

The Myth of the Monster in Mary's Shelley's Murder Mystery, *Frankenstein*

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Martin Heidegger once said that “We think of Being ... as object only when we think it different from Existence and think Existence as different from Being. ... As a result, difference is reduced to a distinction, to a product of human intelligence” (271). This concept is wonderfully illustrated in the film *A Beautiful Mind*. It is only near the end of the movie that viewers come to the realization that not all which they just witnessed is as it seemed. They find out that John Nash's friend Charles, with whom they became familiar, is not real. Even though moviegoers got to see Nash and Charles interact, Charles is actually only a figment of Nash's paranoid schizophrenia. *A Beautiful Mind* goes to great lengths so readers understand the difference between the real and the imagined, but it is not always so clear-cut in real life. The mentally ill often appear just as everyone else. We may not be privy to the reality of their world, but that does not make it less real to them. Victor Frankenstein may not be as obviously crazy as John Nash, but there is ample evidence to suggest that the so-called monster of Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, may actually be very much like Charles and exist only in the mind of Frankenstein. If we pay attention to the gaps in logic, inconsistencies in Frankenstein's tale, and unreliable narrators, then we see Shelley's novel in a different light.

In the conventional reading of Shelley's novel¹, the story is fairly straightforward, even if it may be somewhat lacking in logic. Frankenstein figures out the key to life and decides to create a large example of his genius: an eight-foot-tall nameless creature made up of a hodgepodge of human body parts that Frankenstein abandons almost from the moment the creature draws his first breath. Somehow, some way, the creature survives his infancy. Alone and

rejected by human society, the creature figures out a way to exist. He quickly gains intelligence and experiences. Once he understands that his miserable situation can be blamed on his creator, he seeks out Frankenstein in an effort to garner sympathy and atonement. He convinces Frankenstein to create a mate for him, but Frankenstein reneges on the promise, and the creature exacts his revenge by killing those dear to the maker. It is just too easy and too convenient to read the novel this way, but if we choose to take advantage of what deconstructive theorist Barbara Johnson calls “the gaps, margins, figures, echoes, digressions, discontinuities, contradictions, and ambiguities,” the novel can be deconstructed to reveal what may have been previously invisible to us (346).

Most critics would probably agree that Frankenstein and the creature cannot be separated from one another. To talk about one means to talk about the other. Muriel Spark goes a step further, saying, “There are two central figures—or rather two in one, for Frankenstein and his significantly unnamed Monster are bound together by the nature of their relationship” (134). Despite the connectivity of the characters, they are in many ways antithetical. One irresponsibly takes life into his own hands and abandons it; the other takes life into his hands and extinguishes it. One creates; the other destroys. One wants love; the other denies it. One gets sympathy; the other is handed hate. One is accepted by human society, the other rejected. One is allowed to be human; the other is called “monster.” One seeks to be a god, the other a human. One has a voice; the other does not. Broken down, these characteristics form clear binary oppositions to each other: creator and created, love and hate, community and alienation, and right and wrong. These stark contrasts highlight their interdependence for the sake of the novel as a whole.

Creator and created are not really opposites, though. They are, as Spark suggests, one and

the same. The illusion of the creature wavers when Frankenstein relates his journeys in England, Scotland, and Ireland. At the midpoint of his travels, Frankenstein leaves his travel companion and childhood friend Henry Clerval in Perth, Scotland (Shelley 112). Frankenstein then goes a couple hundred miles away off the northern coast to a remote island with few inhabitants so he can work on making a female friend for the nameless creature (112). According to the narration, when he creates the first creature, Frankenstein makes use of “vaults and charnel houses” for body parts (30). Unless he is able to transport every single body part he needs—doubtful—it is not likely that he will be able to find everything to create the female creature on this isolated island, “the remotest of the Orkneys” (112). Even so, Frankenstein says, “I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands” (113).

