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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## The Superhuman's Transition to a Killing Monster: A Philosophical Approach to *Frankenstein*

<sup>1</sup>Nouman Yousaf\* and <sup>2</sup>Zhang Qiang

1. MS English Language and Literature, Yangzhou University, Jiangsu, China.
2. Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, Yangzhou University, Jiangsu, China

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\***Corresponding Author** | [ny2461999@gmail.com](mailto:ny2461999@gmail.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper explores the creature's nature in *Frankenstein* as transitioning from a superhuman to a killing monster. Through an exploration of human nature in the novel, the study analyzes how society plays a crucial role in forming one's personality and how an individual changes owing to others' attitudes. The research is qualitative and offers a new way to analyze the unexplored reason behind the monster's cruel nature. The research follows John Locke's concept of *Tabula Rasa* as a methodological framework. The research concludes that the monster is superhuman but revengeful because of his master and the physical appearance of the creature misleads the characters and makes them treat him harshly which transitions him into a killing monster. The novel can further be explored from the perspective of eco-gothic to examine how disturbing natural order turns into horror and anxiety. It will challenge anthropocentric views and inspire ecological responsibility.

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**KEYWORDS**

*Frankenstein*, Human Nature, Monster, *Tabula Rasa*, Technological and Moral Monster

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**Introduction**

Human beings, I believe, are curious by nature, and this curiosity makes them go beyond the limits and ultimately their downfall occurs. They want to cross the limits and continuously try to push the boundaries to see what is outside them. This curiosity leads Adam to taste the fruit of the forbidden tree, and as it is commonly believed that one suffers when one crosses the limits, so does Adam suffer. He was expelled from Eden's Garden and was sent to the world. Another story with the same theme is that of Icarus. Icarus was instructed not to fly higher, but he tried to touch the sky and the sun burnt his wings and fell headlong into an ocean. History and literature teach us a lot, but humans never try to learn from history.

*Frankenstein* is a novel written by Mary Shelley and was published in 1818. The story is about Victor Frankenstein and the creature he made and abandoned because it is a grotesque and monstrous figure. The creature seeks revenge and kills Victor's loved ones, leading Victor to dedicate his life to finding and destroying the creature. Victor is so obsessed with natural science that he discovers the secret of creating life. His curiosity blinds him and being a scientist, he becomes dull and cannot decide what is right and wrong and what will be the consequences of his project on completion. His going beyond the limits brought some four deaths in the novel. The novel shows the horrible side of being ambitious and delineates the power of love and society in molding one's nature. What would the monster have done if it had been accepted and loved by society? Would it be a

changed monster if it had not been abandoned by the master? These questions often make me contemplate the way the novel is written and whether the monster should be blamed for the murders or Victor Frankenstein. By using a philosophical approach to Frankenstein, it can be argued that the monster was not a killing monster when it was created, but rather it was a powerful or superhuman who was transitioned into a killing monster by society and Victor's attitude towards him.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines superhuman as, "exceeding normal human power, size, or capability". Having looked at the definition of superhuman and seen the description of the monster in the novel, it can be said that it is a superhuman. It has an exceptionally big, large, and strong body and it has exceeded normal humans in power, size, and capability. The following textual evidence is given to undergird the idea of a superhuman in the novel. "I decided that the creature couldn't be small or even of normal size. It would have to be gigantic, about eight feet tall, for me to be able to attach all the body parts, inside and outside." (40) "A moment later when I looked up, I saw the figure hurrying away. I started to follow him, but the next flash of lightning showed him climbing the steep rocks on the side of the mountain. Then he was gone, disappeared over the top." (76)

It is believed that the creature Victor created in the novel was a monster because it had a huge deformed body. It was terrifying and aggressive but it was no less than humans. Humans have feelings, emotions, etc. and it also has feelings and emotions. It is first a superhuman and then a monster, this will be discussed later on. "A monster is typically portrayed as a creature with deformed figures or terrifying qualities. Looking at it deeper, it usually represents all the evil and negative emotions that human beings face: rage, anxieties, repressed thoughts". (Cabag, Monster Literature).

"Monsters usually resemble bizarre, deformed, otherworldly and/or mutated animals or entirely unique creatures of varying sizes, but may also take a human form, such as mutants, ghosts, spirits, zombies, or cannibals, among other things." (Wikipedia).

This study explores Frankenstein from a Philosophical perspective and tries to show the nature of the creature: how it is called a superhuman and how it became a killing monster. A normal human can also be called a monster when they lose their temperament and take a horrible step, for instance, killing or torturing someone. The word monster cannot be confined to a wild beast or a supernatural thing, rather it can be used for humans who act in an inhuman way or for an inhuman. In the story Frankenstein, it is better to call Victor a monster. He has created a creature, brought it to life, and abandoned it. He left the creature alone at a stage where people long for someone's company.

