



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

ENGLISH

“Oh, Praise the Eternal Justice of Man!”

A Feminist Reading of the Monster
in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Lotta Svensson

BA thesis
Spring 2013

Supervisor:
Fereshteh Zangenehpour
Examiner:
Ronald Paul

Title: “*Oh, Praise the Eternal Justice of Man!*”: A Feminist Reading of the Monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Author: Lotta Svensson

Supervisor: Fereshteh Zangenehpour

Abstract: This essay studies the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* from a feminist point of view and sheds a new light on the meaning behind the monster. The aim is to show that the monster – in his development from uninformed to liberated – is in fact a feminist heroine figure that strives to attain equality through fighting patriarchy, which in this essay is represented by his creator, Victor Frankenstein. By showing how the monster is “a female in disguise”, an embodiment of *the other* and a victim of patriarchy, this essay analyzes the monster's personal development in three steps, one for each chapter. The textual analysis is supported primarily by the thoughts of Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, but also takes into account voices from other and more modern feminist critics.

Keywords: Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, feminism, monster, Mary Wollstonecraft, *the other*, Simone de Beauvoir.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Woman	4
Chapter Two: The Other	10
Chapter Three: The Fighter	15
Conclusion	19
Bibliography	20

Introduction

The creature of *Frankenstein* has been viewed in various ways since his creation in 1818. He has been the terror of a horror story, a representation of the dangers of science, an abandoned orphan and an unnatural freak show. In this essay, however, I will deal with 'the monster' as an allegory for women's struggles in the Romantic period. The monster shares many features and sufferings with the women of his time, and I do not believe this to be a mere coincidence. Therefore, the claim of this essay is that the monster is a feminist protagonist figure that strives to enlighten readers. I will analyze him with the help of feminist theory to show how he develops – like the readers are expected to develop with him – from being unenlightened, to realizing the injustice, to fighting against it. By a close reading of the text, and by the following analysis, I aim to prove that the creature is in fact a victim of patriarchal society and above all a powerful feminist figure.

Mary Shelley was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, a woman who is today regarded as one of the first feminists, and I believe that this heritage of awareness about women's rights is strongly reflected in Shelley's authorship. *Frankenstein* is written in a time when women were extremely restricted and had practically no power, neither politically nor over their own lives. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which was inspired by the unfairness of women's situation at this time, came to be one of the first influential feminist manifests in history. Among other things, Wollstonecraft argued that neither women nor men are actually born into their fixed genders but acquire them through the treatment of society. She argued “that the wielding of irresponsible power corrupts the oppressor no less than it distorts the oppressed” (Norton 169), and she also promoted the idea that women should be allowed the same education as men, in order to become equal human beings not defined by gender. These topics – social construct, irresponsible power that destroys both parties, the importance of education – can all be found in Shelley's portrayal of the monster, which makes me think that Shelley was strongly influenced by her mother's feminist beliefs when writing *Frankenstein*.

Consequently, the feminist literary theory which will be used in analyzing the novel is of course based on, firstly, Wollstonecraft's aforementioned *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This is a relevant piece of work, partly because it deals with feminist concepts that are present in *Frankenstein*, like the importance of education, and partly because of its probable influence over

Shelley's authorship. The second important theoretical tool for this essay is Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, in which she argues for gender as a social construction as opposed to something given by birth. I will be dealing with her renewal of the concept of *the other*, which is a term often used in feminist theory to talk about the patriarchal system of norm versus deviation from norm. This is relevant to *Frankenstein* since the monster is the very personification of deviation from the norm, and suffers from the consequences of this system. For a more modern approach, I will touch on Toril Moi's chapter on "Feminist Literary Criticism". I will also briefly deal with the concept of *the noble savage*, a literary term used to describe an idealized nature-based literary figure who has not yet been spoiled by civilization (OED). This is of course applicable to the monster in his first stage, and important in his portrayal as an uneducated Romantic woman.

Many feminist critics in the past have immersed themselves into *Frankenstein*. However, I believe that there is room for more interpretation of the novel's feminist undertones, especially in the symbolism of the monster. Some critics, such as Anne K. Mellor and Paul Youngquist, have had the tendency to put focus on the female characters of the novel, criticizing Shelley for their passiveness and stereotypical characteristics. Others, for example Ellen Moers in her "Female Gothic", have focused more on the monster's birth as a woman's way of dealing with her fears of motherhood. However, the importance of the monster as a feminist figure has not been as widely discussed, aside from in a few articles which I think are worthy of mention.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), interpret the monster's narrative as "an exploration of what it feels to be [...] a thing, a creature of the second sex" and suggest that the "male monster may really be a female in disguise" (235-237). This is an interesting statement which can be even further explored, and which will be dealt with in greater detail in the first chapter. Vanessa D. Dickerson writes in her article "The Ghost of Self: Female Identity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" about the importance of Safie's quest for independence as inspiration for the monster, and this will also be discussed further on, primarily in the second chapter of this essay. In another article from 1991, "*Frankenstein*: The Mother, the Daughter, and the Monster", Paul Youngquist discusses how Shelley's feminism "falls short" in comparison to her mother's since the monster's "hideous" body is what defines his character (343). He claims that this does not fit with Wollstonecraft's dream of an "androgynous utopia" and her view that physicality is not important for defining a human (343). I disagree with this argument, and I will