After long toil at his bloody task, Frankenstein backs out of the agreement and destroys/mutilates the as-yet-to-live female being, causing enormous anguish to the living creature, who happens by to witness this action (115). The upset creature leaves, and Frankenstein boards a boat to get rid of the human slaughter that would have been the female creation. Frankenstein floats to an Irish island at least a couple hundred miles away only to find his friend, Clerval, murdered there ahead of him (122). Somehow, the upset being is believed to have gone a couple hundred miles to Perth, fetched and killed Clerval and transported him back to where Frankenstein had been floating to frame him for murder. This feat might not be accomplished even today with the advantages of modern technology.

Although Frankenstein is later acquitted—perhaps because of his wealthy, well-connected family—witnesses place a single man in a boat similar to his near the shore where Clerval’s body is found (122). Had the witnesses actually seen Frankenstein’s creation instead of Frankenstein,

they probably would have remarked at the gigantic nature of the person in the boat. When Frankenstein is shown his dead friend by Irish authorities, he remarks, "Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life?" (122). An innocent comment? Is it just ravings, or does a moment of lucidity get through to Frankenstein when he says, "I called myself the murderer of William, of Justine, and of Clerval" (122)?

Another interesting comment that throws into doubt the existence of this being is when Frankenstein says, "Clerval, my friend and dearest companion, had fallen a victim to me and the monster of my creation" (127). The monster of his creation can be seen as a metaphor for his delusions rather than an actual creature. Of course, like Nash, "the monster of my creation" may just be the reality Frankenstein perceives. When thinking about the people close to him that he may have killed, Frankenstein says, "What agonizing fondness did I feel for them! how did I cling to their dear forms, as sometimes they haunted even my waking hours, and persuade myself that they still lived!" (142). As with many mentally ill, Frankenstein may believe a monster killed his family members and friends, but he may also suspect that he did the deeds himself. He says to his father, who is worried about his mental state, "I am not mad. ... I am the assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations" (129).

In most situations, Frankenstein appears as a goodly Dr. Jekyll, but often enough, "[T]he monster of my creation" seizes control of his mental faculties and turns him into a murderous Mr. Hyde. Frankenstein seems to be trying to come to grips with the Mr. Hyde side of his personality and what it has caused him to do. He is on a journey for mental salvation, but he understands the chances of finding it are slim. Frankenstein remarks, "I lived; their murderer also lived, and to destroy him I must drag out my weary existence" (Shelley 140). The delusional Frankenstein

thinks he must catch the creature to save people, but—as he may suspect—he can never catch up with something that exists only in his mind.

The ambiguity in Shelley's novel makes a single, definitive reading impossible. It is not clear from the text whether a creature exists who stalks his creator, killing all of the people close to him, or whether Frankenstein is actually a deranged killer with an alter ego who goes on a killing spree. Either reading is just as plausible. Current understanding about mental illnesses certainly lends a helping hand to the second theory. Frankenstein may very well have believed the creature existed, a delusion that can easily be explained by paranoid schizophrenia. Paul Sherwin notes that "We must dream our dreams of the Creature not only as a signifier in search of its proper signification but as a literal being that means only itself. The literal Creature ... is as much a figuration as the figurative Creature" (41). Regardless whether the creature is simply a figment of Frankenstein's imagination or a delusion, the being still has value to him because it is something that he imagines to be real.

If this creature really does exist, why would this victim of a monstrous, stalking serial killer, who makes a threat to be with him on his wedding night, agree to marry his cousin-sister-lover Elizabeth (116, 131)? The creature, if it is to be believed to be a creature, has already set up a pattern of killing those close to Frankenstein to make him suffer, but now Frankenstein is supposedly afraid the creature will kill him and not his future wife on their wedding night. He says that he "resolved ... that if my immediate union with my cousin would conduce either to her's or my father's happiness, my adversary's designs against my life should not retard it a single hour" (131). Why would the creature want to put Frankenstein out of his misery? It is questionable why Frankenstein would go forward with this wedding if he suspects the creature

will kill again, and it is also questionable why he would take his new bride across the lake to another city and stay at an inn if he is worried about a stalker threatening his life (134). He is supposedly so smart that he can create life, but he is not smart enough to fortify a room to protect himself and his new bride on their wedding night. The man who is so smart that he can ignite the life in the creature should also be smart enough to figure out how to extinguish that very life. The fact that he is not is a red flag that not everything is as it appears in the novel.

