

Degree Project

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The Nameless Monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

An Analysis of The Unnameable Monster's Monstrosity

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Introduction

“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 88)

As far as titles go, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is probably one of the most widely misunderstood. Without a doubt, part of it is due to the worldwide success of the novel's 1931 film adaptation by director James Whale. The movie poster depicts the now-iconic image of the monster, played by Boris Karloff, with bold letters above spelling “Frankenstein”. Due to its cult status as one of the most recognisable monsters in modern history many connect the word “Frankenstein” with the monster itself, while in reality, it refers to the creature's creator, Doctor Victor Frankenstein. There is a strong sense of irony prevalent here due to the ambiguity of the monstrosity within Mary Shelley's famous gothic novel. Many argue that the true monster is indeed Dr Frankenstein himself. He is not merely responsible for the creature's creation but also plays an essential role in the monster's descent into wretchedness by abandoning him at "birth". Thus, the title, while ambiguous, seems very much deliberate and well thought-through, since the confusion of identity is a central part of the discourse of the unnameable monster in the novel. Interestingly enough, the problem with naming also occurred with the initial release of the novel, but relating to the author's name, as the first edition of *Frankenstein* was released anonymously. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley's own name was filled with references to famous individuals of her time; her father William Godwin was a political philosopher, her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous feminist and philosopher, and her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, the famous Romantic poet. One can safely assume that the expectations on her first publication were exceedingly high and upon

its release in 1818 most people indeed thought that it was written by a man - her famous husband to be precise.

The title of the novel itself, *Frankenstein*, is a proper name, a family name. The "real" Frankenstein's monster remains throughout the novel void of a name, surname, or referential signifier of any kind. Without the reference of a family name, or an identity of any sorts, he is left in the sphere of the great unknown: "My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I?" (Shelley 99). The creature is not merely a prime example of tabula rasa; he is innately extremely intelligent and filled with sympathy for his fellow beings. It is only after his harsh experience with the outside world that he begins developing monstrous tendencies.

Names are primarily used as identity markers that signify human relationships and, according to the Greek Sophists, encapsulate the essence of an individual: "the essence of each individual mythical figure could be immediately gleaned from its name; a person's essence is encapsulated within the name itself" (Cassier 132). If this is the case, one could argue that a person does not exist without a given name. Myths and legends from cultures all over the globe are also full of folk tales of unnameable monstrosities. This further proves that throughout the history of mankind, the act of naming has played an essential role in constructing people's individual identities. Thus, for example, "Poroniec" is a demonic creature from Slavic pagan mythology. According to the myth their existence is brought forth when a still-born baby or an unwanted new-born is cast out without being given a proper name and burial. This creature, void of parental ties and affection, is driven by revenge and preys on expecting mothers. According to the tale, the only way to rid of its presence is for a family member to properly baptise the child with a name and bury it under the threshold of the family home. This supposedly transforms the demon into a protective house spirit. There are references to nearly identical creatures all over the globe. Mylings from Scandinavian

folklore haunt lonely roads demanding proper burial, while in Japanese folklore they're called Konaki-Jiji. There are quite a few similarities between these folk tales and the creature in the novel. In not giving his 'new-born' a proper name Victor rejects the creature's existence on the most basic level. Not only does he abandon him, but he leaves him completely unmarked, without family ties, simply an unnameable monster.

Proper names, as opposed to generalised periphrases, are powerful signifiers that signify not only the person's essence with all their attributes but they also signify the inclusion into the human race. Pavlov Štekauer claims that the crucial difference between common nouns and proper names is that in the latter there is no process of generalization; a person always belongs to the class (species) of human kind (29). Names are markers of humanity and we sympathise with human traits, which is why upon our initial reading it is much easier to follow Victor's discourse of his murderous monster. Throughout the novel Victor refers to his "ungodly" creation with a variety of demeaning nicknames, which are based on the fiend's inhuman external appearance: "I gazed at him 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 46). Based on these depictions, the reader follows the narrative of the novel's main narrator, Victor, who assigns the creature only the worst imaginable qualities. For the sake of this thesis, the focus will largely be on the signifier "monster" and its many connotative meanings. The signifier "monster" is especially powerful as it reflects, not only the world's perception of the creature, but his own reflections on himself: "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 88). The creature is left to the mercy of a species to which he holds no ties, and as a product of his bleak surroundings he has little choice but to fulfil the destiny of his monster label; becoming the mental image and the psychological reality which the signifier ultimately constructs.

