

The Intelligent Monster

An Analysis of the Creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

LENG290 (1)

Candidate Number: 2174

Word Count: 5351

Abstract

The depiction of the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a central issue for scholars that analyse and criticize *Frankenstein*. This thesis enters this debate to argue the issue of the creature's intelligence and eloquent language, relation to society and human nature. This thesis will engage with scholars who focus on issues regarding the importance of the creature's intelligence, human nature and relation to society, such as Peter Brooks who presents ideas such as isolation, lack of kinship and language as a tool, or Patrick Brantlinger who presents political and psychological ideas such as readers being in disbelief to the intelligence of the creature and finally Christa Knellwolf who presents ideas such as the importance of education and exploration of human nature. In this thesis I will present the ideas such as human nature, relation to society and intelligence, and eloquence in the text. To present the importance of these ideas I will be focusing on the crucial role the creature plays in the book and I will be presenting key scenes and talking about the book in general to underline the importance of these ideas.¹

¹ In this thesis the only source work that has been utilized is: Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein* (J.P Hunter, Ed 2nd Norton Critical ed). W.W.Norton. February 29th 2012. This book contains multiple criticisms of *Frankenstein*, which will make it easier to refer to scholars I have decided to engage with.

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This thesis aims to focus on the importance of the intelligence and eloquence, discovery of human nature and relation to society of the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The book is one of the most famous works ever published and there are a whole plethora of arguments and ideas that have been presented, some of the main arguments and ideas that scholars have are regarding the importance of the creature's intelligence and eloquence, the exploration of human nature and its relation to society/lack of relation to society. Among the countless critiques and inquiries that have been published by scholars regarding *Frankenstein*, I have selected three different scholars I will engage with to establish the importance the creature holds in the book. A great example of a critique regarding the creature is Peter Brooks' "What is a Monster?" (368-390), who presents the creature as something that looks grotesque yet holds great intelligence and has eloquent speech. His main argument focuses on the intelligence of the monster and the way it looks and presents many interesting ideas such as language as a tool, lack of kinship and isolation. Another great scholar who has published a critical inquiry regarding the creature is Patrick Brantlinger's "The Reading Monster" (468-476), where he presents ideas such as the lack of parenthood, modern society disbelief to the creature's intelligence and other psychological and political meanings. The final scholar I will be engaging with in this thesis is Christa Knellwolf who published "Geographical Boundaries and Inner Space: Frankenstein, Scientific Exploration and the Quest for the Absolute" (506-520), this paper focuses on the significance of the frame narrative, significance of education and exploration of human nature. It is essential to engage with these scholars to establish the significance of intellect, exploration of human nature and relations to society, where the creature is the entry point of analysis. Throughout this thesis I will present different elements from these scholar's texts to establish the significance of the ideas presented earlier.

In order to engage with the question of importance of intellect, human nature and relation to society the creature holds, the first issue we need to consider is Peter Brooks' depiction of the creature in "What is a Monster?". Peter Brooks' critical inquiry presents different interesting ideas and I have selected a few of those that I believe hold significant importance. The first element that Brooks presents that is very interesting is the difference in

its speech and its looks. The creature is presented as something grotesque and monstrous, yet it is also very intelligent and speaks eloquently (371). Even from the first words the creature utters he comes across as a great rhetorician who can express himself very well in language. Even if the creature is something that is artificially created in an experiment by Victor Frankenstein, the importance of language to the monster becomes clearer and clearer in the story. The reason why I believe language is so important to the creature is because language seems to be deeply imbedded within its identity. Within the book, the one redeeming factor that makes the creature seem humane is attained within its eloquent speech and intelligence. An artificially created body that looks hideous and eloquent speech creates an interesting dynamic that comes more across as a contradiction. The reason this dynamic between embodiment and speech can come across as a contradiction, is because there is a great capability to engage with human interaction with eloquent language, but the hideous body works as a deterrent and leads to it being isolated, this is an important aspect I will discuss more in detail further down the line. Peter Brooks argues that the embodiment of the creature and the eloquence of its language, questions the way bodies are made. Language is the primary way humans express themselves and is an important feature to engage with society, but the creature is still almost completely unable to get any form of human interaction with majority of people due to disdain held for his looks. This unnatural embodiment of the creature questions how bodies are made and demands that relationships between body and representation through language be seen in a new light. One thing that is interesting to consider is the interaction the creature has with De Lacey; he is a blind man that lives in exile with his children Felix and Agatha. Due to his blindness, he is incapable of perceiving the creature's hideous appearance and therefore does not look at the creature in horror, thus leading to the creature having a normal interaction with a human which is a first for it entirely. If not for its monstrous and hideous looks the creature would be more than capable of functioning within society, however since it is something artificially created it is incapable of functioning in society and leads to it being completely isolated.

