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An Excess of the Deficient: Attempts to Normalize the Body of Frankenstein's "hideous progeny"

The predominant scholarly discourse surrounding the body of Frankenstein's creature frequently connects his physical person to the body politic or the othered body of slaves and commodified human beings. While these parallels arguably exist, Victor's creation ought to be considered as more than merely a "demoniacal corpse" or a parallel to the contemporary diasporic narratives of slaves or of Semitic peoples post World War II (Shelley 59). Readers and critics alike tend to identify the creature's body with one that readers can draw parallels with, and thus rationalize or normalize it. This underscores one's ability—and desire—to read the creature's body one of two ways: either one identifies with the ugly body of Frankenstein's monster by seeing something human in it, or one recognizes its deviation from 'human' and thus rejects it. Both readings mark a

profound attempt to normalize the ugly body.

The creature may be considered horrific; the very components of his person burst from under the skin and he is an aberration when compared to a traditionally beautiful subject. However, his spare-part composition, the product of Victor's carefully "collect[ed] and arrang[ed] materials" indicates less about his deficiencies as a human being than it does about his creator's desires (54). Victor struggles to make something in his own image while simultaneously emphasizing his difference as a human being and reiterating his superiority. When considering the creature, it is impossible to ignore the fear and horror his body inspires, but this fear requires closer examination: one is afraid not because of the monster's difference, but because of his similarity. He presents both creator and reader with the possibility that by the end of the novel, each will be forced to affirm the creature's humanity rather than deny it. Shelley deliberately blurs the distinctions between man and monster, between the human body and the body of the other, to force the reader to examine conceptions of the normal body. By constructing the almost-human, Shelley asks readers to redefine normal, and challenges both the normal, medicalized body of the Romantic era as well as contemporary bodies. Following an attempt to create a working definition of the ugly body, distinct from the grotesque or commodified body and modelled in terms of deficiency and excess, this paper considers the presentation of the creature's physical self in *Frankenstein*, as well as the ways that Shelley attempts to unseat the reader's version of a normal body by aligning Victor with his creation as the novel progresses.

At the most rudimentary level, the ugly body is conceived of as a deviation from a standard, one that Youngquist asserts has its origins in "anatomy...[suggesting] that

medicine, at the historical moment of its emergence as a distinct institutional and professional practice, produces and enforces a cultural norm of human embodiment” (xi). The ugly body is born disfigured as the result of disease or genetic mutation. It can be categorized as ugly simply by virtue of a visible birthmark. The ugly body can start off normal and become ugly by accident, because of scarring, burns, or the unfortunate removal of a limb. However, as a dictionary definition illustrates, ugly things are, by extension, “offensive to the sight” or “morally offensive or objectionable” (Merriam Webster). By definition, ugly bodies transgress because of their physical deviation (be it anatomical or otherwise), but they also cross some moral boundary where normal is equated with good and non-normal with evil or wrong.

Returning to the idea of anatomy, it becomes obvious that the ugly body differs from the most fundamental understanding human beings have of their own bodies: that of bilateral symmetry. As Mark Turner explains, the unconscious understanding of bilateral symmetry begins at the level of the body and is abstracted to fit over every aspect of human existence and experience, indicating that humans “have a felt, schematic, embodied understanding of bilateral symmetry...[and that they] employ this schematic understanding constantly, moment to moment, in every aspect of...existence, to make sense of [the] world and to interact with it” (70). While this applies to human understanding of movement and interaction with the world on a daily basis, manifesting as balance, coordination and other motor skills, on a physical level, human beings seek out what is symmetrical and align it with concepts of beauty. It is this lack of aesthetic symmetry that impacts Victor and the reader so negatively.