Frankenstein is Mary Shelley's only novel written in the eighteenth century. The story revolves around Victor and the creature he created. Victor, a science enthusiast, wanted to play God. He worked hard to create a powerful, exceptionally strong, and muscular human. He succeeded, yet he lost. A creature was created but was left stranded owing to its heinous, monstrous, and horrible physique. The monster, as was called in the novel, held anger and grudges and wanted to take revenge upon Victor. The monster killed Victor's brother, friend, and wife leaving him desperate. Victor tries to kill the monster before it further commits more murders but is unsuccessful. Victor died at the end and the monster left the places inhabited by people.

## Literature Review

Thomsen's book *The New Human in Literature* (2013) explores different types of strategies powerful people deal with lower-class people in science fiction and literature. It further discusses that humans' desire to live longer and stronger has led them to adopt different types of scientific experimentation that the authors have forecasted in their works and which is awaiting humanity. It further discusses two methods mostly shown in the novel to make a transhuman/posthuman or a superhuman. The first one is mutation and the second one is replication. Frankenstein falls under the category of mutation. With the arrival of modern technologies, scientists are trying to manipulate an individual's DNA and want to bring changes to humanity according to contemporary needs. Human beings are not equal in size, intellect, etc. but science fiction has the premonition to warn humankind because of the *Frankenstinian* result. The creature in *Frankenstein* was created by using different dead people's body parts, perhaps this is the reason for its being powerful. Replication is delineated in Ishiguro's masterpiece *Never Let Me Go*. In the novel human clones are created for organ harvesting. Their purpose in life is to donate organs to normal people until they die. The first method is used to create an immortal superhuman while the second is used to help the rich people live longer than usual. (Thomsen, 2013)

A book authored by Hannah in 2013 explains monsters in several ways. It also delineates a moral monster, a monster in medical terms, and a technological monster. It discusses that when a human forgets their morality and inhumanly treats others and tries to commit heinous crimes, a monster can be found within them. "Inhumanity is the other side of our coin." (44). While in medical terms a monster is defined as, 'an organism with an unusual configuration'. (45). It does not entail any value judgment. It further argues that in the scientific sense, the monster represents a maximal divergence concerning normality, therefore it is judged neutrally. Moral monster is hated not because of their exceptional characteristics, but because of their crimes, their cruelty, and their inhumanity. A technological monster, Hannah argues, is the result of systematic manipulations of the human species. The book takes Frankenstein as an example of a technological monster and says, "Frankenstein offers an extraordinary forewarning of science's fantastic powers to manipulate life and especially the dangers of these powers". (Hannah, 2013)

Jacques discussed in his article whether it is better to call the creature in Frankenstein a monster due to its physical deformity or whether it should be considered a human having moral monstrosity. He further argues that it is called a monster or it is a monster because it strikes terror in whoever sees it, even in the person who created it. It is further argued in the article that the creature is both a human and not a human. The monster is a human. He is a creature and the word monster is used metaphorically, whereas the creature is not a human because he is referred to as an 'it' in the novel. "The monster is monstrous not because of his physical characteristics (his size and ugliness), but because he is called so." (2). It is further explained in the article that the monster lacks his social identity. People do not accept him and whoever sees him, calls him a monster. If he were given a proper name and were socially accepted, he would not be a monster. The word monster is explained in how it is used metaphorically with the help of Elizabeth's statement that states, "Men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood" (89). The monster has become a monster because of the moral monster that men have made him so. The latent meaning of this sentence is that Victor is a moral monster, he created the creature, abandoned him, and called him a monster. Victor first uses the word monster for the creature, later on, the creature uses it for himself and then other people start using it, and finally the whole community of the speakers. "The monster's monstrosity, therefore, does not lie in his nature: he is ugly but benevolent." (Jacques, 2019)

This study examines Frankenstein from the philosophical concept of John Locke and tries to explore that the creature in the novel is a human with superhuman abilities. What makes him a monster is not his deformity or his huge and strong body, but the moral monstrosity of the people present in the novel.

### Material and Methods

For conducting this study, the researchers have tried to qualitatively analyze textual data taken from the novel. Qualitative analysis of a certain literary work enables the readers to explore some implicit themes. It also helps the readers to understand a point that is indirectly stated in written form or indirectly stated verbally.

Mostly, to analyze a literary work, the researchers' main source of data collection is the text of a literary work. The main source of data collection for this study is also the novel *Frankenstein*. Besides textual data taken from the novel, the researchers have taken from other related books and articles. The main focus of the paper is to analyze textual data in light of the theoretical framework to explain the nature and transition of the creature.

### Theoretical framework

John Locke was an English philosopher born in 1632 and wrote a book an *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He presented a concept in his book that explains humans' nature. He is of the view that humans are born without any innate principles or rules. In simple terms, humans are born like a blank page. When a child is born, their mind is like a blank page or slate. Society and their socialization make them write upon it. He called it *Tabula Rasa*, which means, a blank slate. He argues in his book that if rules and principles were innate, every individual would act similarly. He explains why we have some just people and some unjust people. This is because of society; if these principles were innate, everyone would be just. 'To inquire whether the souls of the newly-born are just rasas tabulas, afterwards to be filled in by observation and reasoning, or whether they have the laws of nature as signs of their duty inscribed on them at birth. But by our inquiry whether the law of nature is written in the souls of men we mean this: namely, whether there are any moral propositions inborn in the mind'. Locke begins his argument in the book by opposing the pre-existing view about human nature that humanity is inherently flawed because of the original sin. But Locke refuses and says that humans have an inherent capability of learning and the desire for happiness. The knowledge one achieves is through the combination of sensory experiences with the innate capacities of human beings for internal mental operations such as comparing or abstracting. "Nature, I confess, has put into man a desire of happiness and an aversion to misery: these indeed are innate practical principles" (20).

