

Emotional Construction and Otherness in Frankenstein: A Feminist Literary Critique

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Abstract: This article analyzes the emotional development of monsters in Frankenstein from the perspective of feminist literary criticism, and believes that their “monsterness” is not innate, but the result of social and ethical construction. Although this novel is often interpreted as a warning to the excessive expansion of science, this article focuses on the gender dynamics contained in Victor Frankenstein’s creative behavior and its impact on emotional formation. Victor excluded women from fertility and replaced maternal functions with technical means, thus implementing a patriarchal control. This practice destroys the conditions required for parenting, attachment and relationship identity. The first part of the paper discusses the emotional awakening of monsters in the absence of maternal care. Unlike human babies, he does not have a nurturing relationship, so he lacks the framework required for self-awareness and emotional stability. His early experience shows that emotional ability is not innate, but developed in social interaction and care. The lack of maternal existence leads to the division of individual self-consciousness, so that the vulnerability of “monsters” is attributed to structural neglect rather than congenital defects. The second part analyzes the process of emotional “Otherness”, that is, how “monsters” are systematically excluded from human society. With the help of the othering theory of feminism, this article argues that the situation of monsters is similar to that of marginal groups: their identity is defined by the outside, and their legitimacy is denied. His repeated rejection was mainly based on his appearance, which changed his emotional world, turning sympathy and desire into anger and despair. This change highlights the role of social exclusion in the generation of violence, and reinterprets the behavior of monsters as a response to lack of recognition, rather than a manifestation of their inherent evil. The last part focuses on the monster’s need for a partner, which is regarded as an ethical appeal for emotional recognition and relationship existence. Victor’s refusal to meet this demand, especially his destruction of women’s creations, reflects his deep anxiety about women’s autonomy and strengthens patriarchal control over fertility and interpersonal structures. Through the above analysis, this article points out that the core ethical defect of the novel is the refusal to recognize care, responsibility and emotional subjectivity. In the end, Frankenstein put forward a strong feminist criticism of a society that denies the emotional legitimacy of marginalized groups. The tragedy of creation reveals the consequences of a world that suppresses care and interpersonal relationships, and calls for the establishment of an ethics based on empathy, recognition and responsibility.

Keywords: *Frankenstein*; Feminist Criticism; Emotional Formation; Otherness; Ethics of Care

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1. Introduction

Published in 1818, *Frankenstein* is still one of the most influential and complex novels in the history of modern literature. This novel is often interpreted as a warning fable about scientific ambition and excessive expansion of knowledge, and also provides rich materials for feminist literary analysis. Under its Gothic and philosophical surface, the novel contains an in-depth discussion of the formation of emotions, the lack of interpersonal relationships and the consequences of patriarchy control. From the perspective of feminism, the “monster” in the book is not just a monster, but a subject of emotional life that has been systematically deprived of recognition, nourishment and legitimacy.

Traditional interpretations often focus on Victor Frankenstein’s responsibility as a creator, or pay attention to the ethical significance of scientific deviant behavior. However, this kind of interpretation often ignores the gender meaning in Victor’s creative behavior and the emotional consequences of the life he creates. By excluding the female body from fertility and replacing the maternal process with technical means, Victor implemented a patriarchal possession. This practice fundamentally destroys the conditions required for emotional development.

This article believes that the emotional trajectory of monsters does not come from their natural grotesqueness, but from emotional lack, social exclusion and moral neglect. Through the perspective of feminism, the growth process of the monster reveals how the patriarchal structure suppresses interpersonal relationships and deprives them of love, thus breeding the violence it tries to condemn. By examining the lack of maternal love, the process of emotional “otherization” and the monster’s desire for love and companionship, this article tries to reinterpret *Frankenstein* as a criticism of a world that refuses to give emotional identity to marginal groups.