When one recognizes that the creature is ugly, it is crucial to note that this ugliness

is not born of a deviation from the symmetry of form that Turner describes, but from the aesthetic discord of his features. The creature's actual body is not asymmetrical; his "limbs [are] in proportion, and [Victor selects] his features as beautiful," but the reader can visualize his "yellow skin [that] scarcely cover[s] the work of muscles and arteries beneath" as being literally stitched together (Shelley 58). It is the asymmetry of his *features* that is so striking: the "hair...of a lustrous black" and "teeth of pearly whiteness" are misaligned when paired with "watery eyes, that [seem] almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they [are] set" (58). The massiveness of the creature's frame "magnifies a faulty relationship between the inside and the outside of his body, as well as a lack of harmony on the surface of his body" (Cottom 60). This lack of harmony on the outside of the creature's body is what the reader perceives. From his introduction, the "miserable monster" is undeniably ugly and possesses asymmetrical features, attuning the reader to the fact that he is not a perfect copy of a human being and that his body cannot be wholly identified as a normal one (Shelley 59).

Understandably, the ugly or disfigured body is often seen as lacking; it is not physically congruent with what one possesses, and is thus categorized as deficient. Gigante describes it as a "gap in the beautiful object" (565), what Kant asserts exists as "a shadow form of the beautiful" (qtd. in Gigante 565). In the case of the creature, constructed with deficiencies rather than naturally born with them (like an equally deformed character, Hugo's Quasimodo), the lack is not only in the piecemeal mechanics that Victor uses to stitch him together; its origins lie in the *mind* of his creator. Like an artist whose skill is surpassed by his imagination, Victor has neither the talent nor the tools to construct what he sees in his mind, nor does he seem to possess a clear idea of

what his intentions are, beyond the re-animation of dead human tissue. From the creature's inception, Victor focuses on the abstract idea of "the secrets of heaven and earth...[either] the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man," but the reality of physically constructing a human being does not occur to him until he begins his endeavour (Shelley 39). In its earliest stages, the monster's ugly body is "a frame for the reception" of animation, denied even the status of a body (54).

Once the creature is endowed with life, he is his ugliest because he is no longer a scaffolding to support animation; he is an *animated*, embodied being. Victor believes that the monster is ugly "while unfinished...but when those muscles and joints [are] rendered capable of motion, [the creature becomes] a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived," because it ceases to be a thing and becomes a living being (59). This leap from framework to living being, with no clear aim in mind beyond animation, resembles the skewed reflection from a fun-house mirror and enacts a kind of physical *concordia discors*, a discordant harmony of features. The attempt to "infus[e] life into an inanimate body" is all that concerns Victor, rather than the creature's closeness to or distance from a recognizable human form (58). The creature's ugly body lacks firstly because it has to be artificially infused with life by its creator, and secondly because of the lack of thought that goes into the outcome of Victor's project, should he succeed.

Marie- Hélène Huet describes the phenomenon of creative intent within the framework of the maternal imagination, a concept easily linked to the artificial birth of Victor's creation. Examining Nicholas Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité*, Huet considers belief in monster birth and the notion that the mind of a pregnant mother can become so fixated on a representation (or an image) as to affect the face or form of the

offspring, despite the presence of a “legitimate father” (76). The child becomes an embodiment of its mother’s desire, just as the creature becomes a representation of Victor’s—his ugliness is a reflection of Victor’s “eagerness which perpetually increased,” the desire to instil something with life regardless of its appearance (Shelley 56). In *Frankenstein*, Victor is sole creator of his monstrous object, since he adopts the roles of both father and mother. While Huet’s descriptions are of aberrations, they are aberrations which exist free of any “paternal mark” (76). The child’s appearance is tantamount to infidelity, because it appears as the progeny of the mother’s preoccupation with an image of an object, rather than the product of a natural human union. It is this lack of natural paternal indication that renders such children so unusual and conveys their monstrous status.

Shelley’s text is strongly marked by an inversion of Huet’s theory: one cannot claim that the offspring lacks paternal marks in *Frankenstein*. The scars and stitching which barely hold the monster together are the very marks of his paternity and Victor’s signature as the creature’s craftsman. They also indicate the disparity between the creature’s ugly body and the othered body of a slave. Unlike a body commodified by the work it can perform or the revenue it can produce, the monstrous body of the creature is constructed for no greater purpose than the challenge the process presents to Victor. It stands apart from the body of a slave (or any body, for that matter) by virtue of being both organic and artificial, and exists as Victor’s triumphant conquering of the laws of nature and animation. The creature is composed entirely of human parts, but is not human in his construction. His body is deficient because he is “simultaneously animal and machine” (Engelstein 181). Although constructed in a mechanistic manner, he responds to stimuli in

a non-mechanistic fashion. He responds like a human being, muttering “inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkle[s] his face” (Shelley 59). When confronted with something so seemingly human, Victor focuses on the creature’s ugly body in an attempt to distance himself, declaring that “a mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch” (59). The ugly body distracts Victor from what is an obvious attempt on the creature’s part to affirm his humanity by attempting physical contact and speech.