therefore spend some time on discussing how Shelley's feminism in fact being quite close to that of her mother's. Other articles have treated the monster's education from a feminist point of view (e.g. Yousef's "The Monster in a Dark Room: Frankenstein, Feminism, and Philosophy"). Some have interpreted him as an outsider or a noble savage, and some have compared him to other feminist figures in literature (e.g. Seabury's "The Monsters We Create: *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *Frankenstein*"). However, there have to my knowledge not been any studies focusing solely on the monster as a feminist protagonist figure that develops from an uninformed to an enlightened woman, which is why this essay is needed.

The essay will be divided into three chapters, each concentrating on a new stage in the monster's development from noble savage to feminist fighter. I aim to prove that Shelley lets her monster go through this development in order to promote her readers to do the same.

In the first chapter, I will analyze the monster as a female character. I will show how he identifies with the other women of the novel, and how he starts off as a product of Mother Nature. Here, the aim is to show that he represents the oppressed woman who has not yet understood her restrictions. I will also discuss how he is a constructed monster, not a monster by birth, and I will connect this to the feminist theory of gender as a social construction.

The second chapter will consist of a feminist approach to the monster as an embodiment of *the other*. In this chapter, I will show how the monster steps into his second stage, from being a simple noble savage to actually educating himself and becoming aware of the injustice he faces. This will be connected to Mary Wollstonecraft's thoughts about education and I will show that Shelley inherited her mother's feminist beliefs.

In the third chapter, I aim to display how, finally, neglect of the monster's equal rights and needs leads to his quest for revenge and I will display the similarities between his fight for equality and the feminist fight for equality. The monster's newly gained feminist opinions will be dealt with in this chapter and I will analyze his speeches to "man", meaning not only 'mankind' in general but actually 'patriarchy' and the oppressive man. I will also discuss Victor's 'abortion' of the female character as a patriarchal act that leads the monster to "declare war" against injustice. I will end with a short conclusion, where I summarize the main points of the essay.

Chapter One: The Woman

The monster is – contrary to common belief – not really a monster, at least not in the sense of being a violent creature driven by pure evil. Although his appearance inspires fear in everyone he meets, and he is – as all humans – capable of doing bad things, he is first and foremost a 'newborn', innocent being, thrown into a world that is prejudiced against him from the start. With this chapter, I hope to show how the monster shares fates with the women of the time, and how he can be interpreted as a female figure suffering in silence without yet having realized the unfairness of the situation. This is the first step of his journey towards liberation and independence, and a starting point for Shelley's portrayal of the monster as a feminist protagonist figure. I aim to prove in this chapter that the monster is indeed, in the words of Gilbert and Gubar, “a female in disguise” (237).

Before proceeding with the analysis of the monster as a female character, I believe some clarifications would be helpful in order to understand the starting point of my analysis. One might argue that by saying that a character is feminine one automatically agrees with the patriarchal notion that there are certain qualities that inevitably belong to the female sex, and this is certainly a valid point. However, I find it important to emphasize that my reading of the monster as a female character has nothing to do with any 'eternal' female qualities, but is rather based on Romantic notions of femaleness and femininity, for example the concept of being close to nature. Toril Moi talks about this in her article “Feminist Literary Criticism”, where she also mentions the dangers of assigning stereotypical qualities to women. In the words of Moi: “It is after all patriarchy, not feminism, which always believed in a true female/feminine nature” (210). I am aware that my analysis of the monster as a female character is based on somewhat stereotypical ideas of femaleness, but my aim is to read the novel as it would have been read in the Romantic period, and I believe it would be foolish not to take into consideration the ideas of the time when analyzing the meaning behind the monster.

An important defining feature in the initial stage of the monster's life is his innocence. Although he knows nothing about the world, where he comes from or who he is, he seems to be an inherently good character, an ultimate noble savage. Like the female characters of the novel, he is an alien to the ruling world of men, but has an unspoiled mind and a good heart. Here, he is

not yet the powerful feminist figure that he later develops into, but rather represents the common restricted woman of the Romantic period, or as Dickerson puts it: “Initially, Frankenstein's creature is as passive, childish and helpless as the female figures in the novel” (Dickerson 88). I believe Shelley's intention with this was to establish a platform for a dynamic character who is at first unaware of his victimhood, but as the plot develops turns into a powerful feminist character, making his fate a coming-of-age story that the reader is seduced to sympathize with, and thereby able to accept the feminist message.