Frankenstein sounds schizophrenic when he says “rage choked my utterance. I was answered through the stillness of night by a loud and fiendish laugh. It rung on my ears long and heavily, and I felt as if all hell surrounded me with mockery and laughter” (141). He claims that he “should have been possessed by phrenzy” (141). The mentally ill do not always understand the depths of their illness, even if they may suspect something is awry. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *phrenzy* is marked by “mental derangement; delirium, or temporary insanity.” The dictionary also defines schizophrenia as a “withdrawal from social activity and the occurrence of delusions and hallucinations.” Frankenstein is clearly suffering from delirium and hallucinations, and he withdraws from society during several episodes in the novel.

Psychologist Louis Sass notes that “It is surely significant that the schizophrenic world is so frequently permeated by a feeling or belief of being watched” (21). Throughout the novel, Frankenstein feels as if he is being followed and/or watched by his creature. For instance, on his solitary journey back to his hometown of Geneva from his university town in Ingolstadt, Germany, Frankenstein pauses to mourn for his deceased younger brother, exclaiming, “William, dear angel! this is thy funeral, this thy dirge!” (48). Just as he says this, Frankenstein perceives “in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me (48). He is certain it is

“the filthy daemon to whom I had given life” (48). What is curious is that the creature always presents himself discretely to Frankenstein, and Frankenstein is afraid to talk to anyone about his supposed creation. If this scary creature had really been a threat to his family, wouldn’t telling them have helped to make them safer?

If the creature, who is sometimes referred to as “monster,” is thought of as a metaphor for Frankenstein’s delusions, then all of the killings that take place make much more sense. No longer do readers have to believe that a patchwork of assembled human body parts is a threat. Rather, it’s Frankenstein, whose stories do not hold up well upon scrutiny. He is the actual killer preying on his own family and friends. Frankenstein claims to have rushed back to his hometown after he heard about his murdered brother (44), but can it be that Frankenstein had long before left Germany? After all, before he proceeds with supposedly creating the creature, Frankenstein notes that “my residence there [the university] being no longer conducive to my improvements, I thought of returning to my friends and my native town” (29).

When Frankenstein says he had neared Geneva, he goes immediately to the area in the mountains where William had been killed (47-48). No one guides Frankenstein to the site of the murder; he simply knows exactly where his brother had been slain. Frankenstein has supposedly been away from the family for nearly six years, and he can show up and sniff out a murder scene. This is the kind of knowledge that a killer himself would know. Being at the location where William had been killed probably triggers Frankenstein’s paranoid schizophrenia and causes the appearance of the creature to himself (48). “Alas!” says Frankenstein, “I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery” (48-49). Perhaps, Frankenstein is subconsciously hinting that the birth of his (mental) creature is when he became a killer.

Readers are supposed to believe Frankenstein's creature murders William, but logically, the case is quite weak. If Frankenstein really does bring the creature to life, how can it be capable of what it has been accused of doing, considering it has a human brain, only two years of experiences and has been an outcast from human society since his beginning? Yet, Frankenstein insists this creature has enough intelligence and foresight to find Frankenstein's hometown of Geneva from its birthplace in Germany and then locate and kill Frankenstein's six-year-old brother. Most readers probably could not imagine the far more experienced William doing what the creature has been accused of doing, so why is it so plausible, or believable, that the nameless creature can do it? The creature is really just a toddler with an adult body. That, in itself, should be frightening enough.

There are many more inconsistencies with Frankenstein's story that cast doubt on the truthfulness of his supposed narration to outside narrator, Robert Walton. Frankenstein tells Walton of a letter from his cousin, Elizabeth, in which she purportedly poses this innocent enough question: "Do you not remember Justine Moritz? Probably you do not" (39-40). Just a few lines down, though, Frankenstein states through Walton that Elizabeth says, "Justine was a great favourite of your's; and I recollect you once remarked, that if you were in an ill humour, one glance from Justine could dissipate it" (40). If this Justine is "a great favourite" of Frankenstein, why would he have trouble remembering her? Which part of her letter is to be believed, if any of it?

