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Frankenstein—From Humanity to Monstrosity

With rain splattering against the window pane and nothing but the dim moonlight casting shadows about the room, the distressed scientist finally laid his final tool down and dreadfully witnessed his creation slowly awaken. Here it was in this very room where Victor Frankenstein created his Monster and, more importantly, created the Other. Written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein* was originally published in 1818 following the French Revolution and in the midst of the Enlightenment. As a Gothic novel, *Frankenstein* challenges the problematic “hegemonic notions of identity” (Lamb 307) institutionalized by the privileged class by “suggesting that we can escape the artificial enclosure of self by expanding our idea of what the self means” (Lamb 319). As the daughter of the two major Enlightenment philosophers Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), and William Godwin, famously acknowledged for his work *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Shelley crafted the story as an allegorical response to certain philosophical and political values that concerned progress within society and equality among humans. Enlightenment philosophers entertained “the notion that scientific and economic progress will continually improve the condition of humankind, the idea that once the barriers to knowledge are pushed aside, the conditions for perpetual peace and a universal harmony will have been established” (Comitini 185). They instated the belief that advancements in science, technology, as well as expansionism comprised the key elements for the evolution of society. However, the quest for social

development fails to acknowledge the “double-edged nature of knowledge—as threat and promise,” (Rauch 228) and Shelley embodies the threat of the scientific pursuit through Victor’s creation of the Monster who later transforms into the destroyer of Victor’s life. With only the “promise” of science in mind with disregard to possible ruinous consequences, the prioritization of societal progress accordingly engenders a less moral and an unequal world—an imbalanced, systemized world weighed in favor of the privileged unaffected by the threats posed by progress.

The hegemonic constructs of alterity define the constitution of humanity and reject self-determined sense of self by individuals. Perpetrators of empire forge the notion of otherness in order to validate and justify their own assumed positions as the superior and impose the identity of an inferior and unworthy being upon others for the arbitrary maintenance of a social hierarchy. The Monster represents the struggle of marginalized individuals within empire to reject the hegemonic established definition of humanity, one that he is incapable of belonging to, and the strive toward a more universal understanding of the definition of humanness in order to gain equality. On the other hand, Frankenstein, as well as the rest of society, creates the societal boundaries of otherness by upholding the practice of establishing boundaries among groups of people and imposing an identity upon others based on their categorized traits. Allegorically revealed through Victor and his Monster, the destruction of humanity through the construction of alterity dictates progress within empire rather than the cultivation of mankind, which underscores the fault within the contemporary solutions of social progress. Even in the struggle for the reformation of society through the betterment of humankind, society compromises humanity at the expense of the attainment of power as modeled by the aftermath of the French Revolution. At the core of the novel lies the warning against idealism and radical attempts for societal progress because of their lack of understanding the fault that lies within the establishment and perpetration

of an arbitrary boundary between society and others and how those limitations relate to the ruin of humanity as well as the ruin of empire.

The creation of the Creature reflects the fruit of radical Enlightenment progress, but his grotesque visage mirrors the misshapen outcomes of revolutionary progress that prioritize rational development alongside scientific discovery and further implement the ideology of creating alterity. The concept of radical reformation and idealism closely associated itself with Shelley's personal sphere of interactions as her father William Godwin famously championed "commitment to austere justice, passionate denunciation of economic inequality and idealist faith in the withering away of unjust institutions through rational enlightenment" (Smith 84). In the strive to obtain his ideal utopian society, Godwin's reimagined world included a reimagined, perfected human race unthreatened by oppression from an upper class or mortality, and Victor's creation of the Creature mirrors Godwin's solution to progress. However, Victor's creation of specifically a *monster* depicts the hideous consequences of an initially beautiful design. Any living being on its own constitutes a creature, but the interference of society—Victor included—undermines the Creature's humanistic existence. Victor's literal construction of a man represents the manner in which society figuratively constructs the constitution of humanness within empire—underscoring the apocryphal nature of established societal bounds because of its man-made origins.