To further follow up on the point regarding Peter Brooks inquiry into the creature having a severe lack of kinship and being completely isolated, he underlines the importance of its isolation and lack of kinship (370). Within the story something that becomes very apparent is first the intelligence of the monster and the second thing that is very noticeable is the lack of kinship that the creature feels and how it has been isolated from society. The first thing I

want to discuss between these two ideas is the lack of kinship. The reason why the creature has a lack of kinship mainly comes down to one thing and that is the lack of a proper family with a mother and father figure. The only figure that could play that role is Victor Frankenstein, however he is incapable of fulfilling that role for the creature. In the story at first, Victor believed his creation was extraordinary however throughout the story he begins to hate and hold disdain towards his own creation. The creature riddled with jealousy towards William, end up murdering him and framing Justine, however Victor knows deep down that the creature is the one that committed the deed even with Justine being framed and admitting to the murder. Even earlier in the story the creature never had any kinship, but this sealed the nail in the coffin for ever being able to have a true family. The second point of the creature being isolated throughout the entire story leads down to one very simple thing in my opinion, and that is the hideous looks. All people within Geneva where the story takes place cannot get over the horror and disdain they feel towards the creature when they look at it, thus leading to it being completely isolated from society. As previously mentioned, the only people that do not hold prejudice against the creature was De Lacey who is blind.

Due to the isolation and lack of kinship, Peter Brooks further argues that the creature discovers the true nature of language and its true purpose and discovers it as a tool he needs to be able to get any sort of relation to others. For the creature, language begins to take shape as something he desperately needs in order to counteract his grotesque looks (373-374). The creature is educated through sensation, experience and his association of ideas, and discovers language as a tool that holds ties to human love and patterns of kinship and relationships. The creature discovers that language is a system that isn't held down by what the words utter, but the context is what gives meaning to language (374). This leads to a development which I find very interesting in the creature, it wants to use language as a cultural compensation for its deficient looks. Language becomes a sort of entry point for it to have a chance at having a more normal life, where he is no longer isolated and can feel some sort of kinship that he has never had before. Peter Brooks argues that at this point of the story, language is largely thematised at this point and hold significant importance (374). Languages such as French is introduced with the arrival of Sofie and the creature learns language through observation and overhearing instructions. Thus, leading to the creature learning how to read, the creature begins to further master the arts of language and it becomes more deeply imbedded within its identity. It is very clear that language is something that holds significant meaning within the

story, thus the second scholar we need to consider is Patrick Brantlinger who brings forth interesting points where literacy, education, human reason and monstrous looks hold significant importance, but he also brings forth an interesting point where readers in modern society cannot believe the eloquence of the monster due to common modern depictions of monsters.