2. Lack of Emotional Awakening and Maternal Care

The emotional development of monsters begins in an extremely fragile state. Unlike human babies, human babies are surrounded by love, attachment and recognition when they are born, while monsters are abandoned by their creators as soon as they come out. This kind of abandonment is both physical and symbolic: it marks the lack of any maternal function that can provide emotional foundation and relationship identity. From the perspective of feminism, this lack is crucial. The so-called “grotesqueness” of monsters is not innate, but stems from the lack of care, which is rooted in Victor Frankenstein’s rejection of the maternal process.

Victor’s creative behavior represents a complete subversion of the female body. He created life through scientific means, bypassing the traditional role of women in childbirth, thus taking away the fertility of motherhood, and at the same time excluding women from this process. This behavior can be understood as a manifestation of patriarchal control over fertility, under which the female body is considered unnecessary and even threatening. The result is a form of life that lacks the foundation of the relationship that maternal care can provide.

“Like the monster, woman in a patriarchal society is defined as an absence, an enigma, mystery, or crime, or she is allowed to be a presence only so that she can be defined as a lack, a mutilated body that must be repressed to enable men to join the symbolic order” ^[1].

In the early days of life, this creature experiences the world through primitive senses: light, cold, hunger and pain. Due to the lack of an explanation framework formed through interpersonal interaction, these

sensory experiences are not organized into meaningful emotional categories. Therefore, his emotional life is not missing, but has not yet taken shape. Only through observation---especially the De Lacey family---did he begin to understand love, empathy and social ties. This process illustrates an important feminist view: emotional ability is not innate, but cultivated through interpersonal relationships.

“The creature’s process of self-expression through the inability to communicate its feelings and thoughts is comparable to the process of struggle that marginalised genders undertake in speaking and assuming identity in a patriarchal discourse and language-based society”^[2]. “Characteristics that are seen as traditionally feminine, including empathy, compassion, and nurturance, are characteristics that Frankenstein severely lacks with respect to his creation, even in conception”^[3]. “The monster and his subsequent actions are the results of a dangerous model of gender that exemplifies the problems with equating masculine with aggression and violence”^[4].

The lack of maternal care has a profound impact on the self-awareness of this creature. Because there was no adopter who could affirm his existence, he was forced to build his identity in isolation. His desire for connection is not only a general need for companionship, but a fundamental need for recognition. He not only longs to be loved, but also longs to be recognized as an emotional existence. In this sense, his emotional development does not come from existence, but from absence. It should be noted that the original character of the monster is characterized by kindness and curiosity. He picked up firewood for the De Lacey family, did not steal their food, and expressed his admiration for their friendship. These behaviors show that his emotional orientation is pro-social. But because these good deeds have never been rewarded or even recognized, the relationship necessary for emotional stability has not been established. On the contrary, they deepened his loneliness.

From the perspective of feminism, this dynamic change highlights the importance of care as a basic ethical principle. The tragedy of a monster is not that he is different from ordinary people, but that he lacks a social structure that can accommodate such differences. His emotional awakening reveals that grotesque is not an innate characteristic, but a condition caused by neglect. Therefore, the lack of maternal care is not just a narrative detail, but a structural force that shapes his whole life trajectory.

3. Emotional Othering: Rejection, Gender, and Social Exclusion

As the monster gradually realized that he was different, his emotional life changed profoundly. The initial desire to establish contact gradually turned into a painful cognition of being excluded. This process can be understood by the concept of “otherization” of feminism. “Otherization” refers to how certain individuals or groups are defined as essentially different and lower in the framework of mainstream society. In Frankenstein, the monster is placed in the position of the ultimate “other”. He is not only excluded from human society, but even excluded from the category of “human”. “In Cyber Ecofeminism, intersectionality of fear of othering is discussed by putting light on women as emotional, unable, ignorant and uncritical while man as mental, judgmental, intellectual and spiritual”^[5]. “Literally unmothered, he [the monster] fantasizes acceptance by a series of women but founders in imagined rebuffs and ends in violence”^[6].