The performance of constructing such arbitrary limitations within society initiates the creation of an inner monster within members of civilization, moral corruption. The capacity for moral decay presents itself after Victor successfully manages to bestow life upon an inanimate object: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so

completely as I should deserve theirs” (Shelley 32). The underlying nature of Victor’s thoughts connotes a blooming obsession with power and entitlement, paralleling the similar perspective of corrupted institutions and the privileged upper class—a major spark that generated the French Revolution. He essentially crowns himself as a god-figure who would create a superb race of beings that would prove to refine society through their own perfection, to which the world would owe its gratitude towards him; however, Victor begets a personification of the ultimate Other who later strives to overthrow Victor, the symbol of corrupted individuals within society. In an analogous struggle, “utopian reformers breed monsters who threaten to destroy them,” (Sterrenburg 147) and Shelley’s choice to characterize Victor’s creation as a monster underscores a warning against fanatically driven progress capable of producing unforeseen dire outcomes in addition to the consequences of creating alterity.

Proven by the French Revolution that struggled to overthrow the corrupted system of monarchy and establish a government supportive of democracy and justice, radical reformers possess the same capacity for evil as those whom they overthrew, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the consequences of utopian-inspired revolution. The seed of power implants itself within the minds of former advocates for justice and manifests into an abominable infatuation with authority and power that overrides the desire for justice and humanity, as such was the fate of the French Revolution. The Revolution that successfully overthrew the corrupt royal family also successfully birthed inhumane monsters that incited the population with immense terror and turned the streets of France into rivers that flowed with the blood of its citizens. Comparably, Victor’s fate turns to disaster; due to the hideousness of Victor’s ego and ambition, the result of his exhaustive toils produces an equally repulsive creation—a reflection of his own inner

inhumanity. The Creature confronts that same inhumanity in his encounters with society: the first example being the rejection of his being by his own creator.

Proposed by the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, infatuation with the societal conventions of pride and reputation that deter from the fulfillment of one's basic needs—food, shelter, and compassion—engenders moral corruption; Victor's failure to provide for his own basic needs and failure to fulfill his responsibility of providing for the Creature induces Victor's moral fall. Immediately following the Creature's awakening, Victor hastily flees the room and abandons his creation, leaving the Creature orphaned, alone, lost, and left to fend for himself; Victor's rejection of his monster symbolizes the denial of his own inner demons—his fixation with reputation and authority. Alan Rauch describes Frankenstein as “aloof and out of touch with those around him” and “cannot help but use his science to create something that is as repugnant to society as society is to him” (236). Becoming the first scientist to uncover the mystery of breaking the boundaries between life and death withheld immense potential for the immortalization of his name in history, and Victor's fixation on building his reputation shrouds his ability to rationalize and understand the repercussions of his actions. Frankenstein not only denies his enslavement to vanity, but he also denies his performance of constructing otherness by creating the ultimate Other, which in itself is a form of monstrosity. Only after the Creature awakened did Victor realize the reality of bestowing life to a corpse; his failure to take responsibility for his actions contrasting with the former dream of taking credit as the master of a newborn race of superhumans leaves the naïve Creature to aimlessly wander the world, a forceful ejection into a world of inevitable cruel treatment from mankind. Furthermore, in addition to his betrayal of the Creature, Victor abandons his “moral commitment to the application of knowledge in the service of humanity”

(Rauch 240) by exploiting science meant to be utilized for the sake of societal evolution to serve his own selfish purposes. Victor's moral fall as the Creator—as the God—foreshadows the Creature's—his Adam's—own fall from grace and transformation to Satan, a monster.

The Creature allegorically represents the crafting of individuals' identities stigmatized by empire and the manner in which conformity to hegemonic institutions confirmedly dictates progress within empire. The description of the Creature's "yellow skin," "lustrous black" hair, "teeth of pearly whiteness," eyes "the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set," and his "straight black lips" (Shelley 34) invokes not only the horrific image of a monster, but the image of a man of a non-European background. The establishment of a different race within the Creature precedes his inevitable placement within the lowest classes of society and ostracization from those within the upper class. Solely based on his outwardly appearance, villagers the Creature encounters treat him with terror and violence, associating his countenance with a pre-established idea of his indisputable vicious nature. Despite the Creature's definite human nature, society rejects him based on his outwardly appearance because it fails to conform to the standards of humanness.