The reader sympathizes with the monster because he often seems to understand what most humans have not understood, characterizing him somewhat as a truth-teller. For example, he learns that men define each other's worth based on money and status, and is strongly affected by the new knowledge that humans are capable of evil:

For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased and I turned away with disgust and loathing. (Shelley 115)

In addition, this noble savage is not even aware that there might be differences between men and women, which proves the point that gender is a learned thing and not something naturally evident: “Other lessons were impressed upon me even more deeply. I heard of the difference of sexes” (Shelley 116). That this new knowledge affects the monster “deeply” also suggests that gender is of great importance to the story. One might argue that it is farfetched to say that one mention of feminist issues makes a difference in the portrayal of a character, but as we will see further on, there is more evidence that shows the monster's feminist features aside from what he actually expresses in speech.

For example, that the monster starts out as a clean slate, a tabula rasa, and only later becomes 'monstrous', implies that Shelley believed in emphasizing the 'nurture' side of the nature versus nurture question. In other words, Shelley shared her mother's belief that one is not born a human being, but rather is constructed into one through the nurturing – or neglect – of one's environment. This is a feminist theory for which Wollstonecraft was one of the first to argue, and which Simone de Beauvoir later addressed with further emphasis. The latter's famous quote that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (273) is certainly applicable to the fate of the monster. In the words of de Beauvoir: “No biological, psychological, or economic fate

determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, [...] which is described as feminine” (273). Similarly, the monster is not a monster by biology, psychology or economy but only a monster through the eyes of civilization, which 'produces' his monstrosity in the same way that it produces femininity and masculinity. The way Victor Frankenstein constructs and builds a life with dead body parts seems to imply that gender in the same way is not a naturally created thing, but rather a process and a building of body parts or associations that come with body parts. Seeing the monster as a child that is very much affected by society's treatment, *Frankenstein* seems to promote a more balanced way of raising children that does not discriminate depending on uncontrollable facts like gender – or as in the monster's case: looks. The world from which the monster is rejected is inevitably a very closed and prejudiced one that has no room for deviating creatures. I find that the monster's world and the patriarchal world that Wollstonecraft observes are very much the same, and by society's slow crushing of the monster, Shelley seems to agree with the words of her mother: “When children are confined to the society of men and women, they very soon acquire that kind of premature manhood which stops the growth of every vigorous power of mind and body” (Wollstonecraft 157).

Consequently, the monster is a victim of society's treatment, just like the women of the Romantic period. However, how can we be sure that he was intended to represent the community of women in particular, and not just any minority of people? One clue can be found in his portrayal as a nature-based creature, suggesting that he belongs to the traditional 'female', given that nature in literature “often remains maternal, or at least feminine” (Ferber 136). Throughout the novel, we find the monster feeling closely connected to nature, almost seeing it as a comforting mother-figure: “The very winds whispered in soothing accents, and maternal Nature bade me weep no more” (Shelley 91). The closeness that he experiences with Mother Nature, which in the Romantic era was closely associated with femaleness, implies that he is in fact a female character. Nature plays several parts in the personal development of the monster; it soothes him, warms him, makes him forget his troubles and gives him hope for the future: “My spirits were elevated by the enchanting appearance of nature; the past was blotted from my memory, the present was tranquil, and the future gilded by bright rays of hope and anticipations of joy” (Shelley 111).

Similarly, in several passages of the novel, the monster is guided by the moon, which has often been used as a metaphor for the female: “In the classical tradition, the moon is invariably feminine” (Ferber 130). This strengthens the theory that the monster really is a feminist character; he is guided by the light of feminism: “Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started up and beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path” (Shelley 99). Interestingly, the moon is also often used in literature as a symbol for change owing to its different stages (Ferber 130), which would suggest that the moon in *Frankenstein* not only symbolizes the feminism of the monster, but also his dynamic, developing character, as he moves from stage to stage. Accordingly, when Shelley in her Author's Introduction to the novel describes the memory of the frightening dream that inspired her to write *Frankenstein*, the moon is almost invasive, suggesting the inevitable presence of the female over her tale. She remembers seeing clearly in her mind “the closed shutters with the moonlight struggling through” (Shelley 9), which echoes Victor's later description of the monster's birth, when the moon “forced its way through the window shutters” (Shelley 56). It is almost as though the monster is constantly followed by the light of the moon, and it is always present when Victor sees him, as in: “I saw by the light of the moon the daemon at the casement” (Shelley 161), and at another occasion: “Suddenly the broad disk of the moon arose, and shone full upon his ghastly and distorted shape” (Shelley 196). This could of course simply be a Gothic horror technique for creating a dark and frightening ambiance, but I find it hard to believe that the moon and the monster could be so frequently connected without it having a deeper meaning.