Here it is important to emphasise the difference between the signifier monster and its polysemic adjective, monstrous; while we usually reserve "monstrous" to refer to the worst of human nature we can prescribe monster-like qualities to more or less anything or anyone (human). Beville comes to a similar conclusion regarding the "monster" signifier: "Significantly, it is a term that is applied most frequently to human behaviour, describing acts of brutal violence and terrorism [...] we use the word to explain things that we cannot understand, and for the most part this applies to behaviour when it is seen to have transgressed the limits of what we ourselves can imagine doing" (4). While the adjective monstrous signifies a very comprehensible human condition, the signifier monster, on the other hand, constructs an ultimate Other, the natural antagonist to everything human, good, and familiar. The Webster's definition of a monster confirms this, describing it simply as "any kind of threatening force" and "an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure; an animal of strange and terrifying shape; one unusually large for its kind; or a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty" (Oelman, 204). Attributing animal qualities to construct the Other is nothing new; during the era of Western colonialism explorers often perceived indigenous people as being closer to animals than humans, which, in turn justified their unethical treatment of these groups. The creature, however, is not perceived as less-than-human but is instead the projection of humanities' worst fears and anxieties; he represents everything that humanity is not. The creature starts off his existence as a benevolent being but as time goes by, and as a result of his othering, he transforms into a vicious fiend: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (Shelley 78).

A few papers have been written on the subject of Frankenstein's monster and the source of his monstrosity. Thomas Dutoit argues that the unnamed creature is a monster because of his inability to show his physical face. The monstrosity stems from the "unshowability" of the monster in direct connection to the vision of the monster's face. He compares the creature's face with that of other characters and finds that all human characters

have a describable face that reflects their qualities, good or bad: "through all other faces it is possible to see transparently the psychological inside, and while all other faces are the medium of interpersonal communication, the monster's face is opaque, a barrier to communication" (Dutoit 853). The monster, however, is ostracized from the human gaze and this unrepresentability is the source of the monstrous. Gordon Hirsch approaches this from a different angle and concludes that the monster becomes a monster due to being abandoned by his parent/creator and in turn deprived of all experiences of love and affection. He grows to hate his absent parent for donning him such a hideous physique and believes this outside ugliness is the cause for rejection by all humankind. According to Hirsch, "This monster is corrupted by his experience of the world, not by nature, and his experience consists of repeated rejection and persecution by the human beings he encounters" (133). While these are all valid and insightful points, very little has been written about an important factor that plays a crucial role in building the monstrous identity in the novel: the act of naming. The novel refers to the creature solely by common nouns, instead of a human name, which constructs the creature's identity and ultimately affects how the creature is perceived.

The most notable research in the field of naming the creature was conducted by Bernard Duyfhuizen. He focuses his research on the many periphrastic names the creature is referred to. Names like "demon", "creature", "wretch", "devil", "murderer", "destroyer" and most commonly "monster", play an essential role in constructing the creature's reality. According to Duyfhuizen these signifiers greatly affect the character's experience: "all of the signifiers that periphrastically name the Creature exist in language before his creation ... because he can claim no priority for any periphrastic signifier, the Creature is always already excluded from the "godlike science" of language that he conceives as a system of referential naming" (487). Thus, the creature cannot even claim these contemptible signifiers as his own, as they have been in use in the system of language before his existence, and ultimately refer to generalised entities with mainly negative attributes. One, however, could argue that it is the

lack of a proper name that excludes the creature not only from society but humanity as a whole. Duyfhuizen focuses his efforts on dissecting the meanings behind the creature's periphrastic names, most notably the signifier "wretch". He explores the evolution of the term which is initially used in the novel to describe Victor's uneasy state of mind. As the novel progresses, the same term becomes one of the main signifiers by which the creature is referred to, communicating his existence as a despicable entity. On the other hand, the signifier "monster" which has become the creature's official title in the literary world, has yet to be explored in further detail. Very little has been written about the meanings and realities that are produced by the monster sign, and, even more importantly, the absence of a proper name signifier. On that note, the most appropriate and relevant framework for the studies of signs is semiology. Ferdinand de Saussure, who is considered one of the founders of semiology, believed that the reality of our world is shaped and created by the language we use. Thus, all signs are arbitrary constructions which signify a mental representation of a thing, as opposed to pointing to an actual object that exists in reality (Chandler 62). Similarly, the creature's identity is constructed by a lack of a name sign. In place of his name stands the signifier "monster", which constructs a reality that forces his existence to the very margins of society.