While the story functions as an allegory for the consequences of Enlightenment progress, the story also allegorically reflects the struggles of marginalized individuals such as women and minorities within Shelley's contemporary society. As Colene Bentley argues, "Shelley uses her monster-as-outcast to interrogate the basis and boundaries of established social groups" (327) and, additionally, forges an argument for equality among all human beings. As fervently opposed by her mother, Shelley's contemporary society viewed women as part of the marginalized group of people within society despite their capacity for rationality. Mirroring the Creature's experiences with the extension of a gendered perspective, Wollstonecraft argued that the

“physical differences between men and women have been wrongly expanded into the central structuring principle for society,” (Bugg 656) criticizing the construction of alterity from the very basis of differences in biology. Women, as a result of their placement within the lower classes of society, lacked the same rights as men and opportunities for education, and society perceived the binary between male and female as a binary between rational beings and irrational beings. In *Frankenstein*, the female creature even lacks the basic right to life when Victor decides to break his promise to the Monster and destroys his second creation. Despite the claims of utopian reformers who advocated human rights, women and other minority groups received none of the benefits bestowed upon the more privileged class of men. Expanding past Wollstonecraft’s gender dynamics into a more general notion of deprecated beings, the Creature lacks the same rights to equality as women did in Shelley’s time; however, his ability to learn and rationalize underscores Shelley’s criticism of the stigmas surrounding women and other marginalized groups. The Creature’s utilization of language in order to formulate an argument echoing that of Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant in which “freedom must belong to all rational beings” (Reese 54) attempts to justify his existence as a human equal.

Rationalization and eloquence comprise key elements of society’s constitution of humanity. The ability to utilize language acts as the main boundary separating the Creature from the De Laceys—the main boundary between those considered part of society and those outside of society—however, the Creature’s eloquence that fails to validate his human existence reveals the arbitrariness and abstract nature of society’s definition of human. Empire values the ability to communicate verbally as part of the definition of humanness, but the Creature’s “use of language has failed to gain him entry into the 'chain of existence and events,' but has rather made him fully aware of his unique and accursed origin” (Brooks 211). However, empire constructs the

Creature's "unique and accursed origin," limiting him to the identity of a monster—an "other"—to which the Creature forcefully conforms to in order to possess an identity to call his own. Only until the Creature is able to "become master of their language" does he believe himself capable of overcoming his pre-established sense of self and conforming to their definition of human in order to gain the same acceptance, love, and companionship exhibited towards other human beings. He views language as the only compensator for his hideous visage—the necessary component in the validation of humanness.

Foreshadowed by Victor's disastrous experience with scientific endeavors, the Creature's acceptance of language as a "godlike science" (Shelley 75) suggests his own undoing caused by the effects of rational enlightenment, underscoring Shelley's critique of contemporary science as a form of societal progress rather than humanistic progress. He accepts rationality and eloquence as the sole solutions to his alienation and the standards of humanness to which he must conform in order to receive approval and companionship. The Creature accepts his hegemonically imposed identity as an inferior outsider when he acknowledges the De Lacey's as "superior beings, who would be the arbiters of my future destiny" (Shelley 77) and prematurely kills his inner human by failing to deny society's idea of what constitutes humanness. The Creature allows for the De Lacey's, members of empire, to dictate his identity but is sadly mistaken in his belief that they possess the will to change the deeply-rooted values of othering set in place by society. His failure to resist empire's control over his identity enables the rejection of his self-determined humanity by others within higher social ranks, and, appropriately, rejection awaits the Creature.