Not only does the monster feel at home in the sphere of nature and under the protective moon, he also identifies with the women of the novel, which further suggests that his destiny and the destiny of women are closely connected. For example, when he looks at the simple cottager's daughter Agatha, he recognizes that she, like him, is not pretty: “she was meanly dressed”, and he sees his own feelings reflected in her: “she looked patient yet sad” (Shelley 103). Similarly, when he sees the portrait of his creator's mother, Caroline Beaufort, he seems to be momentarily calmed by the image: “It was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me” (Shelley 137). Dickerson makes an interesting point about the monster taking the place of the traditional nurturing mother-figure in the DeLacey household, by secretly

helping them collect firewood: “His menial services for the DeLaceys are conducted with the same cheerfulness exhibited by Elizabeth, when she, too tries to replace an absent mother by serving the Frankensteins as “an angel in the house” (89). So, here, the monster is still a stereotypical female 'helper' figure without the ambition to step out of the given gender boundaries. At this point, he is still at his first stage of development, not yet having understood his total exclusion from society; not yet enlightened.

In their article “Teaching Frankenstein from the Creature's perspective”, Cantor and Moses argue, as I, that the monster is indeed portrayed as a feminine character, at least according to the standards of his time:

The creature, after all, in a curious way ends up speaking for the value of domestic life in opposition to Frankenstein, who, in his heroic quest as a creator, rejects the ties that would bind him to a conventional family. The Creature longs for precisely the warmth of hearth and home that its creator fails to appreciate. [...] The more one considers this aspect of the novel, the more one recognizes Mary Shelley's wisdom in associating the Creature with a poor, abandoned, persecuted female (the archetypal role assigned to the heroine in gothic fiction). (131)

Other critics claim that the monster is a female character due to his resemblance to his author, and Gilbert and Gubar draw many parallels between the monster and Shelley herself, arguing that he is in many ways a representation of her. Their interpretation stems from the fact that he is intellectually similar to Shelley, both being “devout, but nearly silent listeners” to the conversations of men (237). Although this is certainly an interesting point, the monster is in my opinion more than a mirror of his author. He is a complex victimized character that is meant to represent the problems of women in general, and his similarities to Shelley are not his most important features. Furthermore, I agree with Moi, who criticizes Gilbert and Gubar for assuming that all female writing is somehow automatically feminist since it is written from the point of view of a woman (217). In my opinion, *Frankenstein* is not a feminist novel simply because it was written by a woman, but because it contains profound reflections on what it means to be oppressed, a part of *the other*, and to struggle for independence.

Another theme that pervades the novel is the importance of appearance. The monster understands very soon in his life that people around him define his character based on his appearance. That he is ultimately rejected for being ugly can surely be seen as a critique of assigning importance to women's looks, which is exemplified in how all the female characters of

the novel also seem to be defined by their appearances. Almost every time a woman is presented in the novel, her name appears together with the obligatory classifying adjective like “the beautiful” or “the pretty”. This hardly ever occurs when male characters are presented, and leads to a striking contrast that is hard to deny. For example, in one paragraph of a letter from Elizabeth to Victor, each woman is given a physical classifier: *pretty, ugly, very lively*; while the three men mentioned are described with other adjectives not at all related to looks: *young, rich, favourite school-fellow*:

He has already had one or two little *wives*, but Louisa Biron is his favourite, a pretty little girl of five years of age. [...] The pretty Miss Mansfield... [...] her approaching marriage with a young Englishman. [...] Her ugly sister, Manon, married M. Duvillard, the rich banker. [...] Your favorite school-fellow, Louis Manoir... [...] on the point of marrying a very lively, pretty Frenchwoman. (Shelley 64)

I believe Shelley used this technique of exaggeration in order to display to her readers the absurdity of being constantly judged on the basis of appearance. Discovering the importance of appearance plays a big part in the monster's development since while identifying with the women of the novel, he simultaneously understands the difference between them and himself. As Dickerson puts it: “While Safie's beauty also recommends her to the DeLacey hearth, his ugliness precludes any such welcome” (89). As we will see in the next chapter, his identification with the independent role model Safie is very important, since this is the event that leads him to the next stage on his journey towards liberation.

Chapter Two: The Other

Simone de Beauvoir writes in her introduction to *The Second Sex* about the concept of *the other*, a term used to describe the relationship between norm and deviation from norm, especially in the context of male and female. According to de Beauvoir, who draws the parallel of Eve's creation from the rib of Adam, "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him" (15). This is relevant to the fate of Frankenstein's monster, who is in every way an embodiment of this *other*, constantly being defined in relation to dominating norms. Like Eve, he is created in the image of man, through Victor's decision to create: "an animal as complex and wonderful as man" (Shelley 51). In this chapter, I will begin by showing how the monster is portrayed as an outcast and a victim of patriarchy, and how he is a clear embodiment of *the other*. Further on, I will focus on analyzing the monster's personal development in how he, in this second stage on his journey towards independence, realizes his exclusion from society by educating himself, which calls to mind Wollstonecraft's ideas about the importance of educating women in order to attain equality.