This paper will adopt the perspective of Saussure's "science of signs", semiology. In his theory of the sign, Saussure divides language into two main components: the signified which is a mental image or an agreed-upon concept which the word refers to, and a signifier which accounts for the sound pattern or written format of the concept. Together, through a process of signification, they form a sign. The creature's official name "Frankenstein's monster" stems from a possessive noun, "Frankenstein's", and the signifier "monster" which fills the empty space where the creature's name should be. This thesis will attempt to establish a structural analysis of the main signifier, monster, used to signify the creature's existence and decipher its meanings and realities, focusing on the fundamental claim of semiology that the signified is not 'a thing' but a mental representation of the 'thing'

(Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* 12). The creature's experience with the outside world is heavily influenced by both his namelessness and his monster sign, and this paper will analyse the influence these have over the novel's main antagonist. Semiology studies how meanings are made within the boundaries of our language and how reality is represented through these meanings. The creature, due to his undefinability, evokes fear and disgust in his fellow creatures; his namelessness and monstrosity become his defining signs, which are invested with meaning by everyone he comes in contact with.

In particular, this thesis will argue that the creature is defined by his namelessness, which plays an important part in why he is rejected by both his family and humanity as a whole and is ultimately the reason why he becomes a monstrous *thing*. In place of his name stands the signifier "monster", which positions him as the ultimate Other against everything that is known as good and, more importantly, human. As an unnameable entity, he lacks proper self-reflection and begins to identify as a monster himself. This failure of categorization deems him as a complete "unknown". It is this unknown namelessness that is behind the creature's segregation, sparking in humanity the most primal fear of all: fear of the unknown.

The Importance of Name Signs

The study of semiology establishes a sign as the link between a concept, a signified, and a sound pattern, the signifier. According to Saussure "a sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses" (Chandler 15). His main claim is that both the signifier and the signified are purely psychological constructs. A sign is produced, through the process of signification, with the merging of the mental image of the "thing", the signified, and its material mediator, the signifier: "The signification can be conceived as a process; it is the act which binds the signifier and the signified, an act whose product is the sign" (Barthes *Elements of Semiology* 15). Proper names

are so-called “singular signs”, which means that their signification permits only one denotatum. Human beings are defined by these singular signs in the form of a proper name which classifies their unique identity (Sebeok 60).

In the novel names play a vital role in establishing bonds of family and familiarity. The first reference to naming is found at the start of the novel; in the preface Victor expresses kindness to Walton by referring to him as a friend: “My friend, if thus you will allow me to name you” (Shelley 25). From this context one can understand that “friend” is a marker of a familiar bond which is based on a pre-established relationship. The same goes for personal names; to refer to someone by name there must first exist a familiar bond between the speaker and the referent. Furthermore, proper names signify the essence of being human as they encompass our unique identities and ultimately define us as individuals. In his dissertation Štekauer writes: “Proper names are concentrated expressions of all features characterizing the existence of a given person(ality), both physical and mental features, his/hers achievements etc” (28). Every person has a name and any human name could directly refer to one of the thousands, even millions, of people in the world. For example, the name “David” could potentially refer to any of the millions of people with that name. Furthermore, the name itself means “beloved” in Hebrew and has its origin in the Old Testament which means its ancestry can be traced directly to King David. Names, with the addition of a surname which is inherited and remains fixed through generations, not only compose a unique entity but also transmit the inclusiveness into an ancestral lineage. The creature is aware and burdened by this condition: “I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none” (Shelley 99). Without a name, the creature's existence can be viewed as a sort of an empty signifier: a signifier without a referent that points to no definite object in the world. The creature is always anonymous; through his namelessness his humanity, although present, is fundamentally always rejected.

The creature's existence as the unnameable, the inhuman, and the unnatural positions him in the abiding position of markedness. The Russian semiotician, Roman Jakobson, introduced the concept of markedness: "Every single constituent of any linguistic system is built on an opposition of two logical contradictories: the presence of an attribute ("markedness") in contraposition to its absence ("unmarkedness")" (Battistella 16). The marked "unnameable" exists only in affiliation to its unmarked counterpart, the "nameable". The marked term which is formed with the morphological prefixes, un- or in-, subliminally assign the term a different value; a deviant from the standard unmarked term, the marked term is subject to negative connotations. By association the terms in question are never equal: "The unmarked term is defined by what it seeks to suppress" (Chandler 96). The creature's existence is defined by the very absence of the non-deviant standard of the nameable referent. Without a proper name or a referential signifier, the creature is excluded from the most basic linguistic structures which warrant his exclusion from both the physical and metaphysical.

On an interpersonal level, we use names and surnames to mark our intimate inclusion into a family and, in a broader sense, our belonging to a society of human species. The creature's absence of a proper name or any type of identifying signifier ultimately constitutes his exclusion from a family and marks his complete alienation from not only our human society but from humanity as a species. As opposed to impersonal societies where members of the same species do not recognise singular individual entities, mammals rely on establishing identities in relatively small circles which are based on family ties and long-term affiliation. In such societies, each member is marked by their individual relationship to other mammals of their own species which constructs their unique identity. These unique identities are expressed through identifying indicators which we today perceive as proper names. Without these naming expressions and their identifying meanings, we have little choice but to resort to various epithets which are often associated with a person's attributed qualities. More often

than not these epithets carry strong connotative meanings. This is the case with Frankenstein creature's official moniker, monster.