As troubling as the creature’s humanity is, it does not prevent him from being continually viewed as deficient. He represents a physical lacuna, despite his Brobdingnagian proportions. However, one can equally conceive of his existence and his ugly body in terms of excess. He “spills out from his overstretched skin” (Gigante 569), endowed from the beginning with a “gigantic stature...about eight feet in height and proportionately large” (Shelley 54). From his very inception, the monster cannot be equated with human beings because he is a colossus with “the swiftness of lightning” and is thus larger and faster than anything else alive (200). His alterity can be understood as excess rather than deficiency, and, fittingly, he cannot be contained. He appears as “an excess of existence, and hence...to others as a chaotic spillage from his own representational shell” (Gigante 566). As Gigante explains, this shell cannot be explained by aesthetic discourse predominantly because the monster is ugly, and ugliness exists as a category outside of the aesthetic (567).

Huet effectively argues the opposite, claiming that it is this bounding within the limits of a system of aesthetic value that provides the spectator with a basis for comparison. Were the monster a perfect copy of the human form, it would cease to be an aberration and would thus destroy the “space which enables the spectator to compare the

model...with its image” (Huet 83). It is fundamental to one’s recognition of the monstrous and ugly that this framework of comparison exists, since without it, the ugly cannot exist. The perfect model does not create the anxiety that the constructed monster does throughout Shelley’s novel. The creature is necessarily “not even of the same nature as man,” but requires the frame of the human in order to define himself as not belonging to it and to assert himself as the other outside of it (Shelley 123).

To further delineate the ugly, it is also necessary to make a distinction between the ugly and the grotesque. Gigante dismissively states that it is not possible to confuse the two, for while the latter “combines both the comic and the horrific,” the former “lacks comic effect” (565). Gigante does not accurately elucidate the Romantic grotesque that Bahktin describes, and by not doing so fails to realize that it *does* contain an element of laughter that *is* present in Shelley’s text. The epitome of Bahktinian Romantic laughter, “cut down to cold humor, irony, sarcasm” and devoid of “its positive regenerating power” (Bahktin 38) is present in the hysterical bout of “unrestrained, heartless laughter” Victor experiences before having a fit (Shelley 62). It “frighten[s] and atonishe[s]” Clerval and stands in stark contrast to the conventional humour of the grotesque, that emphasizes the regenerative, levelling power of laughter (62). It does not draw Clerval and Victor together, but is instead a symptom of the mental and physical illness that sets Victor apart. He has “deprived [himself] of rest and health” and has become as mentally and emotionally alienated from humanity as he has been physically isolated from it (58).

The laughter that bursts out of Victor is not meant to signify Victor’s connection with Clerval or to draw the characters onto the same plane. It is not Shelley’s intent to make Clerval and Victor equal, but rather to force Victor closer to his creature and further

from Clerval and the rest of humanity. The Romantic grotesque, therefore, with its cold laughter, is wholly appropriate. It furthers the “tragic aspect of individual isolation” that Victor and the creature both experience, a theme central to *Frankenstein* (Bahktin 39). The story of Victor’s desire to construct his creature, followed by his anxieties, isolation, illness, near-madness, and death are clearly what Bahktin describes as the Romantic grotesque. Victor’s place in the world becomes “meaningless, dubious and hostile” (39). The concept of madness leading to social ostracism is “inherent to all grotesque forms,” and is undeniably played out in Shelley’s text from the creature’s construction to the death of Victor on the boat (39). The grotesque, seen through the Romantic lens, strengthens the parallel between Victor and his creature, but cannot be specifically applied to the creature’s ugly body.