The process of otherification began with Victor’s initial rejection. Victor immediately felt disgusted after seeing the monster’s appearance and abandoned him without any explanation or remorse. This reaction establishes a pattern that runs through the whole novel: monsters are judged only by their appearance, but their inner world is ignored. From the perspective of feminism, this emphasis on appearance reflects

a broader range of cultural norms, which regulate the body and give value according to whether it meets aesthetic standards.

The monster's subsequent contact with society strengthened this dynamic. When he tried to interact with humans, he encountered fear, violence and hostility. Even the De Lacey family, which he gradually admired and helped, finally rejected him after seeing his true face. This moment is important because it marks the complete collapse of the monster's belief in acceptance. He learned language, history and morality through observation, and believed that he could integrate into society. But this belief was shattered by an understanding that emotional and moral qualities are not enough to make up for the physical differences.

Feminism theory provides a useful framework for understanding this exclusion. The concept of "others" put forward by Simone de Beauvoir and other thinkers emphasizes how strong groups can define themselves through opposition to marginal groups. Under this framework, the monster's situation is similar to that of women and other marginal groups: he is watched, judged and defined by others, but is deprived of the ability to define himself. His subjectivity is constantly covered by external perceptions.

This dynamic has a profound impact on the emotional development of monsters. As he internalized the rejection he received, his self-consciousness became more and more divided. He began to look at himself from the perspective of others: ugly, humble and dangerous. This internalization of others has changed his emotional world. Love and sympathy are gradually replaced by anger, resentment and despair. It should be emphasized that this transformation is not spontaneous, but passive. It stems from repeated rejection of recognition.

Therefore, the use of violence by monsters can be understood as a response to emotional rejection. Deprived of the legal means of establishing contact with others, he expressed his pain through destructive behavior. These behaviors are not only a catharsis of anger, but also an attempt to establish one's own existence in a world that refuses to recognize him. In this sense, violence has become a distorted way of communication---a way to force others to admit his existence.

From the perspective of feminism, this dynamic highlights the political dimension of emotion. The pain of monsters is not an individual pathology, but a social dilemma caused by exclusion norms. His experience reveals how emotional life is shaped by power relations and how being denied leads to the collapse of ethical relationships. By viewing the monster as an emotional subject rather than a monster-like object, the feminist interpretation challenges the existing assumptions that lead to his marginalization.

4. The demand for love: Ethical responsibility and feminist reimagining

The monster's request to the partner is a critical moment in the novel, which highlights the ethical significance of the monster's emotional state. After being repeatedly rejected, he clearly and rationally expressed a wish: he asked Victor to create a life similar to him, an existence that could share his life with him and alleviate his loneliness. This request does not come from desire or domination, but from a deep desire for interpersonal relationships. It reflects an understanding that emotional satisfaction requires mutual recognition.

From the perspective of feminism, this request can be interpreted as an appeal for emotional rights. Monsters are not seeking power or privileges, but seeking the basic conditions necessary for a meaningful life. His request challenges the idea that some lives are not worthy of care or companionship. It also reveals the limitations of the moral framework that puts abstract principles above interpersonal responsibility.

“Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley—the only English Romantic whose literary creation (Frankenstein’s monster) threatens to live forever—lives up to literary criticism’s highest standards”^[7]. “Shelley’s depiction of passive women and the Creature’s alienation illustrates the failure to acknowledge both emotional and ecological equilibrium”^[8]. “This sensitive focus is intrinsically linked to Shelley’s own tragic life experiences with maternity and death, including the death of her own children and her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, shortly after her birth. This personal anguish is channeled into the depiction of the abandoned, nameless creature, Shelley’s ‘hideous progeny’”^[9].