Names, just like the sign/signifier relationship, are determined by conventions and agreements which dictate that they are given exclusively to entities that are owned by someone. The first thing parents do is name their children; this is a mark of their parental bond and acknowledgement of the child's individual identity. The child also inherits a surname which establishes his affinity to a bloodline. In Shelley's novel, the creature's namelessness thus further reinforces his status as an abandoned orphan; when Frankenstein refuses to name his creation he ultimately rejects his existence and cuts all familiar ties. He finds his creation's physical deformity to be telling of the creature's character and based on his hideousness alone, Frankenstein deems its inhumanity: "its gigantic statue, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy demon, to whom I had given life" (Shelley 60). Traditionally names are given to children by their parents and Victor, although the creature's only parental bond, declines his role as a father figure and refers to his creation solely with various dysphemisms: wretch, monster, demon etc., which play a vital role in the evolution of the creature's identity. Instead of being defined by a name signifier or any signifier that would signify any bond to the world around him, the world he so delicately explores with his senses and experiences with his feelings, the monster is defined by the lack of such. Duyfhuizen notes: "For the Creature, however, the absence of a proper name, of a signifier that constructs identity before the first glimmerings of subjectivity enter consciousness, marks his alienation by and from the world of human existence. Moreover, it signifies his lack of a family and his exclusion from a chain of generation" (480). He belongs to no one and lurks outside the realities that are produced in the realm of language. The creature learns of words that mark family relations, such as father, but without this experience as a referent, he cannot decipher the meaning of the psychological reality the signifier signifies: "The youth and his companion had each of them

several names, but the old man had only one, which was *father*” (Shelley 87). Without the assimilation of these various signifiers, the creature's perception of reality and of himself is distorted: “God in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours” (Shelley 100). He experiences his existence in affiliation to the existence of man, for he is, after all, made out of human flesh, but always feels like a deviant from the purer human form.

The only example of the creature's self-identification is his self-perceived correlation with the Devil. This affiliation is not completely immaterial as there are many parallels between Frankenstein's creature and the Devil. Across cultures, the various images of the devil represent the absolute evil; humanity's ultimate adversary. Similarly, the Devil, perhaps the most infamous monster figure in the history of mankind, is also defined by his unnameability. Partially, this is due to the superstition that calling forth the name of the devil has the power to invoke it, but mostly the unnameability reinforces the notion of its incomprehensibility. And therein lies the devil's true power. While the monster is closer to Adam in his inclinations and intentions, his unnatural and mysterious origins coupled with his expulsion from the realm of "god's creatures" bounds him to the domain of the heinous: "Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was different from mine in every other respect ... I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition" (Shelley 100). John Lamb notes that due to his perceived kinship with the devil the creature is sentenced to live out his miserable destiny: "The monster must resign himself to the inevitable implications that the master narrative, as a hegemonic form that has come to comprise his only sense of reality, prescribes: he is not Adam but Satan, and, hence, he is forced to act out the role of Satan" (316).

Signs, with their meanings, create a reality within itself: the creature who lacks a name that would signify his inclusion into a linguistic structure, the human race, or a family, begins to identify with his monster signifier. In his role of a monster, he is only capable of the

most horrific deeds: "If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear" (Shelley 111). As mentioned, the signifieds are not external referents but abstract mental representations which carry strong connotative meaning; when Victor refers to the creature as an "abhorred monster" (Shelley 77) he contributes to the construction of a reality that narrates and materializes the creature's monstrosity. His main signifier, monster, is associated with a mental image, which presents itself as a binary opposition to everything human, natural, and good.

The Monster Sign

With a lack of a given name, the creature is left to be identified only by his main degrading moniker, "monster"; in fact, he is widely known around the world as "Frankenstein's Monster", one of literature's most terrifying creations. Culturally, monsters are placed in opposition to everything humanity values as human and good, which materializes the radical Other. Helaine Selin establishes that "The Other is frequently portrayed in negative ways in order both to build a positive self-identity and to legitimize one's own superiority and even conquest and domination of the less "civilized"" (1). Throughout the novel Victor's narrative depicts the creature as an uncivilized inhuman Other. Even his positive attributes, like his super-human speed and strength contribute to establishing him as a monstrous *thing*. Where normal humans would be praised for such superhuman abilities, these features even further alienate the creature from anything with human-like qualities. Victor has created a being that would be superior to natural men, a being which he knows feels affection equal to the sentiments of humans, yet, due to his external appearance, he assigns him none of the qualities he attributes to his kinsfolk: "They were my brethren, my fellow beings, and I felt attracted even to the most repulsive among them as to creatures of angelic nature and celestial mechanism" (Shelley 141).

