Frankenstein* and its author, there are layers to be considered while reading her work through a feminist lens. Historically speaking, Mary Shelley’s work has first and foremost been considered in order to shed light on her husband’s, Percy Bysshe Shelley’s own literary development (Mellor, 1989). None of her writing, except *Frankenstein* had been the topic of critical discussion, and even her most famous novel has tended to be kept off the literary canon list (Mellor, 1989).

However, since the later years of the 20th century, feminist critics as well as psychoanalysts, have been shedding more light on the value of Mary Shelley’s work and *Frankenstein’s* complexities and originality (Mellor, 1989). According to Mellor (1989, 11), “*Frankenstein* is rapidly becoming an essential text for our exploration of female consciousness and literary technique.” *Frankenstein* can be seen as our best literary source of the “psychology of modern scientific man, of the dangers inherent in scientific research, and of the exploitation of nature and of the female implicit in a technological society” (Mellor, 1989, 38).

Mary Shelley, at eighteen years of age, had concocted the first ever myth of creation which included a “man’s single-handed creation of a living being from dead matter” – no other myth had ever ventured in such unspeakable waters – the creation always including “some form of female participation or divine intervention” (Mellor, 1989, 38).

In all the explorations of *Frankenstein* that have occurred in the popular culture, the most complex parts of Shelley’s work had been ignored and overlooked – that being the vitality of the creation and subsequent destruction of the female monster (Mellor, 1989). In the past, critics had dismissed Mary Shelley’s novel as a “badly written children’s book”, ignoring the fact that far more people were familiar with *Frankenstein* than her husband’s poetry (Mellor, 1989, 39).

Johnson (1982) proposes the idea that *Frankenstein* is a feminist novel specifically due to its autobiographical connotations, that the struggle for a female author to own her work is the reason for its feminist label.

In the novel's subtitle; *The Modern Prometheus*, it is obvious that Shelley sees her novel as a response to the scientific question of the origin of humanity (Johnson, 1982). The myth is also a type of birth myth, as Prometheus is considered by certain critics to be the 'father' of the human race (Johnson, 1982).

According to Mellor (1989), it is a story about the consequences of a man attempting to reproduce without a female partner. It is a novel about birth giving, and all the horrors that come with it, focusing on the opposition of the natural and the scientific (Mellor, 1989).

Mary Shelley's own life story comes into the question of giving birth. She had birthed and buried a daughter eighteen months prior to writing the novel. In a journal entry, she wrote that she was haunted by dreams that her "little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived. Awake and find no baby. I think about the little thing all day. Not in good spirits" (Moers, 1985, 96). Therefore, the dream in which the conception of *Frankenstein* began, could be compared to her own loss and wish to reanimate her lost child. The scientist declares "I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (Shelley, 2021, 44).

By giving birth to the novel, her 'hideous progeny', she had consequently given birth to a story infused with images of disgust, guilt and dread in relation to birth and consequences that follow it (Moers, 1985).

Continuing on the topic of birth, the novel can be seen as a representation of postpartum depression. Frankenstein's disgust by his own creation can be paralleled to a mother's rejection of her child (Johnson, 1982). Given Mary Shelley's complex relationship with motherhood, it is a very interesting theory.

There are many interesting aspects in the novel which can be explained through an autobiographical lens. Shelley's second baby was named William, and that is the name she gave to the creature's first victim, a small child he violently murders (Johnson, 1982). Mary's own mother had died during childbirth with her - causing another layer of complications regarding birth in Shelley's life.