To begin with, we need to establish in what ways the monster can be seen as a representation of *the other*. Firstly, and as we just saw in the previous chapter, the monster is the very personification of ugliness in a world where beauty and appearance is of utmost importance. Secondly, while everyone else is the result of a natural birth, the monster is the result of a scientific experiment. Thirdly, in a society that obsesses over constructed things like fame, money and success, the monster belongs to the world of nature. While everyone has family and close friends, the monster is utterly alone. He is even different in being a vegetarian in a meat-eating world: "My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment" (Shelley 141). So, in every way imaginable, the monster is a deviation from the ruling norm. However, he is still the hero of the story, which indicates the bias of the author, who must have had the intention of defending her innocent misfit. Through the image of the monster, I believe she also wanted to defend another group belonging to *the other* – i.e. the women of her time. Although we cannot be entirely sure that she was not defending another minority or did not think about the symbolism at all, I think Shelley's background as a feminist's daughter and being an independent female writer in a very male-

dominated time speaks for the fact that *the other* in her novel can be connected to the feminist movement.

In other words, the monster's characterization as “the archetypal [...] heroine in gothic fiction” (Cantor and Moses 131) is important in order for the readers to associate him with the feminist fight for equality. Because he is an example of *the other*, the monster is rejected from human society and can never become truly equal to the rest of the world. According to Marcia Bundy Seabury, “The creature is different from the dominant society and thus cannot 'pass' no matter what he does” (134). At this second stage of his development, the monster is still very unsure of himself, and has not yet obtained the confidence that he needs to avenge his maker. He often shows signs of self-doubt, much of it owing to him being an outcast from society, and the more the story progresses, the more he comes to terms with this fact: “I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. [...] Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?” (Shelley 116). Here, the monster is not only defined by others as *the other*, but he defines himself by this concept, asking himself if he really is the monster that people perceive him to be. This self-analysis is a part of the monster's process towards gaining confidence and fighting back against the forces that has excluded him.

So why did Shelley decide to write about a monster if she really wanted to shed a light on women's rights? One reason could be that 'the monster' was a clear and commonly used image at the time, and 'the monstrous' seemed to share several qualities with the general image of 'the female'. In Samuel Johnson's famous *Dictionary of the English Language* from 1755, which is the dictionary Shelley would have followed, one definition of 'monster' is “something out of the common order of nature” and another is “strange, wonderful, generally with some degree of dislike”. So, 'the monster' could be interpreted as a Romantic synonym to *the other* that de Beauvoir talks about in her writings.

It is also interesting to see that we today call Shelley's character 'the monster' despite being most commonly referred to as “the creature” in the original novel, which would suggest that we as readers judge him the same way as the world that rejects him. The fact that he does not even have a real name strengthens his image as the ultimate anonymous misfit. I agree with Gilbert and Gubar when they argue that: “[The monster] is himself as nameless as a woman is in

patriarchal society” (Gilbert and Gubar 241). It is quite possible that this was a narrative technique used by Shelley in order to persuade the readers to sympathize with her protagonist, making them take sides with the outsider while simultaneously alluding to the fight of women at the time.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the monster identifies with the women around him, and particularly with Safie, who is the only strong woman of the novel and whose fate he refers to as “the more moving part of my story” (Shelley 112). Safie and the creature learn to master the language together, and whatever else she learns, he learns with her: “I heard of the discovery of the American hemisphere and wept with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants” (Shelley 115). I agree with Dickerson when she claims that a great mental turning point for the creature is when he sees Safie's journey to independence and starts taking steps towards his own. The monster and Safie have several things in common: they have selfish fathers, they are both foreigners and they both have striking physical appearances. As Cantor and Moses put it: “Her status as an alien links her with the Creature, and indeed the way its education runs parallel with hers establishes a firm association between the two characters” (130). It is also interesting to see that while most of the passive and conventional women die sooner or later in the novel, the only independent and powerful one, Safie, survives. She is the only woman who rebels against her patriarchal confinement, and for that Shelley awards her by saving her life.

It is through identifying with the strong Safie that the monster finally starts taking responsibility for his own life and decides to acquire an education. In doing this, he steps away from the passive femaleness of Elizabeth and Justine and goes towards the more powerful active lifestyle of Safie. This might be Shelley's way of advocating to women a new way of living and an encouragement to educate themselves in order to become free, echoing the words of her mother: “I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both in mind and body” (Wollstonecraft 7). Wollstonecraft argued for a national education with mixed classes of boys and girls in order to lift women up from being simple angels of the home to actually acquiring useful knowledge, saying that: “In order to open their faculties they should be excited to think for themselves; and this can only be done by mixing a number of children together, and making them jointly pursue the same objects” (Wollstonecraft 157).

Through educating himself about humanity, and by being rejected by everyone around

him, the monster becomes aware of his own exclusion from the world, and recognizes that he is a victim of prejudice: “Unfortunately, they are prejudiced against me. I have good dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless and in some degree beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes” (Shelley 129). I would agree with Yousef, who says that “The more the creature learns about human forms of life, the more conscious he becomes of his difference” (Yousef 219).