John Deely differentiates between three basic elements in semiology: the signifier, the signified, and an interpretant. It is the interpretant who ultimately deciphers the meaning behind the signification (15). As mentioned, signs are completely arbitrary which means they can convey completely different meanings to different individuals. Monsters exist as a mental concept; a natural antagonist to what we perceive as human qualities, but it is up to the interpretant to decipher its meaning. A sign can be charged with endless connotations; it means whatever the interpretant wants it to mean. While a sign's denotative meaning refers to its so-called primary signification; the straightforward dictionary definition of a sign, the connotative meaning, on the other hand, is formed through secondary signification (Barthes 111-112). Connotations are highly individual socio-cultural associations which are strongly intertwined with the interpretant's social class, age, cultural background, gender etc. It is at the level of connotation that the myth is produced for consumption. According to Barthes a myth's function is to neutralize, or normalize, dominant cultural values and beliefs (Storey 121). Myth is, therefore, greatly influenced by the world around us and is formulated on the principles of our existing world knowledge.

The creature in the novel is defined by the myth behind his signifier. His creator, as well as the world surrounding him, denounces his status as a human creature, and prescribes him a monstrous mythical identity: "His soul is hellish as his form, full of treachery and fiendlike malice" (Shelley 159). The creature is thus not identified by his individual qualities, but instead, is bound to the connotations the monster sign brings forth. Robbed of any potential identity and denied even the most basic privileges, such as freedom and justice, he is reduced to the concept of the monstrous alone. This concept exists as the binary opposite to what we perceive as good through the scope of our own myths. As a being of high intellect the creature is very much aware of these convictions, and points out these discrepancies during one of his altercations with his creator: "You

would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands” (Shelley 111). Here, Victor is faced with his own hypocrisy; he deems the creature to be a murderous fiend, but Victor himself would have no reservations in ending the supposed monster’s life. He denies his creation the most basic right to life and the right to be considered innocent until proven guilty. Duyfhuizen notes that “the creature is a direct embodiment of the unspeakable, a monster who produces horror precisely because he cannot be contained within the limits of representational language; ironically, it is through his acquisition of language that creature is able to make a logical case for his right to basic kindness, especially from his creator” (483).

The monster signifier could be interpreted as a so-called monster token; it lacks proper categorization and generalizes *all* monsters alike in their inhumanity. Saussure claims that linguistic signifiers are not in any way determined by any sort of physical reality, but are instead distinguishable by their written or spoken form. This is where the type-token distinction comes to play: “Since Saussure sees language in terms of formal function rather than material substance, then whatever performs the same function within the system can be regarded as just another token of the same type” (Storey 52). Storey gives an example of the 08.25 AM train that goes daily between Geneva and Paris; the train is perceived as the same regardless of its physicality. This distinction exists outside the physical real and is completely independent of any physical reality (52). The same could be said about the monster signifier as it performs the same function regardless of the physical subject it induces meaning upon. A monster is thus always nameless, for even if the subject had been indeed given a name, the signifier monster carries such an unadulterated meaning that it always takes priority, regardless of the physical reality: “The monster is revealed to be reflective of no definitive characteristics. It remains an abstract term” (Beville 10).

As is the case with all signs, the relationship between the monster signifier and the signified it denotes is completely conventional and is dictated by social norms and our collective values. These values we do not possess innately but they have to be learned. Our knowledge of values between right and wrong is subject to our learning and the environment we are exposed to. Values differ greatly cross-culturally, but focusing on the scope of Western values, the main pillars of righteousness and striving to do good over evil, is something that unifies Western ideologies. On the scale of imagined virtues, monsters, or more specifically the concept the word signifies, are positioned on the side of absolute evil. Human values are centred on virtues such as freedom, empathy and justice, but these seem to be reserved only for the members of our inner circle; the creature, the unnameable inhuman Other, is suspended from these basic ethics. While initially all his efforts were aimed at fitting into the community of humans, the creature, now aware of the true nature of human beings, is determined to find inclusion through the formulation of his own inner circle. He wants an equal, a fiend just like him, whose existence will secure his connection to a family and, ultimately, a species. Upon finally meeting his creator face to face, the creature asks but one thing of him: to create him a creature equally monstrous. “It is true we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another ... I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded” (Shelley 112). The real tragedy of the novel lies in the fact that such an empathic and benevolent being is left completely abandoned, which is the main reason behind his vicious actions. Shelley makes it clear that if he were to ever receive the same affection he feels for others, he would be content with his existence.

