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Unification through Isolation

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley explores, among many other themes, the crushing effects of loneliness and isolation. Through the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who creates a monstrous abomination, Shelley presents loneliness as a unifying force that muddles the border between human and monster. Isolation is a focal experience for both the human characters as well as the monster. Loneliness is a trait expressed not only by the human characters but the monster as well, suggesting that Frankenstein's monster is more human than it outwardly appears. Through loneliness, Victor and his creation are inextricably linked, defying the line between human and monster. Although Frankenstein's monster is regarded within the novel as an abomination by humanity, there are emotional connections between the creature and humanity, mainly through a shared theme of loneliness.

Throughout the novel, isolation is displayed as a profoundly human emotion. It is an underlying yet ever present sentiment expressed in several of the human characters' stories. When Victor arrives in Ingolstadt, he is alone, without any "amiable companions" (33). In the pursuit of scientific knowledge, Victor perpetuates his loneliness by continually disregarding his family's letters and withdrawing from his past relationships. Victor isolates himself not only from humanity but also to the greater world of nature, dedicating all his effort to his secret project and books. Gradually, he comes to "forget those friends who were so many miles absent" (43). As a result of his isolation, Victor had nothing but his ambition to sustain him, driving the young scientist to defy nature. Robert Walton, a similarly ambitious captain en route to the North

Pole, is another human character who expresses a loneliness akin to Victor's. While writing to his sister, Walton admits to desiring "the company of a man who could sympathize with him [me]" (11). As expressed by both Victor and Walton's stories, companionship is vital for a human's well-being. Whereas Victor falls into an almost maniacal state while creating his creature in isolation, Walton craves the existence of a friend to share his struggles. Fellowship and having another existence to share pain is a form of healing whereas loneliness and isolation lead to despair. The human characters of *Frankenstein* demonstrate how loneliness is a profound human emotion with the capability of shaping individual life stories, even leading the lonely to agony and despair.

Frankenstein's monster, although openly detested by society as inhuman, experiences human emotions, including the same profound loneliness. However, the creature's solitude differs in crucial ways. Victor began his story surrounded by family and friends while Walton also has a family, notably his sister back home who he writes to. In comparison, the creature was abandoned at the moment of its "birth" and never once experienced having a family or friends. Both Victor and Walton willingly left behind their loved ones in pursuit of their own ambitions. Comparatively, the creature is condemned to its loneliness because it is "shunned and hated by all mankind" (136). Due to its horrific appearance the creature is unable to form any relationships despite its desire for connection. This desire for connection is another difference between Victor and the creature's loneliness. By watching the DeLacey family from afar, the creature learns about the love and warmth that friendship provides but simultaneously realizes the camaraderie it had been deprived of. The creature becomes determined to connect with the cottage inhabitants but is aptly met with horror and rejected. Whereas Victor is willing to abandon the relationships in his life, the creature is desperate to form even a single meaningful

relationship, commenting how he is “alone, and miserable” (135). While Victor’s isolation is self-inflicted, the monster is alone because human society shuns it, even its own creator. The creature repeatedly makes attempts to connect with humanity while Victor continually neglects his own relationships. Victor’s story is shaped by abandoning his friends and family in the pursuit of knowledge, the monster’s is about achieving knowledge while in the pursuit of a friend. Although loneliness is a trait shared by both the monster and its creator, Victor’s isolation is the result of his own actions or inaction while the monster’s loneliness was bestowed upon him unwillingly at conception.

Equally important to the differences between Victor and the creature’s loneliness are the many similarities. The desire for companionship while experiencing loneliness is a common want expressed by both the human characters and the monster. Victor, Walton, and the monster acknowledge the benefits that come alongside fellowship. From the perspective of every character in the novel, monster and human alike, there are warm aspects associated with friendship, such as bestowing “mutual pleasure “ (33) or causing “calm and serene joy” (48). Companionship is mutually beneficial, allowing both parties a friend to console and someone to confide in. To both humans and monsters, loneliness is recognized as a comparatively cold and cruel feeling. Then, when Victor and his creature are subjected to this cold loneliness, they resort to books and other forms of literature as a form of entertainment or comfort. To Victor, books about natural philosophy are like “treasures known to few” (28). The creature expresses similar reverence to the books it reads, notably “*Paradise Lost*, a volume of Plutarch’s *Lives*, and the *Sorrows of Werter*” (119). Each of these books had a profound impact on the creature, but *Paradise Lost* is especially notable when analyzing loneliness. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam was embraced by God and Eve was made as his companion. Although also artificially created like

Adam, the creature feels more aligned with the spiteful and cast away Satan, similarly rejected by their creators. The maleficent creature, having experienced the same abandonment as Satan, feels a complex hatred for Victor, his version of God. God and Satan, two figures separated by their ideals, are irrevocably linked, not unlike how Victor and his creature are tied together. Whereas camaraderie is as a healing force, represented by God's love of Adam and the human characters' desire for friendship, isolation is shown as a form of suffering which affects both humanity and monstrosity, compelling them both to seek comfort in sometimes similar methods and further blurring the border between monster and human.

Victor and his creation are strung together unlike any other two characters in the novel, even more so than the bible allegory underlines. The shared feeling of loneliness is a critical way in which the two characters are linked. In his solitary chamber, Victor works tirelessly to create life, granting both him and the newly born monster mutual companionship for a single brief moment before Victor abandons his creation. This first act of forced loneliness upon the creature begins a cycle of agony and loneliness for both the creator and the created. Ironically, as the monster routinely removes Victor's friends and family, the monster and Victor become the only two permanent figures in each of their lives. As their mutual loneliness deepens, both Victor and his creation come to accept their loneliness on a similar level. Following the deaths of William and Justine, Victor even begins preferring solitude over companionship, declaring that "when alone, he [I] could fill his [my] mind with the sights of heaven and earth" (153). The creature similarly forsakes human company, instead requesting Victor to make him a female companion of his own species. When Victor sabotages his work on the creature's companion, the monster retaliates by killing Elizabeth, again punishing Victor with the same forced loneliness he enforced upon the creature. The cycle of loneliness is further perpetuated. As the novel

progresses, Victor is repeatedly put in a similar situation to the monster, forced into a similar world of loneliness where vengeance and agony abound. When Victor abandoned his creation to a lifetime of loneliness he was then dealt the same cruel fate. Yet, through this shared sense of loneliness, the monster and Victor are brought closer together than ever before. The cycle finally ends when Victor dies, causing the creature to become truly alone in the world. Without its despised creator who stood as its last connection to humanity, the monster begins to regret its actions though it is too late. Full of remorse, the creature plans to commit suicide. Victor and his monster are two tragically connected characters tied together by their vicious cycle of enforced loneliness which results in both their deaths, again obscuring the border between the two seemingly distinct characters.

Through the recurring theme of loneliness, *Frankenstein* unites both humanity and monstrosity by sharing the motif of isolation and its detrimental effects. Despite loneliness being expressed as a profoundly human emotion, the monster too is able to express it. Though the creature experiences loneliness in a starkly different way from the human characters, its loneliness is also similar to the isolation experienced by Victor and Walton. The relationship between Victor and his creation is defined by a cycle of forced loneliness surrounding the two and taking control of their lives. Victor and the monster both express loneliness and are condemned to lives of solitude. What separates humanity and monstrosity is complicated by the remarkably different yet similar experiences with loneliness expressed by the monster and humanity. (1521 words)

Work Cited

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, et al. *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*. Penguin Books, 2018.