Frankenstein makes no attempt to speak on behalf of Justine, who is condemned to die for the death of William (54), but Frankenstein says he "believed in her innocence" and "loved and esteemed" her "as my sister" (54, 55). Frankenstein does not speak on her behalf because it could

reveal his own guilty conscience to everyone and cause others to suspect him in this murderous affair. But Frankenstein pretends to be innocent himself, automatically putting off blame on someone else, in this case the creature: “Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child. *He* was the murderer! I could not doubt it. The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact” (48). Note that he cites “irresistible proof,” not irrefutable. It is just too tempting for him to believe in this idea, this fancy, rather than in reality.

From the very beginning of his alleged existence, something does not quite add up about the story of the creature. For instance, it is hard to imagine that the creature has complete recollection of his birth, especially when he is using his senses for the first time. The creature, recounting the moment he came to life, says, “A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses” (68). While the creature may make a reasonable description of how a person recently born starts to take in the world, most do not have vivid memories of that time of their lives. Professors of psychology Mark Howe and Mary Courage write that there is no scientific evidence proving the ability of people to remember their birth (3). They note that “Although much remains to be discovered and a complete theory of early memory remains to be articulated, it is reasonably safe to say that memory for personally experienced events (as conceived in almost any definition) begins well after our entrance into this world, not before” (5).

When the creature finds out he is stealing food from a needy family, he says he “abstained, and satisfied myself with berries, nuts, and roots, which I gathered from a neighbouring wood” (74). If these foods are so abundant that a young, inexperienced creature made of miscellaneous

human body parts can subsist on them, then why would these wanting people not be eating them, as well? Frankenstein reports that he had created the creature in November (34). The creature says that it is winter when he is stealing food from this family (74). Since he has not yet experienced his first spring, he is just a few months old at the most. How can this gigantic infant have more knowledge about gathering food than much more experienced humans?

In similar circumstances, the creature, who feels bad for burdening the family, collects his own “fuel for the cottage,” and he clears their “path from the snow” (76). If the creature who lives in a small shed attached to the cottage really does these things, he would have long ago attracted the attention of the cottagers. How can he make a fire without leaving some trace of it for people to sense? If he does not make his fire, how can he stay warm enough in his shed in the middle of a Northern European winter? Also, how can he clear their pathway of snow without making the most awful racket? Can all of this be plausible, or are all of these descriptions simply embellishments of the novel’s narrators?

Just as remarkable, the creature finds and reads copies of *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch’s Lives*, and *Sorrows of Werter*, which is probably *The Sorrows of Young Werter* (85-86). Somehow, readers are supposed to believe the creature is able to comprehend these books. He is still only months old and has supposedly learned his language skills by watching the destitute family through a slit in a wall (74-75, 79). The creature is supposedly made with a human mind, but he exceeds all other humans in cognitive ability by leaps and bounds. *Paradise Lost* is not a book that elementary, middle school, or even high school students are likely to be able to grasp. Even if the creature has the ability to read (hard to believe) then this novice reader likely would need, at the minimum, a dictionary to help him grasp difficult words.

The selection of the books, however, is interesting. If he is able to utilize them, the books can provide the creature with a decent education on Western human society. *Paradise Lost* gives a version of the Christian creation story, *Plutarch's Lives* offers biographical accounts of famous Greeks and Romans, and *The Sorrows of Young Werter* is a bildungsroman. The creature says Goethe's coming-of-age novel sheds light "upon what had hitherto been to me obscure subjects, that I found in it a never-ending source of speculation and astonishment" (86). If the creature is somehow able to absorb the information from these books via osmosis (since it is illogical for him to gain it by reading) he has the chance to gain insights that would otherwise have been provided by parents and society. Since osmosis or other forms of absorption are not known ways for humans to understand written material, his being able to make use of these books is highly unlikely.