The second issue we need to consider to not only engage with the importance of language and intelligence of the creature, but also the significance of human reason and nature within the story is Patrick Brantlinger's "The Reading Monster" (468-476). Patrick Brantlinger brings forth important ideas regarding kinship, two educations or rather miseducation and disbelief to the creature's intelligence due to common modern depictions. The first idea I want to bring forth from Patrick Brantlinger's "The Reading Monster" is the idea of kinship or lack of kinship. Patrick Brantlinger argues that Victor Frankenstein as an abusive or criminally negligent parent of either gender, a father-creator in some sense rivalling god, or as a monstrous mother figure giving birth to a monster child and completely abandoning it (468). He further argues that the creature can be seen as a victim of neglect that can be read as the abandoned child, the oppressed masses, the unconscious or ID to Victor's ego and himself as demon or a devil (468). This brings forth many different ideas regarding the lack of kinship that are extremely interesting and brings forth another interesting argument, he believes that this lack of kinship leads to the monster developing an irrational excess of signification that transcends the boundaries of the norm. Due to the creature being neglected by his creator, he searches for a different family that can accept him and he ends up finding and vicariously enjoying human companionship of the blind old man De Lacey, his two children Agatha and Felix and Safie. Brantlinger argues that the creature longs to join this family, which represents everything Victor has rejected in his pursuit of science (471). However this potential adoptive family the creature longs to join completely rejects him in the end and thus he sets forth on a journey of vengeance and destruction, the monster begins to destroy Victor's family and friends as a sort of vengeance for not providing a family and completely neglecting him. The neglect and lack of kinship causes the monster to a kind of degeneracy and leads him to a path of destruction where the story is a negative family romance for both the creature and Victor Frankenstein. Even though the story unfolds a negative family romance it also sets forth two different pathways for education that are being followed, you have the pathway Victor Frankenstein follows and the other pathway, which is

being followed by the creature, thus this is the second idea of Patrick Brantlinger we need to consider.

The second idea that I will engage with is Patrick Brantlinger's argument for the two different educations or rather miseducation (469-470) but what does Patrick mean by two different educations or rather miseducation's? The two different educations or rather miseducation's are Victor's and the creature's. Victor follows in a path reading and research in isolation, where he is a sort of autodidact (469). Whereas in contrast to Victor, the creature follows in a completely different path of education through his acquisition of language and literacy, where the creature learns through his own experiences through his contact with knowledge (471). These two contradicting pathways of education within the book, which follows different ideologies at the core of things, where Victor is following the path of education in isolation whereas the creature through his self-education is trying to gain a more humane life by utilizing language as a tool. The creature does recognise its own monstrosity in a moment of reflection, but simultaneously discovers the notions of language, thus leading to the necessity of language to the creature. From this self-education, Patrick Brantlinger argues that Mary Shelley's sympathetically chaotic and homicidal creature develops reasoning to challenge his own creator Victor (472). The creature is in some sense its own author in the murderous text, but also a dual protagonist alongside Victor where he is the narrator of his own tale of terror targeted towards Victor. The creature narrates its own journey which is a filled with vengeance and murder due to being neglected, shunned and ostracized since the very moment he was born despite having inherently good intentions of love and affection (472-473). The greatest tool the creature holds within this path of vengeance and murder is the power of language, through his acquisition of language the creature becomes a reading and speaking monster.

The final argument Patrick Brantlinger presents in his text "The Reading Monster" which I will be engaging with, is the fact many readers are sceptical to the linguistic prowess of the monster. What has seemed the most difficult for many readers of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the creature's literacy, but why is it so hard for many readers to accept that very literacy of the creature? The reason why this is presumed to be so hard for many readers to accept is due to the modern depictions of the creature from Mary Shelley's

Frankenstein. Another reason why it is so difficult for people to accept the literacy of the creature is due to the different common depictions of monsters seen in modern society and in many modern depictions of monsters there is a common theme of them being devoid of human intelligence. This argument Brantlinger brings forth is extremely interesting to discuss and quite important, this is due to modern society not realising how important literacy of the creature truly is with all the depictions of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* there are. It holds an integral importance within the story, yet depictions of it within modern society is devoid of this important aspect of the story. Patrick Brantlinger argues that the obsessive erasure of literacy in modern retellings of *Frankenstein* on stage, in film and in other popular cultural forms, seems to stem from likeness to the "collective monstrosity" of the working class (473). Mary Shelley's creature can be viewed as "multiple", due to being made from various dead people's body-parts and is also considered an "artificial man" (473). This argument of Patrick Brantlinger brings forth stems both within the political and the psychological, and the psychological aspect of this argument is quite interesting to engage with as it sort of rationalises and explains potential reasons why literacy of the creature has been removed from modern depictions on stage, in film and in popular cultural forms. Throughout centuries since the book was written, the creature has gone from a creation perhaps even superior to a human in all but appearance to something more of a commonplace symbol of Halloween and horror and as a very simple monster devoid of human intelligence and literacy.