Instead of pointing to an actual object in the real world the term monster exists in the domain of pure thought; instead of corresponding to the physical “real” world, it exists as a concept generated by the subconscious. In his essay, *Myth Today*, Barthes defines a signifier without a definite signified an empty signifier (116). Such signifiers can mean very different

things depending on who is interpreting them. The signifier monster is thus charged with personal and cultural connotations, and while the severity of its impact differs from one interpretant to the other, it always stands in place of an intangible mental representation of a presence with monstrous qualities. Mary Beville comes to a similar conclusion in her book: “The noun ‘monster’ tends to blur with the worn-out adjective ‘monstrous’ so that in terms of meaning, it is almost impossible for us to say definitively what or who, is a monster. The noun, specifically, persists as an empty signifier, one in which various cultural anxieties and repressions can be placed” (180). These mental concepts encompass an assortment of fears; the monster not only exists as mankind’s polar opposite but also represents society’s worst fears and anxieties. The term monster is ultimately an empty signifier as it exists on the level of pure mental representation, standing in place of our worst unimaginable fears. It refers to that which is impossible to name and comprehend; it is worse than the worst of humanity, for even the worst criminals are not monsters, they are simply monstrous.

Fear of the Unknown

In Shelley’s novel, the creature’s lack of a proper signifier establishes an atmosphere of mystery and intense horror; it is the strange and unknown that brings forth feelings of fear and anxiety within the reader (Duyfhuizen 479). Furthermore, both the creature’s lack of a proper name that solidifies his status of a nameless thing, and his identity, which is largely shaped by the monster sign, construct a very similar reality. The two forms of signification create a plane of existence, where our worst anxieties and unimaginable fears roam. The namelessness binds the creature to the most primal of evils, the devil himself, while the negatively charged sign monster associates him with inhuman feral qualities: “I had created a fiend whose unparalleled barbarity had desolated my heart” (Shelley 126). The unnameable and the monstrous stem from the same basic human emotion: fear. Monsters represent the most basic

fear, the fear of the unknown, which is the driving force behind our worst anxieties, pushing the limits of human imagination. Throughout the history of our existence as a species, the great unknown has always been the source of our most primal fears.

The signifier "unknown" is another marked signifier. As already mentioned, the unmarked term is neutral and positively charged, while the marked term is charged with a negative connotation. This establishes a binary opposition; the familiar, "known", stands for nature and humanity, and the "unknown" is the monster with his many connotations and their manifestations. Mary Shelley uses the concepts of duality throughout the novel – nature/science, good/evil, human/monstrous, natural/unnatural etc. Through her narration there is almost an obsession with physical beauty; a fascination with the natural human form on one hand, and a revulsion towards the creature's unnatural deformity. Prescribing negative attributes to physically unappealing features is nothing new and is very present in our own contemporary ideology as a society. In psychology, the so-called physical attractiveness stereotype describes the tendency to prescribe positive traits to attractive people and vice versa. Studies have found that people react positively to attractive people and are in disbelief when presented with the fact that an attractive person has done something wrong like committed a crime, for instance. In other words; what is ugly is bad and what is beautiful is good. "In general, individuals evaluate attractive targets more favourably than unattractive targets. These differential judgments occur regardless of whether perceiver's assess the attributes of strangers or familiar targets" (Rennels 636). Similarly, the creature in the novel is treated with disdain and evokes feelings of disgust which are based solely on his inhuman physical appearance. Victor immediately blames his abandoned creation for the murder of his little brother, William, regardless of the fact that a confession was already acquired from his beloved Justine. His assumption is made solely on the grounds of the creature's physical presence, as he resolves that none but "the devil himself could have perpetrated" (Shelley 68) such a crime, and concludes the creature's "delight was in carnage and misery" (Shelley 60).

This projection of a devilish fiend is forced on the creature, who is given no agency in the matter and is ultimately deprived of all potential for love and affection from the outside world.

While he's assembling the monster, Victor makes it clear he aims for nothing less but perfection: "I have selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful" (Shelley, 45). The general consensus thus seems to be that if Frankenstein's creation would come to be physically beautiful, he would also be perceived as virtuous by the outside world: "The creature has no "beauty" to attract kindness" (Duyfhuizen 483). More specifically, the creature's hideous appearance is constantly contrasted with the perceived beauty of Elisabeth and Justine. Upon learning of Justine's involvement in his brother's murder, Victor, without any concrete proof or evidence, is convinced that it was indeed his creation that committed the crime. Even when Justine pleads guilty to the act, Victor is fixated on her innocence which is sustained by her beauty. On the day of the trial he describes her:

Her countenance, always engaging, was rendered, by the solemnity of her feelings, exclusively beautiful. Yet, she appeared confident in innocence, and did not tremble although gazed on and execrated by thousands; for all the kindness which her beauty might otherwise have excited, was obliterated in the minds of the spectators by the imagination of the enormity she was supposed to have committed (Shelley, 64).