It has already been established that the family the creature is living next to is stricken with poverty (74). The creature says they can not spare a morsel of food, but fortunately for the family, their situation dramatically changes after they take in another person, Safie (85). She has traveled to the family's cottage in Germany from Italy with "some jewels that belonged to her, and a small sum of money" (85). After a hard journey in which she has to pay for transportation and lodging and losing her only servant, she makes it to the family and her love interest, Felix (85). Somehow, it is supposed to be believed that the formerly destitute family is "contented and happy" and are "assisted in their labours by servants" but are still not wealthy (88). It's a significant change to the family's fortunes to now be able to employ servants. Yet, it is hard to believe that Safie can change their financial wellbeing for long with what she brings, especially with the additional mouths to feed and people to care for.

After the family rejects him and flees, the young creature places “a variety of combustibles around the cottage” and then sets it on fire (93, 94). Certainly, the creature should not be able to accomplish this. This action episode is not merely about intelligence, but it is also about real world experiences, which the creature obviously lacks. He also rescues a girl from a raging river and tries “to restore animation” (95). He probably has to swim to save the girl (that is not clear from the text) and use life-saving techniques on her. The eight-foot-tall creature is about the most talented infant/toddler to have ever existed, if he indeed is an actual physical manifestation. Most likely, he is simply a tall tale told by one of the narrators.

While the novel does have three narrators, not one is reliable. The identity of the outside narrator, whom the entire novel goes through, is not a certainty. It may be Robert Walton, whose name is signed to the letters that frame the novel. It is just as likely that the narrator is not Walton. Any well-educated person could have written those letters and signed them Robert Walton. That possibility illustrates the unstable nature of this story. The person holding the most pivotal position is the so-called Walton, who claims to be relating the story of another narrator, Frankenstein, who in turn claims he is reciting another narration by the creature.

The confusing mix of narrators distorts any attempt to follow a single reality in Shelley’s novel. Fred Botting in *Making Monstrous* notes, “The visibility of frames, the framing of frames ... discloses not a naturalness of reading as the perception of what is there but a form of reading as recognition that finds what it wants to see as it reconstructs the text” (18). Readers can see that the story can be whatever Walton wants it to be. All of the information about Frankenstein and the creature goes through him. As Beth Newman notes, “By juxtaposing three tendentious narratives,” Shelley’s novel “seems to encourage a point-of-view approach. It presents

confessional first-person narrators whose stories sound the note of self-justification so loudly that they immediately invite suspicion” (146).

From the beginning of his narration, Walton casts doubt on whether he should be trusted. He says in a letter addressed to his sister, Margaret, who should already know details about his past, that he “became a poet, and for one year lived in a Paradise of my own creation” (Shelley 8). Just two pages later, Walton writes that he is now “twenty-eight, and am in reality more illiterate than many school-boys of fifteen” (10). Shelley’s use of the word *illiterate* opens up meaning in the text. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as people who are “ignorant of letters or literature,” “without book-learning or education,” “unable to read,” or “ignorance or lack of learning or subtlety (in any sphere of activity).” So, either Walton cannot read as well as a fifteen-year-old, or he is more ignorant about poetry than a fifteen-year-old. Either way, why would a man “more illiterate than many school-boys of fifteen” try his hand as a poet or last at it for a year? Also, how could a person with either weaker reading skills or greater poetic ignorance than a fifteen-year-old pull off the narration of Shelley’s elaborate tale? Even if Walton does meet a Frankenstein who tells a tale of creation and destruction, would this Frankenstein (or any human for that matter) tell a story that would make himself look so bad? As an unreliable narrator, Walton opens up the gates of meaning for readers. Since readers do not feel obligated to stay grounded in what is presented in the text, they are left grasping for what meaning they can glean from it. Greta Olson notes that “Attributing unreliability to the narrator, the reader recognizes the text’s implicit joke and sees the narrator is not what she proposes to be. Cases of unreliable narrators invite readers to depart from a literal reading” (105). The outrageous quality of Walton’s story suggests that he is setting up someone for this joke. Since

his primary audience is supposedly his sister Margaret, she is the most likely candidate.