The final issue I will be engaging with to underline the importance of the intelligence of the monster, but also significance of human nature and human relation within the story, is Christa Knellwolf's "Geographic Boundaries and Inner Space: Frankenstein, Scientific Exploration and the Quest for the Absolute" (506-520). Within this critique by Christa Knellwolf some the main aspects she focuses on are the narrative frame, the significance of education and exploration of human nature. Like the other scholars Peter Brooks and Patrick Brantlinger that I have decided to engage with during this thesis, Knellwolf follows a somewhat similar line of inquiry into the importance of education, human nature and the narrative of the text which I haven't put as much emphasis on as they may have done. The first idea presented in Knellwolf's text I have decided to present is the importance of the narrative frame. Knellwolf argues that the frame narrative is closely related to Adalbert von Chamisso who was a prominent member of German Romanticism, was in the process of sailing around the world in the Romanzof expedition (years - 1815-1818). She believes that it

is an interesting coincidence that when Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, Adalbert von Chamisso whom I will refer to as Chamiasso (507), was on the Romanzof expedition. Chamisso went along with the expedition as a botanist due to feeling alienated with the contemporary society. Their mission was to find a Northeast Passage and he spent a lot of time sailing the arctic seas. According to Knellwolf it is very likely that the restless romantic poet turned botanic traveller inspired the narrative frame of *Frankenstein*. The interesting part of this is some of the similarities between the Romanzof expedition and the beginning of the *Frankenstein* book, in the *Frankenstein* it begins with a series of letter by Robert Walton, the captain of the naval expedition to the north pole, to his sister in England. His first letters proclaim the objective of discovering tropical lands in the hearts of the arctic, which also holds similarities with Chamisso's expedition where his goal was to tread on land that had never been imprinted by the foot of another man (507-508). This similarity is very interesting to analyse, although not as integral to my own thesis it is nevertheless a very interesting idea to mention, as it seems to be a very strange coincidence that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein's* beginning in the book has similarities with an expedition by a fellow scholar Chamisso. Although it is very possible that Mary Shelley was inspired by Chamisso's expedition to find a Northeast Passage when writing *Frakenstein*, it is also completely plausible that it is a coincidence as well.

The second idea I will engage with from Knellwolf's text is the significance of education, something that falls in a similar line of inquiry as both Peter Brooks who is very focused on the intelligence and eloquence of the creature and Patrick Brantlinger who also brings forth ideas such as education and miseducation of Victor Frankenstein and the creature. Knellwolf argues that the novel establishes a close relationship between the quest for knowledge and the act of striving for the absolute (509). This is quite apparent as the story unfolds with Victor Frankenstein and the creature both striving for knowledge and education in their own ways, Victor in isolation and the creature by self-experience, instructions of others and observation. Knellwolf argues that the loving dialogue between Safie and Felix De Lacey, not only aims to achieve moral and emotional maturity, but also seeks to gain living understanding of the mysteries behind creation. She also argues that *Frankenstein*, examines modalities of gratifying the desire to know the mysteries behind creation. This argument from Knellwolf is quite interesting to consider when analysing the importance of education in the story, you have different characters such as Victor, the creature, Safie, De Lacey and his

children striving for education, and it is apparent that it is deeply embedded within the story especially so for the creature. Knellwolf further argues that the context for scientific enquiry, the goal of study and exploration are all healthy aspects within the story. She further argues that it is healthy for humans to strive further for knowledge about one-self and the world in order to strive for a rich emotional life filled with self-development (509-510). Knellwolf argues that the scholarly focus on artificial life overshadows **Frankenstein's** the thematic psychological development of its characters. She believes that it makes it all the more important to recognise that one of the important strands of the story focuses on the growth and development of its characters. All three of the narrators have one thing in common (Walton, Victor Frankenstein and the creature), which is their loneliness and all of them strive to further develop their lacking education as much as possible (510-511). Although Knellwolf's idea of the significance of education is slightly different from Brantlinger's and Brooks' they all have similarities within them that they have all inquired about.