Johnson (1982) points out that the idea of a mother who regards her child with fear and hatred, who rejects it, is one of the most taboo topics in psychoanalysis, and an abhorred image for society, not only in the 1800s but today as well. A mother rejecting her infant is a terrifying

image in its own right, and Mary Shelley managed to present that idea through her novel in a bold and unique way. Though Victor is a man, he is also a stand in for a mother figure who regards her child with fear and disgust instead of the expected love and acceptance. This can be seen in Victor's recollection: "Mingled with this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment; dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!" (Shelley, 2021, 47). Another good example of this can be found in this passage:

"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, 2021, 47)

Another possible reading could view *Frankenstein's* avoidance of femininity the most interesting feminist aspect of it. The only complex characters in the novel are men, men are at the forefront, even their most meaningful relationships are with other men (Johnson, 1982). The women on the other hand are all gentle, nurturing, mother-like figures who do not possess any layers, whatsoever, to their personality. In them there is no desire, no dream, no conflict – all of these belong to the men. As Johnson (1982, 7) states "monstrousness is so incompatible with femininity that Frankenstein cannot even complete the female companion that his creature so eagerly awaits".

Women in real life are complex creatures, full of desires and contradictions – this is completely absent in the novel. Perhaps that is by design. All the things listed, that make women the vibrant, unique beings that they are, are the things the patriarchal society wishes to repress. The world wants women to be the nurturing mothers, the doting sisters, the faithful lovers – all in order to make men's lives easier and to allow them to fulfil their dreams. Johnson (1982) aptly points out that there would be no better way to express female repression to this degree than to simply erase femininity altogether, seeing that the silence speaks for itself. Shelley sets the representation of women "in the gap between angels of domesticity and an uncompleted monsteress, between the murdered Elizabeth and the dismembered Eve" (Johnson, 1982, 9).

Society's idea that a young woman could have a vivid imagination and find her self-expression in a monstrous story seems to be "monstrous in itself"(Johnson, 1982, 7).

This can be seen in the fact that Percy Shelley felt it necessary to write the preface to *Frankenstein*, in his wife's voice, and add warnings such as the following:

“... my chief concern in this respect has been limited to the avoiding the enervating effects of the novels of the present day, and the exhibition of the *amiableness of domestic affection*, and the excellence of universal virtue” (Shelley, 2021, 9-10)

As is clearly seen here, the idea of a woman portraying something which does not align with ‘domestic affection’ is something horrifying (Johnson, 1982). Percy Shelley’s influence permeates the entire book, not just his preface, having edited it to his satisfaction - another example of female authorship being repressed. It must be redressed in a way men find appropriate before it can be released into the world.

As Mary stated, her husband was “forever inciting me to obtain literary reputation... At this time he desired that I should write, not so much with the idea that I could produce anything worthy of notice, but that he might himself judge how far I possessed the promise of better things hereafter” (Shelley, 2021, 4). The irony of *Frankenstein* being far more widely known than any of his work is not lost on anyone who reads her introduction - where she shines light on just how potent the misogyny in her life was. Another example can be seen, again in Percy’s preface: “Two other friends (*a tale from the pen of one of whom would be far more acceptable to the public than anything I can ever hope to produce*) and myself agreed to write each a story, founded on some supernatural occurrence” (Shelley, 2021, 10). This passage clearly shows how hard men would go to maintain their status as superior to women – to, in her own voice, declare her accomplishment as less worthy than those of the men around her.

*Frankenstein* is also a story of a vain man erasing the role of the female by giving birth to his own hideous creation (Johnson, 1982). Victor spends roughly nine months, the duration of a pregnancy, creating his monster, once he has finally given him life he abandons him, leaving him alone and at the mercy of the world the creature was not made for (Mellor, 1989).

*Frankenstein* describes his creature with no love or empathy:

“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 a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriations 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...shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.” (Shelley, 2021, 46)

*Frankenstein* refuses to parent his child, denouncing it as demonical, an aberration, and abandoning it to be destroyed by the world unprepared to handle him. Even later, he refuses to



see the error of his ways and dies believing he was right in his actions, due to the evil demonic nature of his creature. In his own words, he felt “guiltless”:

“I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime.” (Shelley, 2021, 133)

Another aspect of feminist reading can be seen in Elizabeth’s death – she was killed on her wedding night, thus, drawing attention to the issue of female sexuality (Mellor, 1989). Given the novel’s consistent repression of all sexual relations, focusing on the chaste lovers in De Lacey’s, the platonic love between Victor and Clerval, or the familial dynamics which lacked any sexual aspect throughout – the novel causes repressed sexual desires to explode in pure violence (Mellor, 1989). As Mellor (1989, 56) points out, “the repression of sexual desire, in the male as well as the female, generates monstrous fantasies”.