Walton insists what Frankenstein says to him, or what he claims Frankenstein says, is truthful: “I own to you that the letters of Felix and Safie, which he showed me, and the apparition of the monster, seen from our ship brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected” (Shelley 146). How likely is it that the creature extracts letters of Felix and Safie from the family he lived next to and then gives them to Frankenstein? Not very. Perhaps Walton wants to give his tale the feeling of truthfulness to make it more horrific to his sister. He writes to his sister about the prospect of his returning from his daring voyage to the far icy reaches of the arctic: “Years will pass, and you will have visitings of despair, and yet be tortured by hope” (148).

Walton describes two personal experiences with the creature. The first alleged occurrence may or may not have actually been with this creature. Walton describes a sledge on the ice far from his ship (13). At an estimated half a mile, he says he and the crew see “a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature ... in the sledge, and guided the dogs” (13). If Walton is to be believed at his word, there is still room to doubt whether this is Frankenstein’s creature. From such a distance, it is doubtful whether a firm identification can be made. A combination of the ice and the distance most certainly could play tricks with these individuals’ eyes. The second time the creature supposedly makes himself seen to Walton happens after Frankenstein dies on his ship. Somehow the creature knows Walton is on the ship, and somehow the creature is able to find it on an “ice-raft” of all things (156). Walton finds him mourning the loss of his creator (153). The creature laments, “Oh, Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me?” (153). Why should the creature feel this way when he

has been rejected by his creator from the very beginning of his existence? Why should he be sad? After all, the creature supposedly picks off Frankenstein's closest friends and family one by one just to torture him into insanity. Now, it is supposed to be believed that this so-called "monster" would have a tinge of remorse?

The reliability of outside narrator Walton is again called into question when taking into consideration the condition of the ship, which is sailing in the frigid arctic. Walton finds time to get away from his chore of just surviving this harsh climate and keeping his boat afloat and his crew alive to write up a book-length version of Frankenstein's story. In a weak attempt somehow to lend some believability to his story, Walton says Frankenstein proves his account for accuracy (146). Walton says the arduous journey has its effect on everyone: "... [E]ach day's expectation delayed fills them with fear, and I almost dread a mutiny caused by this despair" (148). Walton also notes that "The cold is excessive, and many of my unfortunate comrades have already found a grave amidst this scene of desolation" (149). The situation on the ship gets so bad that people are dying from the cold and possibly from hunger. If this is the case, would Walton have the leisure and comfort to listen to Frankenstein's tale and then record it in a book?

In fact, the mutinous crew is so desperate to get out of the arctic that they demand Walton, the captain, turn the ship around if it is able to break free from the ice (149). When the ship finally is free, Walton says the crew joyously shouts "because they will soon return to England" (150-151). In Letter I and Letter II, Walton says he hires a ship and finds sailors with whale fishing experience in Archangel, which in the northeastern portion of Russia (9). Why would these Russian sailors—or at the very least, Archangel residents—be glad to return to England? Wouldn't they prefer their home of Archangel? Walton cannot maintain consistency in his story,

which is the mark of a narrator who should not be believed.

Walton asks readers of his tale to make too many exceptions for the believability of this creature. One of the primary exceptions readers are expected to make is the most ludicrous element of the story. Frankenstein's nameless creature is composed of used human body parts, yet Walton wants his audience to believe that this creature is superior to humans in physical strength and speed and in mental and emotional intelligence. When a human child is growing, he or she needs to learn his or her strengths and weaknesses and what is and is not proper behavior. Humans are not born considerate. Manners and behaviors are learned in a community. Frankenstein's creature is left to fend for himself without the benefit of a community, and somehow readers are expected to believe this creature should have known better than he did. Walton claims truth, as would the narrator of a good ghost or fish story, but the holes in his narration should initiate suspicion. Shelley probably never expects readers to take Frankenstein and the creature too seriously. After all, in her introduction to the 1831 version of the novel, she says she intended to write a ghost story as part of a challenge with Lord Byron, husband Percy, and others (170). Walton, it should be assumed then, serves as Shelley's prop to get across her ghost story.

