

with a lonely outsider status), the role of the narrator. This complex narrative frame gives the reader the experience of a story within a story and the perspective of three characters – Captain Walton, Frankenstein and his monster. These conflicting perspectives invite the reader to consider the real monster in the story – the nameless creature or Frankenstein himself.

## **Monstrosity**

Shelley's *Frankenstein* parodies the central defining myth of creation and becomes a study in monstrosity. A *monster* is deemed as something strange and unnatural. This understanding of monstrosity results from the characterisation of both Frankenstein and his creation. The creature's ugly appearance, unnatural manners and violence make him monstrous, while Victor Frankenstein's ambition, secrecy and selfishness make him a true monster, consumed by obsessive hatred of his creation.

Shelley invites speculation and the book has been endlessly reinterpreted. It can be viewed as the earliest version of the myth of the mad scientist, or the id on the rampage, or the proletariat run amok, or what happens when a man tries to create life without a woman.

The hubris lesson can be applied to all scientists whose experiments place them at the edge of what society considers acceptable. They struggle with finding the right balance between their desires, ethics and human progress. The mad scientist myth transcends technology and time, and has resulted in many different representations which capture reckless arrogance and self-destruction. These representations include atomic bombs, robots, computers and diseases. Martin Tropp, a Gothic scholar, sums up the impact of *Frankenstein* on literature by saying:

His creator has spawned a whole range of demented scientists, from Dr Strangelove to the Saturday morning cartoon madmen whose symptoms include unruly hair, a persistent cackle, and the desire to (dare I say it?) 'rule the world' ... Mad scientists and monsters are

figures in the modern myth; they reflect our fears about the future of man in a world of machines.<sup>1</sup>

In a wider sense, *Frankenstein* belongs to the literary tradition of eighteenth century literature. In his Introduction to a series of literary articles on *Frankenstein*, Fred Botting explains:

The connection between texts and monsters was well established before Shelley equated *Frankenstein* and the monster. 'Monster' was a standard, almost technical, term of criticism in the eighteenth century and one applied to *Frankenstein* itself: one reviewer called it 'a monstrous literary abortion'. The metaphor was frequently applied to Gothic novels, with none more deserving of the appellation 'monster' than M.G. Lewis's notorious *The Monk* which scandalised reviewers with its accounts of rape, murder, incest and diabolical intrigue. In circulation throughout the eighteenth century, the metaphor of monstrosity applied to any literary or cultural artefact that contravened the rules of Neo-classical aesthetics. Lord Kames outlined conventional rules of taste in his *Elements of Criticism*: 'every remarkable deviation from the standard makes accordingly an impressions upon us of imperfection, irregularity, or disorder: it is disagreeable, and raises in us a painful emotion: monsters, exciting the curiosity of a philosopher, fail not at the same time to excite a sort of horror.' Horror, pain and disgust were the proper responses to creations that failed to conform to Neo-classical aesthetic ideals of unified design, harmonious composition of parts in simple regularity and proportion. Frankenstein's overwhelming feelings of horror and disgust on seeing his hideously disproportionate creation come to life display the appropriate reaction to aesthetic deformity.<sup>2</sup>

*Frankenstein* was composed during the Romantic Movement in western literature and subverts the Neo-classical conventions.

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1 Martin Tropp, *Mary Shelley's monster: The Story of Frankenstein*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1976, pp.2-3.

2 Botting, Fred. *Introduction to Frankenstein* (New Casebooks series), Palgrave, New York 1995, p.5.