This physical attractiveness, which represents virtue, is contrasted with an ugliness of both, the body and spirit. This contrast establishes maybe the most powerful binary opposition present in the novel. Mary Shelley, was, without a doubt well-aware of the importance of these dualities; she masterfully uses them in her writing to get her message across, and ultimately, challenges the reader's own perception of *good* and *evil*.

Binary oppositions are crucial for understanding and deciphering both, the aspects of language, and how humanity perceives the world it lives in. Saussure emphasised the importance of binary oppositions between signs: "Concepts are defined not positively, in

terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system. What characterizes each most exactly is being whatever the others are not” (115). If humanity and nature signify what is *good*, the concept of negative differentiation dictates the creature symbolises everything which is *bad*. Binary oppositions do not naturally occur in nature. Instead, they are a human construct designed to bring order to our complex human condition. Opposites have a very practical function, both within our language, as well as a philosophical dualistic concept we apply to our everyday life. The meaning of “light” exists only in correlation to the meaning of “dark”, and we can truly conceive the meaning of good only to the relation of our understanding what’s evil; the two cannot exist without one another, since one has no meaning without its contrasting opposite. Chandler argues that: “It is an open question whether our tendency to think in opposites is determined by the prominence of oppositions in language or whether language merely reflects a universal human characteristic” (91). The creature with his unknown origins, lacking any human traits or names, serves as a binary opposition to the comprehensible, natural, and human. Aware of his unfortunate condition he declares: “if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear” (Shelley 111). The text hints that the polar opposite of love is indeed fear, and if the creature is excluded from all feelings of love, he is bound to punish humanity by inducing fear.

In the opposite’s duality, if one of the terms is given, then the other, though not present, is evoked in thought. The unknown, however, serves as a collective term indicating everything we fail to comprehend. This does not only extend to instances of *not knowing*, when we are simply lacking information, but also to occasions of *not understanding*. Humans, as well as most animals, rely on their instincts to survive. The innate predisposition to fear that which is unfamiliar and which we do not understand is crucial for our survival. Species that are in predator-prey relationships rely on their ability to distinguish between their own kind and others, as this distinction might be the difference between life and death. After all his encounters with humans resulting in them running away in fear for their lives, the creature

hopes to find a companion in a child; one who would not yet be conditioned to act on his instincts to flee from that which he cannot understand. Unfortunately for him, when he finally encounters a child, the child's innate reaction to the creature's presence is to run away. This pure and presumably uncorrupted child perceives the creature as a literal monster that presents a serious threat to his life: "Monster! Ugly wretch! You wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces – You are an ogre – Let me go!" (Shelley 109). In his dissertation on anxiety disorders, Carleton notes: "Enough fear to approach unknowns with caution (i.e., treating unknowns as potential threats) would be adaptive, so long as the intensity did not compromise survival activities (e.g., seeking food, shelter, mates ... In non-primate mammals, unknown objects evoking fear are at first avoided, increasing the immediate safety of the animal" (12). Therefore, fear of the unknown is not only natural but also serves an evolutionary purpose. Regardless of the circumstances, little William's instincts to fear the unknown creature had proven to be correct. Upon learning of his connection to Frankenstein, the creature murders him in cold blood: "I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feet" (Shelley 110).

Psychologists have come to recognize the manifestation of various monster figures to be directly linked to the manifestation of a patient's worst fears. Individuals suffering from severe anxiety disorders often describe and experience their fears as a lurking monster figure that constantly preys on them. Within this figure, their worst traumas, fears, and anxieties are embodied. These figures, with their monstrous presence, signify the fragility of the subject's ego in comparison to the overwhelmingly large and inhuman frame of the monsters. Their altered malicious appearance conveys their overpowering authority over the patient, against which they are made to feel completely helpless (Oelman 210). These depictions are very closely related to how the creature is portrayed in the novel. Primarily through Victor's eyes, we are confronted with an abnormally large, not-completely-human figure, with superhuman strength and agility. While, strangely enough, a detailed description

of the monstrosity is never provided, Victor, and with him, the reader, feels completely overpowered in its presence: “I suddenly beheld a figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his statue also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man” (Shelley 76).