The novel begins with Frankenstein's chasing of the creature across the arctic ice and ends with Frankenstein's death (13, 152). Walton finds Frankenstein about as far north as his ship will take him, yet supposedly Frankenstein is chasing this creature across the ice in a sled pulled by dogs. How can he get to that location on a sled? Earlier, when Frankenstein runs across an arctic town, he hears that the creature before him had depleted the residents of their winter store of food, but then Frankenstein says before he departs that he purchases "a plentiful stock of provisions" (144). Why would this town give up food that it does not have or was at least in short

supply of? As Frankenstein is chasing this creature across the ice in order to kill it, Frankenstein notes that the creature is “armed with a gun and many pistols” (143). If he is as invincible as Frankenstein would have us believe and if he cannot prevent his unarmed version from murdering his friends, then why would the creature suddenly switch to packing and using arms? And how does he know how to use them?

Frankenstein’s presence on the ice can be construed as metaphoric of his search for himself, especially the darker side of himself, which he believes is a creature—a delusion that has previously been noted possibly to arise from paranoid schizophrenia. Frankenstein is in a fantastic place on a sled, chasing his creation, who is also on a sled in a location that should only be accessible by the most sturdy of ships. These actions seem only plausible as a figment of someone’s imagination or a delusion. Louis Sass notes, “The schizophrenic often seems to be caught in an insoluble dilemma—driven to search for the self yet liable to destroy the self in the act of searching” (23). Frankenstein has to die before he can catch up to his personal ghost because he cannot conceivably catch one who does not exist.

If Shelley intended her novel to be read in a simple, straightforward fashion, then her portrayal of the creature would have come across better if she had the creature talk like a child and perhaps unintentionally cause damage to things. After all, in a more realistic writing, this eight-foot-tall hunk of muscle could not possibly understand his strength or proper rules of how to behave. Shelley could have had the creature mature over a much longer period, and then the creature she presented would have developed more soundly. If humans learn and grow emotionally at a certain rate, would it not then be reasonable to expect a creature made of human body parts to learn and grow emotionally at a similar rate? If Shelley had let her creature develop over a longer

period—say sixteen years rather than two—then he would have been much more plausible as a stand-alone character. If a human mind typically takes many years to develop intellectually and emotionally, why should readers expect anything differently from this creature? Even if he were to develop unusually fast, it would still take many more years than Shelley allots before the creature were an expert on Goethe and Milton.

From the narrow, literal reading of this novel, it is to be believed that the creature lashes out and kills Frankenstein's family and friends because he lacks a support system, a society, friendships, and love. Since Frankenstein has all of these things, it is then questionable why he would not intuitively know that the creature needs these things, as well. Frankenstein does get to experience how lonely the creature must feel after he spends time in an Irish jail cell when the "darkness pressed around me; no one was near me who soothed me with the gentle voice of love; no dear hand supported me" (123). Keeping a belief in the literal creature takes more work than just seeing him as what he really is: a figment of Frankenstein's mind. The beauty about a novel as open-ended as this one is that when what may be its intended meaning breaks down, new meanings form. Perhaps, Shelley never envisioned Frankenstein and the creature being one and the same, but the text, once written, is no longer hers. It's for the reader to interpret. Fred Botting remarks in *Gothic* that

Monstrosity has left the novel open, its frames broken: All boundaries are left in question, divided between the positions of Frankenstein and the monster. The creator dies, the monster disappears in darkness and distance, while Walton, having agreed to return home, still gazes towards the Pole. (105)

It's up to readers to decide if the creature has been Frankenstein's secret tormenter or just a

figment of his mentally deranged mind, but one thing is certain: Once Frankenstein dies, the creature disappears after him.

Note

1. In this paper, all references to *Frankenstein*, the 1818 text, come from the 2005 Norton Critical Edition edited by J. Paul Hunter.

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