Gilbert and Gubar write about the three books that the monster happens to come across, which form the basis of his knowledge of the world, Plutarch's *Lives*, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I would agree with their point about these books (which Shelley herself read the year before she wrote *Frankenstein*) (237). According to Gilbert and Gubar: “As specific works, [...] each must have seemed to her to embody lessons a female author (or monster) must learn about a male-dominated society” (Gilbert and Gubar 237). In fact, the monster clearly expresses that the aim of his education is to become accepted by the cottagers, who represent the dominant society. His only wish is to be equal and loved by these fellow creatures, and by seeing Safie's success with this through her education, he sees learning as his way into the community:

I looked upon them as superior beings who would be the arbiters of my future destiny. [...] I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanour and conciliating words, I should first win their favour and afterwards their love. These thoughts exhilarated me and led me to apply with fresh ardour to the acquiring the art of language. (Shelley 110)

Although the monster never succeeds in becoming accepted, his mastering of the language is what makes him realize the injustice he faces. It is through this first step that the monster starts moving slowly towards the final step, which, as we will see in the next chapter, makes him fight back against patriarchy (represented by Victor) and eventually turns him into the powerful feminist figure that Shelley wants her readers to follow.

Some might say that since there is not much explicit evidence of feminism in Shelley's novel, it is unlikely that she was a feminist writer at all. However, I would argue that this is a quite simplistic view, and that there are many clues which claim the opposite to be found in her elaborate use of symbolism and characterization. Furthermore, towards the end of her life, Shelley actually wrote a few lines in her journal that I think makes her intentions with *Frankenstein* very clear. This is interesting since it is one of very few explicit feminist statements

from Shelley, in which she seems to separate her own feminism from that of her mother's, perhaps because she feels she cannot live up to its greatness:

I have never crouched to society – never sought it unworthily. If I have never written to vindicate the rights of women, I have ever defended woman when oppressed. At every risk I have befriended and supported victims to the social system; but I make no boast, for in truth it is simple justice I perform. (Norton 958)

Here, she proudly claims that she has always stood on the side of the oppressed woman and that her intention has been to support “victims to the social system”, which the monster certainly is an example of. That she uses the words “at every risk” implies that she probably encountered a great deal of criticism for her courage to defend women, but she stands by her feminist values by proclaiming that it is “simple justice” she performs. This short journal entry reinforces my argument that it really was Shelley's intention to create a sympathetic monster as a symbol for the victimized woman, and not just to write a simple horror story about the dangers of science.

So, to sum up this chapter, the monster is an embodiment of *the other* who, through education and knowledge about humanity, realizes his exclusion from society. In the following and final chapter, I will show how the monster moves from this newly found enlightenment to actually demanding equal rights and commencing his fight for independence.

Chapter Three: The Fighter

The steps of the monster's development which we have discussed in the previous chapters are all necessary for him to take his last step towards finally becoming the feminist figure that Shelley intended him to be. By being rejected and oppressed, then educating himself and finally understanding his “wretchedness”, he has gathered the tools that are needed to fight back. In this chapter, I will analyze the final turning point that makes the monster avenge his maker and patriarchal society – the event of Victor's destruction of the female monster. With the help of Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir, I will read the monster's final stage as a warning about the consequences of neglecting the rights of women.

As was established earlier, *Frankenstein* is set in a very patriarchal environment. To begin with, it is the men of *Frankenstein* who dominate the story by being the active scientists and explorers, the intellectual and the storytellers who all practice power over the women around them. Victor is no exception, and his character can be interpreted as a symbol of this patriarchy in several ways. Firstly, his sexist attitude towards women, especially regarding Elizabeth, shines through in many passages of the novel. At several points, he claims that Elizabeth is less intelligent than him, dismissing her way of looking upon the world as superficial: “While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes” (Shelley 35). Secondly, he is an egoistic character that does not defend the innocent woman (Justine) even though he possesses the information that can possibly save her. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, he represents patriarchy in his violent creation and destruction of the female monster. If we view her as a representation of the feminist movement, Victor becomes an oppressor of women that the monster must fight. Critics have often discussed the significance of this passage and I would agree with the interpretation of Anne K. Mellor, who argues that the destruction of the female monster shows us that Victor is afraid of female sexuality and the female's possible ability to reproduce an entire race of mini-monsters:

A woman who is sexually liberated, free to choose her own life, her own sexual partner (by force, if necessary), and to propagate at will can appear only monstrously ugly to Victor Frankenstein, for she defies that sexist aesthetic that insists that women be small, delicate, modest, passive, and sexually pleasing. [...] Horrified by this image of uninhibited female sexuality, Victor Frankenstein violently reasserts a male control over the female body, penetrating and mutilating the female creature at his feet. (120)