As a society, as well as on an individual level, we create monsters to symbolise our most primal fears; a most disturbing encounter with impossible realities. As humans are conditioned to fear the unknown, for treating the unknown as a potential threat could mean the difference between life and death. Death might be the keyword here; it’s an essential fear, as its ultimacy and inevitability, makes it the greatest intelligible fear that is shared by all of humanity. Thus, a high number of phobias and anxiety disorders originate from the fear of death. Among others, the creature’s horror stems from his intentions to cause death and destruction: “I, like the arch-fiend, bore all hell with me; and, finding myself unsympathised with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then have sat down and enjoyed the ruin” (Shelley 105). The creature’s threatening presence is reinforced by humanity’s fear of the ultimate unknown, death. In her book, Beville concludes that monsters and death are intertwined. The monster, with its absolute inhumanity, serves as a reminder of our impending demise: “Death is acutely repressed and is impossible (according to Freud) for the human mind to imagine. It is this impossibility that in turn drives our most basic desires. The monster, from this perspective, embodies our terror of this unimaginable death. Its extremity is a reminder of the fundamental excess of the end” (5). Frankenstein’s monster is also linked to the symbolism of death; by murdering Victor’s loved ones he’s a literal representation of death, and with his cataclysmic presence and existence beyond that which we can fathom, he is also a strong allegory of death.

The meaning of the monster sign within the framework of semiology, where the sign does not signify the subject itself, but is instead, the mental representation of the subject

one creates, is very closely mirrored in the monster figures in psychology. In both cases the nameless monster from the novel signifies an inhuman form, incomprehensible in its unknowability, standing in the place of our worst imaginable fears. As the famous quote by H. P. Lovecraft states: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (1). It is this innate fear, the anticipation of the incomprehensible, wherein lies the horror of the *Frankenstein* novel.

Conclusion

Friedrich Nietzsche famously wrote, “Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into the abyss, the abyss stares back into you” (69). Many argue that the true monster is indeed Dr Frankenstein himself. For who is the real monster; he whose monstrous actions are a consequence of abandonment at birth, or the maker who creates a living, feeling being and abandons him upon creation? In this sense, Victor is not merely only responsible for the creature’s creation, but also plays an essential role in the monster’s descent into wretchedness when he abandons him. Additionally, he revokes his promise to construct for him a female counterpart that would save him from complete isolation. The creature’s namelessness marks an absence of love from both his creator and humankind as a whole; this is the main driving force behind his monstrous actions: “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?” (Shelley 131). Ultimately, the creature is aware of his own monstrosity and the fact that he is defined by his existence outside the planes of humanity, which ultimately drives him towards realizing his monstrous potential.

As opposed to names, periphrasis are, at most, a referential identity. This identity lacks all uniqueness, and strips the signified it refers to of all individual qualities. Not only does the use of a periphrastic name signal a lack of familiar bond to the referent, but it

often serves as a derogatory term for the unnamed Other (Duyfhuizen 479). Charged with negative connotation and acting as the polar opposite to all human virtue, the monster in the novel is a true manifestation of the ultimate Other. In reality, monsters are a purely objective mental construct that are merely a reflection of the individual's own inner suppressed tendencies. These turmoils are directly projected into a highly personalized monster figure, which has nothing to do with the subject the term refers to, and everything to do with its interpretant. Such is the case for Victor Frankenstein: his distorted view of the creature as a vicious selfish being is a direct reflection of his own subconscious monstrous tendencies. On various occasions, the creature proves he is indeed morally superior to his creator; regardless of the fact that Victor has abandoned him, and treated him with utmost unjustified disdain, the creature still holds him in high esteem: "I am thy creature and I will even be mild and docile to my natural lord and king" (Shelley 77). The creature maintains patrimonial feelings towards Victor, and as his child, feels a responsibility towards him as a family member. If given the chance, he would accept his unwilling father with unconditional love and treat him with utmost respect. The only thing he demands in return is fatherly affection. This primal bond would provide him with an identity from which he has been deprived, and ultimately define his existence within the basic linguistic structures. Instead, he is reduced to a mere empty signifier.

Being denied inclusion into the sphere of humanity, and thus without an identifying signifier, Frankenstein's creation exists merely as an incomprehensible entity. The nameless monster is a creature that has been *reduced* to his parts alone. He is a dehumanized humanoid, a brute that sometimes walks and talks like us, but ultimately lacks the mysterious ingredients to make him human. The creature's creator demonstrates his own cleverness and Promethean pride, and while, through human knowledge he might be able to compose life itself, he cannot, it seems, compose it well. Something essential is always missing (Asma 153). While the creature's external appearance is supernatural and abnormal, his emotional

needs could not be more human; herein lies the true tragedy of the *Frankenstein* novel which spawned one of the most heart-breaking characters in literary history.

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