Rather than being amalgamated into the category of grotesque, the ugly body stands quite literally apart from others, most obviously through its isolation. Despite the creature’s belief that the De Laceys will “compassionate” him once they realize how morally upstanding he is despite being “endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome,” the monster remains isolated for the majority of the novel (133, 123). His interactions with people, most notably De Lacey and young William, end poorly. They emphasize that the ugly body is a threat to be driven off, even by the simple assertion of a child, or the unseeing eyes of the blind De Lacey. William claims that the creature “wish[es] to eat [him] and tear [him] to pieces,” seeing him as a danger at best (144). De Lacey unwittingly others him by telling the creature that he would be happy to “be in any way serviceable to a human creature,” a category into which the reader knows that the monster cannot fit (136). In both situations, interactions with human beings result in

negative and unproductive outcomes: the creature kills William and is driven away from the De Laceys. The ugly body “threatens to consume and disorder the subject” (Gigante 569), either by literally “tear[ing it] to pieces,” or by “destroying the objects that obstruct” it (Shelley 138). In this instance, the creature destroys human subjects and the physical structures of their society—their homes. When that fails, he chooses to destroy himself with the knowledge that human “abhorrence cannot equal that with which [he] regard[s] himself,” his self-loathing is far greater than anything a human being can offer (224).

In a larger context, beyond the human characters and their homes, the creature threatens the structure and supremacy of human culture. Because of the larger threat to humanity, the creature becomes othered. Victor’s behaviour illuminates the othering process; he refuses to build his creation a mate, despite the fact that the monster is “a rational creature” possessed of everything human beings have that grant them supremacy, save a physically normal body (Shelley 219). Victor’s “duties towards the beings of [his] own species [have] greater claims to [his] attention, because they [include] a greater proportion of happiness or misery” (219). This creates a barricade between Victor and his offspring; he and the monster are clearly *not* of the same species and even at the end of the text, a weak and dying human’s desire has greater value than that of an unnaturally born creature—it is Victor’s tale that is recalled by Walton more than the creature’s, and Victor who “seek[s his creature’s] extinction, that [the monster] might not cause greater wretchedness,” lending his death a kind of nobility that the creature’s arguably does not possess (225).

To further classify the ugly body is to consider what it means to fall outside the conventional realm of normal. Georges Canguilhem’s *On the Normal and the*

Pathological makes the distinction between anomaly and abnormality, claiming that

in a strictly semantic sense, “anomaly” points to a fact, and is a descriptive term, while “abnormal” implies reference to a value and is an evaluative, normative term; but the switching of good grammatical methods has meant a confusion of the respective meanings of anomaly and abnormal.

“Abnormal” has become a descriptive concept and “anomaly” a normative one. (73)

For the purpose of discussing the creature’s body, the two terms are inverted at best, as Canguilhem describes, but in modern thought they are conflated and “reduced...to the category norm/normal” (Huet 75). The narrow pairing of “norm/normal,” cannot accommodate the ugly body, and illustrates Youngquist’s notion of the “intersection of flesh and culture during the Romantic period” in which “singular bodies become subject to regulatory norms” (xiv). The construction of the creature ties him intrinsically to the normalized body from which he deviates. While “anomaly” indicates a *qualitative* measure and “abnormal” a *quantitative* one, their overlap in the modern mind creates a new category where the abnormal swallows the anomalous without accommodating it. Things that are anomalies automatically become abnormalities. Difference now (and in the Romantic period) implies deviation and unnaturalness instead of a descriptive category. Viewed in this light, the ugly body ought to be considered as an anomaly; there is something *about* that body which makes it different. It is through the processes of normalizing and othering that one makes the creature’s body an abnormality, that which deviates from an implied standard, and it is Victor who constructs both the standard and the body that deviates from it.

The creature's self-understanding is coloured by this single vision of himself as abnormal rather than solely anomalous; he sees his own "form [as] a filthy type of [the human], more horrid even from the very resemblance" (133). While this can be interpreted as the creature using Victor's standard to measure himself (which indeed it is), it also illustrates that the ugly body is never seen, even by the rational mind that inhabits it, as anything but a perverted form of the natural human body. It is only when the creature discovers that he "terrifie[s]" himself with his own reflection that he becomes "convinced that he [is] in reality the monster" that others see and fear (116). Ovid's Narcissus, recognizing his own reflection, can "see through [his] own image" to the self-desire that he cannot overcome (600). The monster, by contrast, is left feeling "unable to believe that it....[is him] reflected in the mirror," transfixed not by his beauty, as Narcissus is, but dismayed and appalled by his own appearance (116).