#### **4. Gothic Monstrosity, or, The Queer Otherness**

That which is considered Gothic is always related to fear – reality is replaced by fantasy, supernatural or monstrous posed over the common, in order to induce the emotional reaction of fear (Moers, 1985). And one thing that can be said about the queer otherness is that it inspires fear. Once the monster is transformed into a race he becomes part of nature (Moretti, 1997). Then he can become the ‘Other’ unto which hatred and fear is projected in order to create a sense of security and superiority for the heterosexual patriarchal social order. That which is ‘Other’ threatens, not by innate difference, but by a perceived one, the one created by the ‘Self’ to justify the alienation of that deemed ‘Other’.

*Frankenstein’s* monster is the in-between of man and woman, the ‘Other’ containing both the male aggression and the female displacement – it is where the two genders come together (Zigarovich, 2018). The etymology of the term ‘monster’ originally denoted mythical and extraordinary creatures, a marvellous prodigy – only later on did it start to stand for things which were frightening, disfigured and unnatural (Zigarovich, 2018).

Trans people have been identifying with *Frankenstein’s* monster for a long time, finding a certain beauty in its failure to conform to the norms of human society and the rage with which it finds itself struggling to cope with its condition. For Potential, the term monster opens up new ways in which to comprehend trans bodies - he claims that “monstrosity-as-gender”

equates to “hopeful and beautiful” (Zigarovich, 2018). He claims that this view of the monstrous allowed him “a tangible example and concept of how I could explain my Transness outside of the medical model” which was at the time called Gender Identity Disorder (Zigarovich, 2018).

In order to resist humanity’s dehumanization of him, Frankenstein’s creature opposes it by learning language, along with his own and the world’s history, thus being able to pose himself as subject, instead of simply the object and ‘Other’ (Zigarovich, 2018).

We would be remiss to discuss the queer understanding of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* without the mention of Susan Stryker and her essay ‘*My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix, Performing Transgender Rage*’ which has had profound and lasting impact on the feminist gothic theory, as well as for the queer and transgender community as a whole.

Stryker (1994) compares the creation of Frankenstein’s creature with her own recreation through gender affirming surgery:

“The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.”

Moretti (1997) holds that the new made being is a monstrous one even before its birth because that is the condition under which it is created. Stryker (1994) mentions different ways in which she identifies with the monster – being seen as less than human, being excluded from society simply for the crime of being different – recognizing the same rage in herself, that the monster felt in the novel. Frankenstein said “Begone, vile insect, or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust. You reproach me with your creation” (Shelley, 2021, 81). Like Frankenstein’s rejection and hateful opinion of his creation, so too is the society’s opinion and behaviour towards transgendered individuals.

In her introduction, Mary Shelley presented Frankenstein’s fear, the same fear that can be found in those who look at queer people and transgendered individuals as beings revolting against God:

“Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world, His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror- stricken. He would hope that,

left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter: and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life.” (Shelley, 2021, 6-7)

Looking at Frankenstein and his monster as each other’s doubles - the monster acting as the ‘Other’ to the scientist’s ‘Self’- reminds us of the way in which cisgender society poses transgendered individuals as their ‘Other’; alienating them and pushing them to the fringes of social existence (Stryker, 1994). This kind of marginalization and alienation has often been the cause of destruction of transgender people’s lives. A transgender woman, Filisa Vistima, wrote in her diary “I wish I was anatomically ‘normal’ so I could go swimming... But no, I’m a mutant, Frankenstein’s monster”, merely two months before committing suicide (Stryker, 1994, 239).

Similarly, in the novel, the creature, upon realizing his own deformity, exclaims:

“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.” (Shelley, 2021, 93)

In order to take power away from the narrow-minded society she has to reside in, Stryker chooses to reclaim the term ‘monster’. She writes “I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual and therefore I am a monster” (Stryker, 1994, 240). Stryker (1994), argues that a creature “is nothing other than a created being, a made thing.”