Victor’s response to this request is very illustrative. At first, he agreed to create a female partner and acknowledged the rationality of the creation request. But he finally destroyed the unfinished female form because he was worried that she might be difficult to control, or that two creations might reproduce. This decision reflects his deep anxiety that women’s autonomy and patriarchal control may be broken. Victor refused to complete the creation of women’s creation, which not only denied the monster’s request, but also reinforced the idea that women were excluded from the field of creation. “The creature’s unacceptance in the ‘normal’ society resembles Shelley’s hesitant existence as a woman writer in the male dominated writing circle”^[10].

This act can be regarded as a second betrayal, which exacerbates the initial abandonment. Destroying female creation symbolizes the double denial of emotional satisfaction and gender expression. This shows that the problem lies not only in the specificity of monsters, but also in the possibility of a relationship structure that can transcend patriarchal norms. In this sense, Victor’s decision is not only immoral, but also ideologically motivated.

The consequences of this refusal are disastrous. After losing the last hope of connecting with people, the monster completely accepted his role as a destroyer. However, even when he was violent, he was still talking about his pain and desire for recognition. His last monologue revealed that he was clearly aware of the moral level of his behavior, but he was unable to get rid of the situation that caused these behaviors.

Feminist caring ethics provides a more detailed perspective for understanding the core tragedy of Frankenstein. This method does not emphasize abstract moral laws, rigid principles or consequences-based calculations, but focuses on interpersonal relationships, emotional interdependence and ethical responsibilities rooted in care. It challenges traditional and often masculocentric ethical models---which prioritize autonomy, rationality and detachment---and instead emphasize the moral significance of attention, response and meeting the needs of others. Under this framework, the definition of ethical behavior is not to abide by universal rules, but to maintain and cultivate interpersonal relationships.

From this point of view, Victor Frankenstein’s failure is not mainly in his attempt to create ambitions beyond the limits of nature through science, but in his refusal to take responsibility for the life he created from the beginning. He abandoned the monster when he gave life, which constitutes a profound ethical rupture: he not only denied the responsibility of his father, but also denied the basic obligation to provide care, guidance and recognition. This kind of negligence is not only a personal defect or psychological weakness; it constitutes a structural failure, that is, the failure to practice relationship ethics. Victor regards creation as an isolated intellectual achievement and cuts it off from the continuous responsibility that inevitably comes with creation.

Therefore, re-examining Frankenstein through the perspective of caring ethics can shift the focus of interpretation from deviance to negligence and from ambition to irresponsibility. This allows us to

re-understand the monster and no longer regard him as a symbol of unrestrained passion or natural grotesqueness, but an image directly related to emotional and moral collapse and lack of care. His trajectory reveals how denial of empathy and recognition distorts subjectivity and breeds violence. In this sense, “monster” has become a critical lens, through which the limitations of a society composed of exclusion, hierarchy and emotional oppression can be exposed.

It should be noted that the monster’s persistent desire for love and companionship should not be interpreted as excessive, irrational or threatening. On the contrary, it expresses a fundamental need for connection that exists in both human and post-human survival. His plea for recognition emphasized that subjectivity itself is a relationship---meaningful existence means being seen.

5. Conclusion

Feminist literary criticism reveals that Frankenstein deeply explores the consequences of emotional construction, lack of relationships and patriarchal rejection. The growth process of monsters in the book shows that emotions are not innate, but formed in social interaction and love. His initial kindness, later pain, and final tendency to violence all reflected the environment in which he was forced to live.

This article examines the lack of maternal care, the process of emotional “otherization”, and the ethical significance contained in the monster’s need for companionship. Through these analyses, it can be argued that the monsters in Frankenstein are not the result of the natural state, but the product of social construction. This novel criticizes a world where emotional needs are ignored, relationship responsibilities are deprived, and marginalized groups are excluded from recognition.

Frankenstein is not just a story about scientific creation. From the perspective of feminism, it is also a criticism of the indifferent society. The novel calls for the establishment of an ethical outlook based on empathy, sense of responsibility and emotional subjectivity recognition. The tragedy of this monster is not what he is, but how he is treated. His story prompts us to rethink the boundaries of human nature and makes us realize the importance of caring in building ethical life.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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