The Creature's acquirement of knowledge through reading the works of Goethe, Plutarch, and especially Milton develops his recognition and acceptance of his established identity through

his relationship regarding others he reads about. He “sympathized with and partly understood them” (Shelley 86); however, he acknowledges the innate differences lay in his lack of association with others similar to his being. For even “Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him” but the Creature born as the sole member of his own race became “solitary and detested” (Shelley 88). Although he perceived language as the key to justifying his existence as part of mankind, the “increase of knowledge only” reveals to the Creature even further “what a wretched outcast” (Shelley 88) he is, an unsuitable example of what the users of language defined as human. Attempting to overcome the boundaries that alienated him, he seeks the reciprocation of his compassion towards the De Lacey family by communicating solely with the blind De Lacey father, the candidate most capable of accepting the Creature as an equal human being. Despite his naïve assumption of the De Lacey’s exception to the cruelty of mankind, the old father’s advice highlights the hypocrisy in the ideology of those within higher ranks of society: “...the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity” (Shelley 90). The father’s emphasis of individual self-interest underscores the insincerity within perpetrators of empire and reveals the inherent flaw in the justification for othering. However, his efforts remain unrequited as he faces anger and violence when the son Felix confronts the Creature speaking to his father, and the Creature is denied his right to companionship and equality by members of society.

The Creature fails to utilize language against empire as a form of resistance to his predetermined existence as a monster because of the very nature of language within empire as an indisputable truth. John B. Lamb defines language as a “limiting and limited taxonomy, a pre-established cultural hierarchy that defines all the possible definitions of self...” (312). Conforming to Enlightenment values, the Monster’s acquirement of knowledge exhibits an ideal

form of progress; he becomes a rational being capable of eloquence and the usage of logic. In addition to his intellectual capabilities, the Creature exhibits his emotional capacity through his aid to the cottagers and desire for love. However, the Creature's initiation into the system of empire confines him to a sense of self constructed by society based purely on his countenance. The Creature believes and affirms society's position on his existence as a monster when he perceives his grotesque visage in a pool of water: "...I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am" (Shelley 76). While empire constructed and perpetrated the identity of a monster upon the Creature, the Creature's complicity prescribes the underlying goal of progress within society—the preservation of the hegemonic power hierarchy “through the destruction of alternative systems of meaning and value” (Lamb 316). The humanistic downfall of the Creature into the Monster exhibits a critique of the Enlightenment definition of progress as one that sacrifices humanity for the price of rationality, idealistic evolution, and power. As a monster, the Monster embodies the hegemonic construction of his identity as one of the “deviations from the normal essence of a species” (Maienschein 215). He recognizes his exclusion from society based upon his outwardly appearance but extends the argument made against his being in order to justify his manifestation as a monster both outwardly and inwardly. His surrender to monstrosity additionally functions as a display of perseverance as the Monster “engendered a cultural system of signs by which those who attempt to achieve autonomous selfhood inevitably come to name themselves 'Lucifer,' and to believe that identity has been freely chosen" (Lamb 306) though the extent to which the Monster truly becomes autonomous remains subjective.

The Monster's failure to counter society's position on humanness destroys his humanity by the denial of his own human nature. Rather than arguing for a more universal constitution of

humanity based on his own exhibition of benevolence, compassion, and longing for companionship, he submits to a hegemonically constructed standard of the consideration as a human being. Influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle, the “form of the matter and also the process of its development” (221) defined the characteristics necessary for a human being within society; therefore, by strictly following that criteria, Maienschein argues that the Monster is not human and “only when the matter and process are achieved together in the proper way can an individual's humanity be achieved” (221). While the Monster lacks the proper development of a human being from a child to an adult, he exhibits his capacity for rationality and emotional development during his stay with the De Lacey's. He sympathizes with their troubles and anonymously aids them with their chores during the early hours of the day; his simple love for the family encourages his language learning progress so that he may become part of their domestic sphere. Maienschein fails to consider the Monster's own form of humanity masked by his non-human appearance. The Monster's ability to feel love and pain alongside his desire for love and acceptance justify his human existence. Only after the Monster submits to his inner demons and exacts revenge against his creator can the Monster be denied the classification as being of humanity because he himself fails to believe in his own existence as equal to humans'.