The queer, the ‘Other’ is always a negation of the cisgender heterosexual norm – straight is natural, queer is not; between straight people exists love, between queer an aberration; heterosexuality is proper, queerness is an illness. Those in power deem the ‘Other’ as their binary opposition in order to keep them subjugated, in order to feel in control and not have to face the otherness presented in queer people.

There is a direct parallel between the creature and queer people in the way the monster craves to be treated humanely, wishing to be given the same opportunity to be seen as an individual worthy of love and of social acceptance despite being seen as ‘Other’. He approaches society with nothing but good intentions, and is rewarded for it with violence and abuse. The creature

explains that he “admired virtue and good feelings, and loved the gentle manners and amiable qualities of [his] cottagers; but was shut out from intercourse with them... Miserable, unhappy wretch!” (Shelley, 2021, 99).

He is rejected and forced to live outside of society, deemed too deformed to stand amongst it. He wishes to be seen as an equal, not to become their superior, but is denied the luxury because of his appearance. Even when his attempts are thwarted, he asks then to be allowed to live outside of the ‘normal’ society with someone who is like him, of the same species, so that he is not alone. He begs Frankenstein to make him a companion: “I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects.” (Shelley, 2021, 118).

That is similar to queer people building their own communities after being shunned and rejected by the hetero-patriarchal society. And yet, even that is impossible, for the monster and the queer ‘Other’ - both are met with further violence. Not allowed to exist within society but prevented from creating their own spaces outside of it. Frankenstein refuses to comply with the creature’s request to create him a companion, even though he vowed to stay away from human kind – his creator violently destroys the female monster, shattering his last hope of a happy life (Moretti, 1997). In a similar manner, historically, queer spaces such as gay bars, have been attacked and violated by violence from the heterosexual patriarchal overlords. The ‘Other’ cannot exist at all, lest those in positions of power and privilege be threatened by them, even if the threat is only in their minds.

A monster might be that which refuses to be defined by gender (Stryker, 1994). As Stryker (1994, 241) claims, the idea of a monster with their own free will and a life of their own is the “principal source of horror for *Frankenstein*”. In the same way that Frankenstein is unable to control his monster, define the creature’s mind and actions, so too do the transgender people transcend the control and boundaries set for them by the hetero-patriarchal social order (Stryker, 1994).

It is those in power who create the same ‘Other’ they fear (Moretti, 1997). Frankenstein creates his own monster, while the society creates the monstrous ‘Other’ by being the cause for their othering. In the case of the queer ‘Other’, the fear is unjustified, yet still deeply permeates the heterosexual society.

In the same way as the creature finds out his origins, so does Stryker (1994) come to understand hers through medical journals on gender reaffirming surgery; just as the creature is seen as disordered so is she by the definition of transsexualism as an emotional disorder; just as the creature tried to communicate his needs and thoughts but nothing coherent could come out, so were her words dismissed as rantings of a madwoman. “Like that creature, I assert my worth as a monster in spite of the conditions my monstrosity requires me to face, and redefine a life worth living.” (Stryker, 1994, 250-251)

There is another way in which *Frankenstein* can be read, and that is as a story about the implicit silence and repression of queer people, especially queer men and their relationships. The most potent and intimate relationships in the novel are those between men. For example, Frankenstein and Clerval’s friendship can be seen as a romantic love story between two men.

In this passage, the love Frankenstein feels for his childhood friend can be seen:

“Nothing could equal my delight on seeing Clerval...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, 2021, 48)

He never shows that type of love for Elizabeth, his intended bride – seeing her as more of a sister than a lover. He spends more time with Henry, in intimate domesticity, than any other. In fact, when Frankenstein gets ill, Henry is the one who spends months nursing him back to health, putting his own studies and life aside to tend to Frankenstein. We can see the love and gratefulness in Frankenstein’s words:

“He knew that I could not have a more kind and attentive nurse than himself, and, firm in the hope he felt of my recovery...” (Shelley, 2021, 50)