Consequently, Victor is the embodiment of sexism and oppression of women, and his abortion of the female monster is entirely an act of patriarchal values. De Beauvoir writes about “man's horror of female fertility”, which Victor can certainly be said to exemplify in his relationship to the female monster, and perhaps also towards his male creature. Victor feels terrified and threatened by the thought of both creatures, and it is necessary for him to practice his male power over them in order to maintain his own superiority. Even his name implies his function in the story: “Under patriarchy, the male is always the [V]ictor” (Moi 211). By rejecting his first creation and violently destroying his second, Victor displays the kind of male egoistic power that de Beauvoir associates with patriarchy:

History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as *the other*. (de Beauvoir 159)

It is when the monster sees this violent attack that he really evolves, and takes the final step towards liberation. From trying to achieve peace and meeting an equal fellow creature through reasoning with his maker, he now changes completely and becomes the monstrous avenger that will no longer endure the unfair treatment of patriarchy in the form of Victor. The monster identifies with the female creature, saying that like her, he is also “an abortion”: “I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on” (Shelley 213). It is only after this event that the monster develops the thirst for revenge that is to define the rest of the novel. Here, we find the monster violently threatening 'man', which can interestingly be interpreted both as Victor, the whole of mankind, or perhaps 'man' as in patriarchy or male power.

Man! You may hate, but beware! Your hours will pass in dread and misery, and soon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness forever. Are you to be happy while I grovel in the intensity of my wretchedness? You can blast my other passions, but revenge remains. [...] Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom. Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict. (Shelley 162-163)

Finally, the monster shows some form of 'monstrosity', although it seems quite justified after the treatment he has received. While reading *Frankenstein*, I cannot help but ask myself who the real monster actually is, and what monstrosity actually is. It is clear to me that the one who is called “the monster” is not actually a monster at all, but often more wise and good than his creator, or

any of the other male characters. As Elizabeth Lavenza rightly reflects: “Men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood” (Shelley 88). The only thing that the creature really wants is to be accepted into society and treated as an equal, the same thing that the supporters of women's rights continue to aim for throughout the ages. Seabury asks herself: “What does the monster want? Most simply, not to be a monster; not to be deemed deviant from humanity; to be able to fulfill basic human needs” (134). I believe that Shelley plays with this irony in her novel through asking us indirectly if it really is 'monstrous' to aim for equality. Should not an intelligent creature that is only slightly different from man still be treated as a man? *Frankenstein* acts as a mirror towards its readers and makes us think that it is maybe we who are the real monsters for calling him a monster. In the last chapters of the novel, Victor also calls himself a monster and a miserable wretch, finally understanding that he has become the monster he so much feared. Some critics have argued in favor of sympathy for Victor, seeing him as the protagonist who is simply a victim of bad decisions that he cannot undo. However true this might be, we have to consider that while the monster is left totally alone in the world, at least Victor is a part of the ruling norm and society, always benefiting from support from his family and friends. Yousef also mentions this fact, saying that Victor is: “first, finally, and throughout the object of human sympathies from which the creature is first, finally, and throughout excluded” (223).

In short, the injustice that the monster experiences seems to echo the sufferings of the Romantic women, and since he is the ultimate noble truth-teller, we are persuaded to think of these sufferings when the monster bitterly exclaims: “Oh, praise the eternal justice of man!” (Shelley 96). He even talks about being “excluded” and the importance of living with “equals” in several passages, making his struggle seem very similar to the struggle of the feminist movement:

My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor, and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. 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 142-143)

It is true that we cannot know for sure if Shelley had this feminist agenda in mind when writing *Frankenstein*, or if it was simply an unconscious heritage from her mother. However, there are many similarities to be found between her novel and the works of her mother, which makes me think that there is certainly a connection. In her *The Wrongs of Women* from 1798, Wollstonecraft wrote about Gothic horrors as representations of “the tormented mental lives of cloistered

women” and that “specters and chimeras are the best metaphors that can express the wrongs of women” (Dickerson 82). So perhaps the creature could be such a metaphor, passed down to Shelley from her mother. Perhaps Shelley deliberately chose to veil her feminist views behind a monster mask in order to get her point across. According to Dickerson, the monster certainly is a vehicle for expressing “the wrongs of women” that Wollstonecraft talks about. There is a clear voice in *Frankenstein* that tells us that neglect and unequal treatment will ultimately lead to nothing but violence and hatred, as when the monster says: “There was none among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No; from that moment I declared ever-lasting war against the species” (Shelley 131).

This use of the word “war” is interesting since it echoes de Beauvoir argument that “all oppression creates a state of war”, and she goes on to say that “the existent who is regarded as inessential cannot fail to demand the re-establishment of her sovereignty” (674), which can be directly applied to the fate of Frankenstein's monster. The oppression and rejection that the monster experiences cannot lead to anything except rebellion, and I believe this is exactly what Shelley wished to show with her novel.