The moment when the creature looks at his own face is itself a reflection, a perversion of the Narcissus story. While Narcissus is "maddened by grief" for the unattainable nature of his own physical beauty, the creature is captivated by his own hideousness (616). Narcissus dies for want of himself; the creature arguably dies for want of a normal body. The monster's ugliness is his undoing, and teaches him to look "upon [humans] as superior beings, who [will] be the arbiters of [his] future destiny" (117). The creature turns to people, whom he considers his betters, to direct his life and improve his existence, despite the fact that he cannot fit inside their categories. As he is malformed in body, he is "unformed in mind...dependent on none and related to none," and seeks direction from the normalized framework of which he cannot become an integral part (131).

Following his subsequent rejection by the De Lacey's, the creature comes to hate himself, and his self-hatred is in part the mechanism that breeds his hatred of others. He "declare[s] everlasting war against" humanity and asserts his vengeful feelings for his creator (138). As circumstance would have it, the creature's ugly body may not be beautiful, but it *is* preternaturally strong, providing him with a means to his revenge. He discovers that he can "create desolation" and that human beings are "not invulnerable" to the damage he can inflict (144). The ugly body becomes a vehicle for fear because it "cannot inspire love" and finds power and direction in its deviation from the standard and in its capacity to frighten (148).

The ugly body's ability to inspire fear has two effects: while asserting the ugly body's difference and deviation, fear also reinforces the normal body's sense of entitlement and its right to other (and to distance itself from) the ugly body. "Deviance," Youngquist explains, "both disturbs and intensifies the authority of that norm" (xii). The creature's deviation from the normal human body is frequently made apparent in the novel; he is called a "fiend," "wretch," "abhorred devil," and countless other unflattering terms (94, 101, 104). Because he cannot alter negative human perceptions of his ugly body and harmonize his existence with humanity, the creature is forced to cast himself in the role of subordinate, presenting Victor with a description of the lifestyle he and his mate will lead, ostracized from human society. This lifestyle is characterized wholly by its appearance as "peaceful and human," existing within the bounds of the normal despite the non-normal nature of its subjects (149). The only condition inhibiting such a lifestyle is the fact that the creature is *not* viewed as human or peaceful, having admitted that he considered the possibility of destroying the home of the De Lacey's and "glutting [himself]

with their shrieks and misery” (138). His choice to burn the cottage in a fit of “insanity...that burst[s] all bounds of reason and reflection” and his feelings of “revenge and hatred” that he does not “strive to control” suggest that he is human enough to feel sympathy and to long for compassion, but not quite human enough to control the chaos of his impulses (140). The lack of control initially suggests humanity, but the excessive destruction the creature causes suggests lack of discipline and brute force.

Deprived of the possibility of ever becoming equal, the ugly body is presented with several alternatives. It can acknowledge its difference and relish its capacity to cause fear, which the creature eventually does; it can attempt to become like the commodified body of the slave and compensate for its hideousness by being subservient; or it can become relegated to the realm of medical curiosity. Any of these choices removes at least a portion of the threat that the ugly body represents. The creature chooses the first alternative and not the latter because the latter would constitute a decrease in power. Having been a “poor, helpless, miserable wretch,” incapable even of articulation, the creature is not eager to pursue a position that will render him nearly powerless again (105-6).

Once he realizes that his hideousness (and the fear of having it revealed) is problematic to Victor because he is a “fiend whom [Victor has] let loose” among human beings, he uses his ugliness as a weapon (94). This moment stands out sharply in the text as one of the few instances where the ugly body is commodified by the one who possesses it: a kind of self-exploitation. Ugliness or anomaly is more often exploited through spectacle, a format that furthers the othering of the ugly body by displaying it specifically to emphasize its deviation. Such arrangements serve as a reiteration of the superiority of the normalized body. Here, the ugly or deviant body is empowered through its self-

exploitation, a display of its difference on its own terms.