In eighteenth-century England, it was illegal to practice homosexuality – seen as unnatural and perverse and thus punishable by law, as well as being ostracised from society or even killed. This understanding of historical context can explain Frankenstein’s reaction to his creature through the idea of ‘homosexual panic’ (Franklin, 2023). Frankenstein explains:

“Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. ...it was in vain; I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams.” (Shelley, 2021, 47)

The revulsion, the scorn, the horror with which he regards his creature can be compared to the feelings a gay man might have felt when faced with his own sexuality and the feelings deemed unnatural by the society in which he existed. With the wish to avoid being 'Othered', he rejects anything related to those 'impure' feelings, by rejecting his creature. The monster here is a metaphor for homosexuality and the self hatred and repression created by the hostile environment Frankenstein resided in.

The creature approaches Victor after his nightmare, in which after kissing Elizabeth, she turned into a corpse:

"I thought I saw Elizabeth... Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms...I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed – when... I beheld the wretch -the miserable monster whom I had created." (Shelley, 2021, 47)

This can be seen as his subconscious rejecting the idea of a heterosexual marriage, while the personification of his queerness is literally waking him up from the dream. The fact that Frankenstein's monster is never given a name can also be seen as a metaphor for queerness - homosexuality is "the love that dare not speak its name" (Franklin, 2023).

Another queer understanding of the novel stems from Mary Shelley's own possible bisexuality. Though sex between women was not illegal, it was still necessary for queer women to hide their feelings from the public, having to choose between being ostracized or repressing their true desires (Franklin, 2023). In a letter to Edward John Trelawny, in 1835, Mary wrote "I was so ready to give myself away—and being afraid of men, I was apt to get tousy-mousy for women" (towsy-mowsy was a slang for the female sex organ) (Franklin, 2023). Mary was also a vocal supporter of the queer community. In her 1884 book "*Rambles in Germany and Italy*", she spoke against condemnation of artists for their showcasing of homosexual love (Franklin, 2023)

## **5. Postcolonial Otherness**

The concept of 'Otherness' has been created for the purpose of alienating, dehumanizing, having power over that which stands in direct opposition with the 'Self'; in order to define the 'Self' one must pose the 'Other' through which it can be considered as an authentic subject.

Thus, it can be argued that the concept of 'Otherness' has been used in terms of racial and colonial dynamics which stand in opposition to the Western world orthodoxies. The imperialist West has posed the colonized nations and non-white people as their 'Other' in order to subjugate them to their power, by painting them as possessing inferior knowledge and capabilities to justify their othering (Burney, 2012). This established a hierarchical relationship between the power, the colonizers, and the inferiors, the colonized. The imperial control of knowledge, of their depiction of 'Other' as savage, mysterious, inferior and infantilized, enabled the colonizers to paint a picture of non-whites as needing their help to be civilized and brought prosperity (Burney, 2012).

Orientalism is presented as an institution for dealing with the Orient; describing it, colonizing it, making up stories about it, educating it, having authority over it (Burney, 2012). Edward Said claimed that Westerners project onto the 'Other' those qualities, or faults, which they wish to deny in themselves – like cruelty and sexuality (Jakulovska and Denkovska, 2023). Europeans depicted everything that was 'Other' than them as one monolithic mass which needed to be owned and led (Jakulovska and Denkovska, 2023).

According to Michel Foucault, knowledge is power, and the West has used knowledge as a mean to keep the East under their control – by building myths about the Orient and justifying their violent oppression with ideals of educating and improving an inferior species (Jakulovska and Denkovska, 2023).

In anthropological terms, the West had deemed the non-Western people and cultures as the 'fossil Other' – seeing progress and civilisation as only a Western concept, the Occident treated those people as 'living fossils'; since progress starts with colonization, in touch with the West, anything that came before that is less than human, less worthy (Sarukkai, 1997, 1406). This paradigm saw the Orient as children in comparison to the Western adult, epitomizing the infantilizing ideology of the advanced West over the savage 'Other' (Sarukkai, 1997). Thus, the West went a step further from 'fossil other' by presenting the 'savage Other' as to portray Africans, and the 'black Other' to justify racism in its own territories (Sarukkai, 1997). Said claimed that the reason for such a widespread misunderstanding of the East lies in the racist Orientalist language in the works which make up the English literary canon (Burney, 2012).