The Monster's fall from grace—from humanity to monstrosity—represents the lost fight against society by marginalized individuals who struggle to maintain their own identity in the midst of alterity. Victor's physical death outwardly exhibits the inner destruction of humanity caused by his own lustful exploitation of progress in order to obtain power. Victor's egotistical ambitions destroyed his world with the direct and indirect murders of William, Justine, Henry Clerval, Elizabeth, his father, as well as Victor himself; the destruction of Victor's sphere mirrors the possible destruction of society based on the contemporary enticement with progress.

Shelley's issued warning against societal progress aims to overcome the limiting boundaries that define humanity. The hegemonic understanding of humanity aligns with the exploitation of the strict definition of humanity as a form of alterity and disguise for power obtainment, which only benefits those within the privileged class of society. Such deceptive ideologies concerning a nonmaterialistic concept exploited to justify the establishment of social classes and hierarchies underscores the inherent inhumane nature of empire—a leech sucking dry others' human identities for the validation of its own actions and preservation of its own power.

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Annotated Bibliography

Shelley, Mary, and James Paul Hunter. *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text, Contexts, Nineteenth-century Responses, Modern Criticism*. New York: Norton, 1996. Print.

The original version of *Frankenstein* written by Mary Shelley published in 1818 tells the fictional tale of an aspiring scientist named Victor Frankenstein who creates an unnamed monster. The novel is set as a frame story in which Victor tells his story to a British sea explorer named Walton who is attempting to discover the Northwest passage through the North Pole. Once Victor's creation is completed, he along with the rest of society shun the monster, which leads the once benevolent monster to become vengeful. Their loss of humanity signifies Shelley's critique against Enlightenment values and revolutionary idealism in her time following the French Revolution and Enlightenment. In the novel, humanity is the grand price at stake in the process of empire building and societal progress as portrayed through Walton, Victor, and the monster, which calls to question whether individual humanity and empire possess the capacity to coexist.

Lamb, John B. "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Milton's Monstrous Myth." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1992, pp. 303–319. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2933709.

John B. Lamb is a Professor of English at West Virginia University and an editor of *Victorian Poetry* who specializes in Victorian literature and culture. The article emphasizes the presence and importance of Milton's *Paradise Lost* within *Frankenstein* as well as the implications of Victor's and the Monster's connections to God, Adam, and Satan. The problem of the Monster's identity and struggle to find his sense of self is called into question. The Monster's identity is not only shaped through the presence of *Paradise Lost* but also through the identification of

language as a tool of classification used against the Monster. The article draws heavily from Shelley's own perspective and influences throughout her lifetime in order to support the claims made throughout the article. This source heavily supported my claims about the Monster's identity and society's control over the identity of others.

Levine, George, ed. *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*. Berkeley: U of California, 1979. Print.

George Levine is a Professor Emeritus of English at Rutgers University and specializes in research concerning Victorian literature as well as the connection between literature and science. The novel is a collection of essays concerning various areas of interest within *Frankenstein* such as its historical, political, scientific, and philosophical context; the monster's symbolic importance; and modern adaptations of the novel. The book itself does not contain a particular bias because it is a collection of essays written by multiple scholars. This source was also cited in multiple scholarly articles concerning my research. The most helpful essay was "'Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts': Language, Nature, and Monstrosity" by Peter Brooks, which analyzed the monster's potential for humanistic understanding and related back to the theme of language shaping empire. Brooks explores how the monster's language shapes its identity and the world around it.

O'Rourke, James. "'Nothing More Unnatural': Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau." *ELH*, vol. 56, no. 3, 1989, pp. 543–569., www.jstor.org/stable/2873197.