This is also something that Wollstonecraft talks about in her fight to free women, and she argues that continued neglect of the female sex will lead to women starting to fight back: “How can women be just or generous, when they are the slaves of injustice?” (189). She believes that a society where half of the population is oppressed cannot function and she sees female independence and equality as necessary not only for women, but for society as a whole:

Make them free, and they will quickly become wise and virtuous, as men become for so; for the improvement must be mutual, or the injustice which one half of the human race are obliged to submit to, retorting on their oppressors, the virtue of men will be worm-eaten by the insect whom he keeps under his feet. (Wollstonecraft 175)

So, as we have seen, the monster shares many features with the women of the Romantic period, and it is quite possible that Shelley inherited some of her mother's feminist views and transferred them to the fictional character of the monster. We almost hear the words of Wollstonecraft herself when the monster truthfully says, in the very final pages of the novel: “Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all humankind sinned against me? [. . .] Even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice” (Shelley 213).

Conclusion

With this essay, I have shown that Frankenstein's monster, who is so often misread as the horrific antagonist of the novel, is in fact a feminist protagonist figure that strives to attain the same rights as his fellow human beings. I analyzed him with the help of the ideas of both Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir and showed how the monster can be convincingly interpreted as a hero from a feminist point of view.

In the first chapter, I discussed Shelley's portrayal of the monster as a weak female impersonation who is oppressed by his surroundings but has no power or role models to take himself out of the situation. I showed how the monster is connected to nature and the moon, and how he identifies with the women of the novel, making him appear as a female creature.

In the second chapter, I analyzed the monster as the ultimate example of an outsider, personifying everything that is *the other*. I focused on the monster's first step to enlightenment, which is triggered by his observing of Safie, who is the strongest and most independent feminist character of the novel. I also discussed the importance of education in the monster's development and connected it to Wollstonecraft's ideas about educating women to attain equality.

In the third chapter, I followed the monster as he reaches his final stage on his journey towards independence through understanding and accepting the gravity of the injustice of which he is a victim. I discussed how his fate echoes Wollstonecraft's warning that neglect of the outcast will ultimately lead to the destruction of both the oppressor and the oppressed. I also analyzed Victor's destruction of the female monster as an oppressive act of patriarchy which triggers the monster to start his feminist fight.

To summarize, I have shown that the monster is in reality a feminist protagonist figure in a monster costume. He has in common with the female characters of *Frankenstein* that they are all ultimately nothing but powerless outsiders in a world full of men that judge, reject and destroy them. Through portraying the monster as an ultimate outcast and alluding to the problems of a patriarchal society, I believe Shelley aimed to pass on her mother's feminist beliefs to her readers. In my opinion, it is evident that there are many feminist undertones to be found between the lines in *Frankenstein*, and there is certainly room for more study in this field.

Bibliography

Primary Source

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1994. Print.

Secondary Sources

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1953. Print.

Cantor, Paul A and Michael Valdez Moses. "Teaching *Frankenstein* from the Creature's Perspective". *Approaches to Teaching Shelley's Frankenstein*. New York: MLA, 1990. Print.

Dickerson, Vanessa D. "The Ghost of a Self: Female Identity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." *Journal of Popular Culture* 27.3 (1993): 79-91. Web 21 May 2013:
<http://www.roberson.k12.nc.us/cms/lib6/NC01000307/Centricity/Domain/2632/Ghost%20of%20a%20Self%20article.pdf>

Ferber, Michael. *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Cambridge: 1999. Web 21 May 2013:
http://www.academia.edu/1052805/A_DICTIONARY_OF_LITERARY_SYMBOLS_By_Michael_Ferber

Gilbert, Sandra M and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Yale: Nota Bene, 1979. Print.

Greenblatt, Stephen, gen. ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. Vol. D. The Romantic Period. New York: Norton, 2006. Print.

Mellor, Anne K. "Usurping the Female" Chapter 6 of *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*. New York: Methuen, 1988. Print.

Moi, Toril. "Feminist Literary Criticism" Chapter 8 of *Modern Literary Theory*. Editors: Ann Jefferson and David Robey. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1982. Print.

OED Online. "noble savage, n.". March 2013. Oxford University Press. Web 22 May 2013:
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/256816?redirectedFrom=noble+savage>

Seabury, Marcia Bundy. "The Monsters We Create: *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *Frankenstein*". *Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 42:2, 131-143. Web 21 May 2013:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00111610109601133>

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. New York: Norton & Company, 1988. Print.

Youngquist, Paul. "Frankenstein: The Mother, the Daughter, and the Monster." *Philological Quarterly* 70.3 (1991): 339-359. Web 21 May 2013:
<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/youngq.html>

Yousef, Nancy. "The Monster in a Dark Room: *Frankenstein*, Feminism, and Philosophy." *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History* 63.2 (2002): 197-226. Web 21 May 2013: <http://ats.coloradocollege.edu/co100-04-b1/images/7246921.pdf>