In the same vein as the Imperialist and Colonized dynamic works, so does the one between Frankenstein and his creation – all that he refuses to accept about himself, he assigns to his creature (Stryker, 1994). Frankenstein’s monster, not unlike the non-white ‘Other’, only wants to be treated as an equal citizen, given the opportunity to belong to the community around him which he is being unfairly excluded from for looking different than the majority (Moretti, 1997). The monster wishes only to have equal rights:

“I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king...Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.” (Shelley, 2021, 82)

Frankenstein, contrary to what he claims in the novel, purposefully wishes to give birth to a creature of another race, not a human being – it is not ‘man’ he creates it is an entirely other species (Moretti, 1997). A species he is the sole creator of, picking his features singlehandedly, and yet immediately scorns and abhors it for looking different than him. This shows the scientist’s hypocrisy to the utmost degree. We can clearly see the parallel between the monstrous race of the creature and people of colour, in the racist way the authority treats them. As Frankenstein claims:

“Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the demon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror.” (Shelley, 2021, 136)

Just as Frankenstein rejects his creature and any chance of it being treated equally, so does the white patriarchal order of the West reject the notion of equality between them and non-white people (Moretti, 1997). The monster is always posed as the negation of the man, the same way Orient is posed as a negation of the Occident. The man is well proportioned, the monster is not; man is beautiful and monster is not; man is good and the monster is evil – the same rhetoric can be seen in the way the West describes the subjugated East (Moretti, 1997).

The idea of the creature having descendants is so horrifying that Frankenstein refuses to do the one thing his creature has asked of him, that is to make him a mate – even at the cost of the



lives of everyone he holds dear, even at the cost of his own life (Moretti, 1997). The creature begged Frankenstein:

“I swear to you by the earth which I inhabit, and by you that made me, that, with the companion you bestow, I will quit the neighbourhood of man, and dwell, as it may chance, in the most savage of places. My evil passions will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy! My life will flow quietly away and, in my dying moments, I shall not curse my maker.” (Shelley, 2021, 120)

However, his father responded in an overwhelming negative: “Shall I, in cool blood, set loose upon the earth a demon, whose delight is in death and wretchedness?” (Shelley, 2021, 137).

## **6. *Frankenstein* and the scientific Other**

Mary Shelley created the first science-fiction novel, using the knowledge of the science of her time in order to criticise it. In the preface to the novel, it is stated that “the event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed by Dr Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence” (Shelley, 2021, 9). Mary Shelley had spent time hearing and reading about scientific advancements of her age. In her introduction to the novel, she wrote:

“Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley... They, talked of the experiments of Dr Darwin... who preserved piece of vermicelli in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion... Perhaps a corpse would be reanimated - galvanism had given token of such things - perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together and endued with vital warmth.” (Shelley, 2021, 6)

Victor Frankenstein uses the scientific methods of his time in order to try and create a living being out of dead material by unnatural means – leaving Mary Shelley’s novel one of the best depictions of scientific hubris and the inherent ‘Othering’ of nature, prevalent in the scientific history as well as present. Frankenstein’s creature is modern monster, one which showcases the dangers and hubris of modern science (Hammond, 2004).

Francis Bacon proclaimed “I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave”, thus equating the modern scientific

endeavours with sexual violence against the female ‘Other’ (Mellor, 1987). Mary Shelley was one of the first authors to portray the perilous consequences of using sexist metaphors in scientific development, understanding that the male need to possess and enslave nature is equal to his need to possess and enslave the female ‘Other’ (Mellor, 1987).