The final idea that I will engage with from Knellwolf's text is the significance of exploration of human nature. This is also something that hold similarities with my engagement with Peter Brooks' "What is a Monster?" where the true nature of language and the nature of human interaction is discovered by the creature. Knellwolf argues that proto-evolutionary theories have been deeply imbedded in the story as they discuss the "principle of life" (512). Knellwolf argues that the novel draws attention to the fact that a precarious lack of responsible foresight characterises our culture's valorisation of progress (514). She clearly believes that the text *Frankenstein* advocates certain boundaries to the application of scientific discoveries, however it does not advocate that curiosity should be restrained. This is application of science and the discovering the true meaning of human nature and life is something that Victor Frankenstein especially has a lot of interest towards as he was conducting the experiments to create artificial life with his creation of the creature. Knellwolf argues that when he is faced with his monstrous creation he recognised that the being created from the experiment deeply project his own innermost nature. The recognition that the key protagonist inner landscape has been become a wasteland does not imply that the original purity of human beings does not undergo a process of corruption (514). This argument is quite an interesting one as it presents the idea that all humans are born inherently good and pure and not all undergo a process of corruption like the creature does in *Frankenstein*. In *Frankenstein* the creature was born inherently good and had pure intentions, however throughout its

development, the negligence it faces and lack of kinship, it starts on a journey of vengeance and murder thus leading to it being corrupted.

In this section of the thesis, I will be presenting key ideas underlined while engaging with the scholars Peter Brooks, Patrick Brantlinger and Christa Knellwolf earlier in the thesis. The purpose of this section is to both present the key ideas and provide a close reading of two important passages I have carefully selected from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The purpose of these two passages is to underline two important ideas presented within the thesis, the first being the importance of education and language to the creature and the second key idea being human nature and human relations importance to the creature within Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. These two ideas hold great significance within the story and is deeply imbedded within the identity and development of the creature, thus leading to them being the most key elements I am presenting.

The first key element I will be discussing in this section of the thesis, is the importance of language and education to the creature. Throughout the story the more it unfolds the more apparent it becomes that language and education is largely thematised and holds significant importance to the creature. This is shown clearly when the creature begins to discover the true notions of language and begins to view it as a tool to be used. The fact that the creature has been able to interpret the true nature of language as something where the utterance of the words is not what is significant, but rather the context of which it is expressed. This realisation from the monster leads to it viewing language as a tool to have human interaction, and language is also a way for the creature to counteract the grotesque and hideous looks. Language becomes a medium in which the creature can become capable of experiencing human love and affection, thus leading to the creature wanting to educate itself further and further to compensate for its lacking nature and looks. To further underline the importance of language and education to the creature, this following passage shows the importance it holds to the creature and the emotions its able to feel when further developing its own language and education:

“While I improved in speech, I also learned the science of letter as it was taught to the stranger, and this opened before me a wide field for wonder and delight” (82)