James O'Rourke is associate professor of English at Florida State University who specializes in researching British Romanticism in the nineteenth-century. In this scholarly journal article, O'Rourke explores Enlightenment philosopher Rousseau's influence and presence in Mary Shelley's novel and how Rousseauian ideas impacted the monster's character. He sets aside the

obvious, more well-known connections to Rousseau present in *Frankenstein* and delves into specific plot and theme choices that may directly connect to and target Rousseau. O'Rourke provides excerpts from Mary Shelley's essays and journals that recorded her responses to the ideas present in Rousseau's famous First and Second Discourses. The source argues that Mary Shelley intentionally wrote parts and wired the themes of *Frankenstein* to suit her critique of Rousseau's personal life and philosophical ideas. This article furthered my research by identifying Rousseau's interpretation of what constituted humanity and Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley's responses to his ideas.

Rauch, Alan. "The Monstrous Body of Knowledge in Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein.'" *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1995, pp. 227–253., www.jstor.org/stable/25601114.

Alan Rauch is a professor of English at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. Much of his research, including this article, deals with the connection between science and literature. In this article, he explores how the pursuit of knowledge and the notion of scientific progress shapes and transforms the scientist Victor as well as the effects of Victor's ambitious and egotistical desires for knowledge. Rauch argues that the quest for knowledge overshadowed Victor's responsibility to his family in addition to his duty towards society as a scientist who should be researching for the benefit of others. The acquisition of science is not only applied to Victor but also to the monster who is able to use his knowledge for the benefit of others rather than for personal satisfaction. This article furthered my research by analyzing the effects of scientific knowledge upon Victor's humanity and how his loss of humanity affected those surrounding him.

Reese, Diana. "A Troubled Legacy: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Inheritance of Human Rights." *Representations*, vol. 96, no. 1, 2006, pp. 48–72., www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2006.96.1.48.

In this journal article, Reese explores Mary Shelley's monster's politicization and humanity through a philosophical lens. The monster's very existence is explored through the philosophical ideas of Rousseau and Kant. The ideas of both philosophers are exhibited by the analysis of their major works concerning the natural state of humanity. The monster's initial state is examined through the lens of both philosophers to answer the question of whether or not the monster can truly be considered human and, therefore, worthy of human rights and becoming part of the society that shuns him. As my research questions grapple with the concept of humanity and its role within empire and empire building, the analysis of the monster's significance as the "other" in the world of empire furthered my research into what the Enlightenment philosophers in Shelley's time constituted humanity as and how their ideas may have influenced the symbolism behind the monster.

Small, Christopher. *Ariel like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein*. London, Victor Collanz, 1972. Print.

Christopher Small was a scholar in musicology. *Ariel like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein* is a book that contains analytic research gathered by various scholars revolving around various literary aspects of *Frankenstein*. A brief biography of Mary Shelley's life, context about contemporary philosophical influences, explanation and in-depth interpretations of the major allegorical metaphors present within the novel, connection to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as well as exploration of the novel's scientific contexts are all contained within the source to assist scholarly analysis of *Frankenstein*. The book also expanded on the importance of other literary mentions within the novel and how the contexts of those works are relevant within the context of *Frankenstein*. This source provided me with relevant background information

concerning Mary Shelley as well as a new perspective in terms of interpreting and analyzing the novel by connecting *Frankenstein* to other works not commonly associated with the novel.

Smith, Andrew, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Andrew Smith is Reader in Nineteenth-Century English Literature at the University of Sheffield, and is considered an expert at Gothic literature. The source is a non-fiction guide geared towards benefitting scholars' analyses of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Historical, literary, and personal contexts that surrounded Mary Shelley's life, scholarly theories about the novel's context, and study of modern adaptations of the novel shape the source's plethora of information concerning *Frankenstein*. The source's exploration of Mary Shelley's perception of contemporary philosophy and scientific discovery following the French Revolution and Enlightenment revealed how Mary Shelley's responses to influences surrounding her were personified into the creation of the monster and its creator. The source connected both the monster's and Victor's significance in relation to empire by establishing their connections to Volney, Rousseau, Romanticism, and nineteenth century British imperialism.