With the understanding of the scientific evolution of her time, she managed to imbue her work with the contrast between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ science – the former being that which examines and describes the natural ways, and the latter being the egoistic scientific wish to manipulate nature to his own ends (Mellor, 1987). In the novel, Shelley writes of the nineteenth-century scientists:

“They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places...They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows.” (Shelley, 2021, 39)

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley presents to the readers, an egoistic, self-centred scientist, who tries to subdue nature to his own will and goes against the natural laws in order to fulfil his selfish goals of being the creator of life (Mellor, 1987). Shelley depicted the evils of Frankenstein’s scientific indulgence by portraying the decay of his mental and bodily health throughout the creation and subsequent attempts of destruction of his creature:

“I felt my flesh tingle with excess of sensitiveness, and my pulse beat rapidly... This was the commencement of a nervous fever, which confined me for several months.” (Shelley, 2021, 50)

His scientific endeavours not only harm his psyche and body, bringing him pain and anguish, they also leave him to abhor science as a discipline all together. Mellor (1987) claims that Victor was written in direct opposition to Darwin's teachings, presenting a figure of an anti-evolutionist scientist.

Darwin and many other scientists had sexist views of the natural world, and viewed the female sex as subservient to the male, responsible for things like genetic deformities, but never the positive attributes – ascribing those to the male model (Mellor, 1987). He believed that the male state of mind and male ideas, being superior to that of the female, were responsible for the formation of the child’s organs and sex (Mellor, 1987). Mary Shelley used this concept brilliantly in her portrayal of Frankenstein’s sickened mental capacities during the process of his creation which resulted in the birth of a monster:

“But my enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety, and I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favourite employment. Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime...” (Shelley, 2021, 46)

It is worth noting that Frankenstein endeavoured to create life without the natural sexual reproduction, leaving the woman out of the birth process altogether and posing an incredibly unnatural mode of “paternal propagation” (Mellor, 1987). Not only that, but he has consciously made his creation of abnormal proportions, ensuring that the creature could never adapt in society – his lack of empathy and hubris is quite evident in this act.

As Mellor (1987) eloquently puts “nature has become the passive female whose sole function is to satisfy male desires.” This construction of nature as female ‘Other’ has been the reason for the vast destructions of the planet we now see around us, disrupting the balance between man and nature in the most perverse and violent ways (Mellor, 1987).

The prevalent patriarchal fear of female sexuality and the powers of reproduction result in the use of laws and technology to enforce control over women (Mellor, 1987). This is mimicked in Frankenstein’s erasure of women in the act of creation and in his repression of female sexuality, as seen in his relationship to Elizabeth:

“We called each other familiarly by the name of cousin....We were brought up together...the saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home.” (Shelley, 2021, 29-30)

Frankenstein’s creature rejects his power over him - “Remember that I have power; . . . I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you” (Shelley, 2021, 137). In the same way, nature repays man for the atrocities he commits against her. As the monster promises: “Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict” (Shelley, 2021, 138).

In the novel, Shelley does not present the scientific method of the being’s creation as the biggest problem, it is the scientist’s rejection and abandonment of the created being which turns him into the monster. Monster is not just created by science, it is made through social isolation and violence against it. The creature explains:

“I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity

man more than he pities me?...Shall I respect man, when he condemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness; and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery I will revenge my injuries; if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear...” (Shelley, 2021, 119)

Frankenstein, as well as the modern scientist’s hubris, is that which is most criticised in the novel. In his scientific enterprise, Frankenstein focuses on what he can accomplish and never once wonders if this project should be done. He wishes to expand his own scientific prestige without considering the ethical problems of his endeavour. Frankenstein never asks himself if he even understands the nature of what a human is, he just presumes he knows it and can therefore recreate it (Johnson, 2014). Johnson (2014) states “the creature only has to open his eyes, the object only has to become subject for Frankenstein not to recognize him anymore and for him literally to lose consciousness”, explicating how feeble his epistemological superiority and scientific ability is.

Through modern scientific developments and technological advancements, Frankenstein has been used as cautionary tale for decades - whether it is regarding IVF conception, GMO food or scientific intervention in genetic coding (Johnson, 2014). This myth is clearly seen in the US Supreme Court’s ruling that the scientific creation of living beings can be patented since the problem is “not between living and inanimate things, but between products of nature—whether living or not—and human-made inventions” (Johnson, 2014, 7). The creation of life being seen as simply a product of human invention clearly mimics Frankenstein’s belief that the creature is his product and not a living being with his own consciousness and freedom.