This short passage as the creature begins to learn the notions of language, shows the significant role it portrays. As the creature is observing and learning language speedily in Safie's instructions, the creature begins to feel wonder and delight from being able to further educate itself. The emotions that the creature feels when learning language holds significant importance as there is finally something that the creature can enjoy developing after its neglect and isolation from its birth. Taking the creature's enjoyment of developing its education and language in mind, I believe that education and language is largely thematised within the book and presents the idea that striving for something such as education, understanding the mysteries behind creation and self-development is healthy for all humans to engage in. Having something to strive for and yearn for is something that is extremely important for humans, and for the creature becoming more educated and learning language becomes what it truly strives for. Although education and language are viewed as a tool for the creature to have normal human interactions without the prejudice it feels against its hideous looks and the isolation it is trying to overcome, it is something that the creature truly yearns for and wishes to further develop itself through those notions. As such I believe language and education is an extremely important key idea imbedded within the entire story and this rings true especially for the creature. The true nature of language becomes a way in which he can even challenge his own creator Victor Frankenstein and that makes it hold an even more important meaning considering the journey of vengeance and murder it embarks on after being rejected by his potential adoptive family. The creature seeks vengeance upon Victor Frankenstein and wishes to destroy his friends and family after being neglected by him.

The second and final key element I will be discussing in this section of the thesis, is the significance kinship, isolation and interaction with society of the creature. The creature is devoid of all human nature except for its eloquent language and brilliant mind, thus the monster wishes for the ability to have a normal family, to no longer be isolated and be able to function within society without the prejudice held against it for its hideous and disgusting looks. These human relations are something the creature is devoid of almost entirely within the story beginning all the way from its abandonment and negligence since its creation or rather birth. The creature from its very birth is isolated by society, neglected by his own creator Victor Frankenstein and has been completely incapable of functioning within normal society. The creature is completely alienated by the contemporary society which is why being able to attain these things becomes more important to the creature than anything else. The

creature has never been able to experience a feeling of kinship and belonging, never being able to feel human love and affection and has also never been able to function within society due to its isolation since the day of its creation. To further underline the significance human emotions and nature holds for the creature, this following passage clearly depicts the human emotions and nature of human interaction it so dearly wishes for:

“You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being, This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse” (101).

This short passage where the creature wishes for Victor to create another being such as himself, shows how much the creature really wishes for having a feeling of kinship and belonging, and being able to feel human love and affection. The creature desperately wants and demands that Victor creates another artificial being to fulfil the necessary notions of human nature and human interaction within its heart, this demand and desperate wish from the creature derives from its own beginning of creation and is something it has been wishing for, for a very long time. Unfortunately for the creature, Victor refuses to create another being such as the creature and even if he was being tortured, he would still deeply refuse to do so (101). Following the arguments which have been presented I believe the notions of human nature, human emotion, the isolation it feels, and lack of kinship are all important to how the story unfolds and is another key factor in the journey of vengeance on Victor Frankenstein it embarks on.

This reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* presents the importance of education and language as well as human nature and human emotions. Utilising the creature as an entry point to both examine and underline the importance of these key ideas. This pursuit of knowledge leads to the realization of the importance these key ideas hold throughout the story of *Frankenstein*; it is through these very ideas that I believe a large part of the story is thematised around. Language and education show its importance in both the creation of the creature, but also its very development. Language and education are the tools that gets imbedded within the creature as it yearns to further develop itself in that regard to counteract its monstrous and hideous looks. The creature discovers a purpose and a pathway that it can take through his eloquent language and brilliant mind, a pathway in which the creature believes it can attain what it truly wishes for. The true thing the creature wishes for is to be

devoid of its isolation, to experience kinship and feel human affection and love. These key ideas regarding human nature and human emotions are another important aspect when it comes to the development of the story, as it is deeply imbedded within its very own identity. Thus, following its development in education and language, as well as its deep yearning for natural human emotions of kinship, love and affection, and modes of socialisation it embarks on its own corrupted journey of vengeance and destruction. The true nature of this destruction and vengeance all comes from the neglect and isolation since the beginning of his creation, this all leads to the very discovery of the true nature of language and a deeper wish for further educating itself. The creature, which was born inherently good and with pure intentions, becomes more and more corrupted throughout the story and commits dreadful acts such as murder in its journey of vengeance and destruction.

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² Although i am uncertain whether it was necessary to provide all pages and different sources utilised within the book itself, I decided to add the scholars I engaged with in the Norton 2nd Critical Edition as well as the relevant page numbers their critiques can be found in the book I used.