### Results and Discussion

The analysis was carried out considering some important questions about Frankenstein, such as, Was the creature in Frankenstein a monster or a superhuman? How did he become a killing monster? and are humans evil and revengeful by nature or not? Thomsen and Hannah in their books *The New Human in Literature* and *On the Human Condition*, respectively, discussed the representation of different types of humans in science fiction. They are of the view that literature is a lab and it forewarns humans about the future. The authors try to demonstrate the advancement of science in the fictive works. They define a superhuman as a human with exceptional size, power, and strength. If one looks at the creature in Frankenstein, one can find the three exceptions in the creature. The creature is strong, large, and fast. He is way faster, stronger, and larger than a normal

human being. This is the reason the creature is called a superhuman. Another reason is that he is a technological monster. They used the word technological monster in their books for a being that is created with the help of science and by manipulating DNA or systematic function. Monster is not used here for something that is wild or like a beast, it is used for something that differs from a normal human being. Therefore, the creature in Frankenstein is a technological monster because he is created by a scientist Victor by attaching different body parts of different human beings. He does not look like other human beings because he is strong and huge.

Locke argues that a child is born like a blank slate. The creature is also a newborn. He does not know the language, the only thing that makes him different from a child is his body and his creation. He is made from different human parts, so how can he be called a monster if he is made of human parts? Another difference, he did not have a mother to give him birth, a woman did not give him birth. He was created. Therefore, he is considered like a new-born child who, in Locke's terms, is like a blank slate. If he were not a superhuman and were a monster, he would kill Victor the moment he went into his room. As a human being learns from society and people, so does he. He wants to be accepted by the people, but whoever sees him calls him a monster. He lacks social identity and adopts the name monster. He was abandoned by his master and that is what makes him revengeful. His monstrosity does not lie in his nature; he is a monster but he is benevolent. He is a monster because he is named as a monster. He tries to be kind, he tries to help people as he helped De Lacey's family and also saved a drowning child. But what he got in return from them, he was beaten and faced violence. It can be argued that he became violent and revengeful because of the people. If he is called a physical monster, Victor and other people should be called moral monsters. They are no less than him, they made him to be so. He indeed has a deformed physical structure but he is kind and more intellectual than other human beings. He might be unjust but he is rational and sympathetic. He might be physically deformed but he is spiritually well-formed. He might be violent but still, he feels what he does and at the end of the novel leaves society himself to not harm other individuals. If he were a monster, he would not decide who should be killed and who not. He would kill every individual he came across with. He killed those people who were dearest to his creator. He killed people not out of monstrosity but out of revenge. Revenge even makes a normal human being a monster.

It can be argued that society and people make him a monster. Locke is of the view that only the desire for happiness is innate because everyone wants to have a happy life. Apart from the desire for happiness, nothing is innate. A man cannot be revengeful, violent, and hateful by nature. If a man is, he is, because of society. Desire for happiness can be found in humans, not in monsters. If the creature in Frankenstein were a monster, he would not desire for wife which is the ultimate source of happiness. Additionally, when he was created, he was not violent though he was a powerful being. As he stood up, he came to his master as a child goes to their mother. He would not have done so if he were violent by nature. To talk about his monstrosity, he got it from society. The moment he learned the human language from people, he realized the abandonment he faced. He understood violence and revenge. Whoever he helps, beats him and calls him a monster whether that's the father of the drowning child or the De Lacey family. Who is responsible for the treatment he faces? It is Victor who is responsible for all the murders in the novel. He created a superhuman and the superhuman was a blank slate. He could have written good deeds and actions on the blank page that could have helped humanity if he had ignored the deformity.

**Conclusion**

It is concluded that the creature in Frankenstein is neither violent nor revengeful by nature. Society plays an important role in one's psychological development. He is called a monster in the novel not because of his physical deformity or his physical monstrosity but because of society and his master. One's name is one's identity. He is given this name. He can be called a moral monster or a technological monster but not a physical monster. The word monster does not mean that he is not human or he is a beast. It is used in a metaphorical way for him to represent his cruel and violent behavior. It is also explored in the study that if society and his master had treated him like a normal human being ignoring his physical deformity, he would not have killed any character in the novel. The study found that the monster at the moment he was created was like a child or a blank slate and whatever was written on the blank slate was the outcome of other characters' attitude towards him.

Recommendations: The novel can further be explored from the perspective of eco-gothic to analyze how humans' anthropocentric nature has become a nightmare for them and how disturbing any natural balance or order leads to destruction and downfall of humanity.

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