Mary Shelley presents us with a clear picture of the importance of social relations for determining the consequences of scientific methods and technological inventions (Hammond, 2004). The conditions in which the creature is brought to life are more important than the mere method of its conception. The monster’s hatred and viciousness is not an innate trait, it is a learned one, based on the way society and his father treated him.

Frankenstein can be read as a scientist picking out genes and choosing character traits, as seen in ventures such as genetic engineering and human cloning, showing us the clear dangers of messing with the nature of living things (Hammond, 2004).

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* divulges the danger of the anti-social egoism of the scientist. Victor embarks on his journey of creation in order to gain fame and be admired as a creator of

life – it is a selfish and narcissistic endeavour (Hammond, 2004). He works in isolation, hidden from his peers and professors, avoiding judgement while also avoiding any possibility of scientific debate and review of his methods and means. There is no chance of, what is today called, peer review - he eliminates any chance of another scientist helping him or stopping him from his determined creation. In the same vein, Mary Shelley criticises Romanticism for its “focus on the freedom of the individual, presumably over and above collective social needs and rights”(Hammond, 2004, 188).

*Frankenstein* can be seen as a criticism of the well-intentioned scientist, naive to his own faults – he is neither objective nor reasonable, he is not working with humility to help advance humanity – he is working to become a God in his own right, with no regard for the ethics of his experiment (Hammond, 2004). In the novel, Victor Frankenstein declares: “what were rain and storm to me?” (Shelley, 2021, 79) This can be read as a cautionary tale for the egoistic capitalistic development of science which only benefits a handful of people and harms everyone else.

## **Conclusion**

Mary Shelley's novel and its critical perception, explained the concept of otherness and its usage in feminism, queer theory, racial issues and scientific exploration. We have witnessed many ways in which *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is connected to the concept of otherness. The 'Other' is embodied in the character of Frankenstein's creature. He presents the ultimate 'Other' which stems from the hetero-patriarchal Western 'Self's' need to define and maintain its privileged status in opposition to those they deem different. Through Frankenstein's creation of his monster, and subsequent abandonment of it, followed by his journey to destroy that which he abhors, we can realize an apt metaphor for those in positions of power subjugating their 'Other' in the same ways. The destruction can be located in racial matters, as the slave-master dynamic, the colonizers versus the colonized; in the feminist understanding of otherness, where the absolute 'Other' is woman and man wishes to possess and control her; in the queer critical viewpoint, within the rejection of the 'unnatural' queer 'Other'; in scientific endeavours which destroy the feminized 'Other' posed in nature, leading to disastrous consequences made manifest in the world today.

Mary Shelley's own life plays into the context of the novel and its possible readings. Barbara Johnson and Ellen Moers were some of the first critics which undertook the process of researching her work, especially *Frankenstein*, from the feminist perspective. The ways in which Shelley's own history with motherhood impacted the story, the subtle ways in which she imbued her book with her own anxieties and shame, was brought to light. We have seen the misogyny she was subjected to, herself being the 'Other' to the patriarchal society she existed in. It is specifically for these reasons, her own marginalization and repression, that she succeeded in presenting us with such a potent and elaborate story portraying the ultimate otherness. For how could someone who has never been othered, describe the process so perfectly?

The one thing that all of the mentioned 'Other's' in this paper have in common, is their repression combined with their need to step outside of it, to be liberated, to create their own 'Selves' and reject the othering they have been subjected to. Whether it is Frankenstein's creature, or Stryker's journey through transitioning, or even Mary Shelley choosing to publish a novel she knew she would be judged for – all of them have different struggles but converge in the rejection of the heterosexual patriarchal world order. *Frankenstein* can be perceived as a cautionary tale for the scientific community, for the hubris displayed in 'playing God', but more than anything it is a tale of recognizing one's repression and refusing to be silent and compliant with it.

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