Prospectus

The notion of progress within empire is often defined by modern advancements usually involving technology and science. However, in the process of empire building, the role of humanity comes into conflict with progress. Such is the case in the fictional novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley originally published in 1818. The main protagonist Victor Frankenstein epitomizes the humanistic consequences of striving for progress dictated by contemporary beliefs, inspired by the time period of the Enlightenment. In his egotistical strive to break the boundaries between life and death, the monstrous offspring of Victor's ambition acts as a reference to the initial state of man that becomes corrupted by society. The Monster's isolation and abuse from society drives both him and his creator to fall from the original innocence and sympathy of humankind. The disastrous aftermath of Victor's lustful attempt to create an ideal race with him taking credit as their creator reflects a critique of radical attempts to create perfect society, echoing the catastrophic outcomes of the French Revolution. At the core of the novel lies the question of the definition of humanity and how the Monster demonstrates the truth about humanity. The Monster embodies the notion of the "Other," and his function as such reveals the truth about progress within empire—rather than bettering society through the reformation of humanity, empire sacrifices humanity for the sake of progress.

The Monster's outwardly appearance mainly outlines the depiction of alterity within the novel. Upon the finalization of his project, Victor describes the monster as having "yellow skin," "lustrous black and flowing" hair, "teeth of a pearly whiteness," eyes "the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set," and "his shriveled complexion and straight black lips" (Shelley 58). The characterization of the Monster consequently evokes the image of a human or creature of a different race or species. Victor's rejection of the Monster sets the stage

for the Monster's imminent exclusion from society because of his appearance that deviates from European norms. Society's treatment of the monster reflects the imperial attitude towards conquered others in a time period when European imperialism soared; Europeans often viewed those on the non-European side of imperial binary as savage, irrational, and hostile. Shelley's depiction of the alienated monster as quite the opposite manifests a movement towards a more universal understanding toward whom is capable of humanity and being considered human.

The human category is not exclusive to the race of humans nor is the idea of human and humanity applicable to all members of human society. Jane Maienschein defines human as "being the human type, which requires both the form of the matter and also the process of its development" (221); however, this interpretation of humanity is limited only to the biological definition of human. Similar to Shakespeare's creature Caliban from *The Tempest*, the Monster defies the boundaries of the category of human by expressing his ability to sympathize, rationalize, and longing for acceptance. In a similar sense, those who belong to the biological category of humans and do not express the attributes that define humanity cannot be considered human. Victor, for example, foregoes his humanity when he not only rejects his creation but also when he destroys the Monster's female companion, breaking his promise and the Monster's last chance at acceptance. The Creature loses his humanity as well when he commits each of his murders out of revenge, demonstrating the capacity for any human to lose humanity through his or her actions. Within empire, progress and humanity conflict with progress ending victorious. Progress, often taking the form of revolution, produces more chaos than it does peace. The bloody French Revolution demonstrated society's attempt at overthrowing a tyrannical ruler and reforming the nation only for violence and chaos to ensue.

The critique of the radical reformation of society stems from Shelley's personal life. Shelley's parents Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin were two prominent radical philosophers during the Enlightenment, and scholars perceive *Frankenstein* as a critique of Godwin's desire to construct a perfect utopian society—and at its very core, progress. In Godwin's eyes, the key to the progress of a perfect society lay in “the utopian regeneration of humanity” (Sterrenburg 146) as a reformation of both human society and race. Shelley clearly criticized her father's radical beliefs through Victor's actions and his attempt to create a new race of human-like creatures. Aligning with Enlightenment beliefs, Victor considered his science crucial to the evolution of society; however, his overwhelming obsession with power and the ability to act as God in respect with an Adam ultimately leads to the loss of his humanity. Revolutions act in an analogous manner; those who claim to contain good intentions for the betterment of society inevitably submit to their inner selfish desires, which lead to the downfall of society.

In my analysis of *Frankenstein*, I extend Mary Shelley's arguments against societal notions of alterity as well as progress. Empires evolve through the destruction of humanity rather than the betterment of it despite advancements produced in the name of good. The warning at the core of Shelley's novel against the warning against idealism and radical attempts for societal progress because of their lack of understanding the fault that lies within the establishment and perpetration of an arbitrary boundary between society and others and how those limitations relate to the ruin of humanity as well as the ruin of empire.