The display of the ugly body as a spectacle enacts a kind of castration; it neutralizes the threat the ugly body poses to the normalized one, and is usually for the gain of someone other than the ugly body itself. One thinks of the P.T. Barnum-esque presentation of Caroline Crachami, the Sicilian Dwarf, whom the public could “view...for a shilling—[and] handle...for another” as an example of the most basic kind of exploitation of bodily anomaly (Youngquist xii). The monster, by contrast, uses his own body’s extraordinary physical strength and undeniable ugliness to bully Victor into constructing him a mate. He makes his body a commodity not for the work it can perform but for potential damage it can inflict on Victor, his loved ones, and humanity as a whole. The monster can frame Victor for the murders of William and Elizabeth, but by the end of the text, he drives Victor to madness and to the ends of the earth, effectively destroying his creator with his potential to cause harm. He capitalizes on the value of his ugly body as a fearful and destructive object rather than a subjugated spectacle for individuals to stare at for coins.

Spectacle as a means of displaying the ugly body brings the binary pair of normalized/ugly bodies into sharper focus; the difference from the normal is displayed like a specimen for one to look at, but also as an object from which to distance oneself. Nevertheless, it also underscores the importance of the body, medicalized, exhibited, or otherwise, that one uses as a point of reference for what is normal. At the most fundamental level, human beings desire to “define the normal through the body,” and to some extent, definition is sought by exploring and rejecting othered bodies to emphasize a presence-through-absence, or negative definition (Wick 1). The human being defines itself

in terms of what it *is not*. As Wick illustrates, it is not just “the unnaturalness of the monster” that is revealed through its construction (3). The “unnaturalness of the human that insists on creating” monstrosities and insists on constructing the designations that make its creation other is of more importance to the reader because one can more readily align oneself with Victor and his normal body (3). Through the creation of a monster, Victor articulates his need to designate a self that is distanced from what he creates. In creating a monster, Victor is attempting to identify *himself* as much as an other, by showing what he (and human beings) are *not*.

Creating this othered body helps to emphasize the normal body, to define that which exists, without thought, as normal. Normalizing is often achieved through acts of violence—one kills the other in order to assert his or her dominance. In Victor’s case, the desire to control or destroy the monstrous other that he has made is his method of othering. When he flees his laboratory and runs into Clerval, he realizes that he “dread[s] to behold [his] monster; but [he] fear[s] still more that Henry should see him” (61). From the outset, he is attempting to protect a larger cross-section of society, beginning with himself and his loved ones. Beyond the realization that he has “turned loose into the world a depraved wretch,” one he has “formed, and endued with life” and is on some level responsible for, he is also aware that it has implications beyond him (78). He must remove the ugly body in order to protect human identity and reiterate its dominance and normative value.

While these two goals are closely related, they both serve the greater function of self-reflexively justifying and perpetuating the right of the human to other. Othering asserts the differences between bodies, and justifies “whatever might be necessary to enact

those distinctions” (Wick 3). For Victor, this justification takes the form of

wanderings...which are to cease but with life. [He has] traversed a vast portion of the earth, and [has] endured all the hardships which travellers, in deserts and barbarous countries, are wont to meet...[he has] lived...and prayed for death. But revenge [keeps him] alive [he] dare[s] not die, and leave [his] adversary in being. (Shelley 205)

The “revenge” that Victor has not yet satisfied is the culmination of othering the ugly body, either by destroying it or destroying himself, Victor will find an end. He is willing to sacrifice his own life in order to protect the immediate safety of the people around him, but also the safety of the larger human population. Ironically, however, this is not self-sacrificing behaviour: it is Victor’s egomaniacal desire for knowledge that leads to the construction of the monster, and all activity from the moment of animation has been Victor protecting himself. This safeguarding leads to dissociation from his family, the deaths of Elizabeth and Clerval, and causes Victor’s complete isolation from any being resembling the identity he is trying so desperately to shield and simultaneously construct. He fights for the normalized body and ironically “absent[s himself] from all” in the process (157). In one sense, Victor guards the normalized body at the expense of *his* normalized self, the self that interacts with other normal human beings. His work becomes a kind of “slavery,” enacting a reversal of the master/slave dialectic in which the monster now commands Victor (157). In another sense, Victor sacrifices his individual, normalized body to uphold man’s right to other the ugly. His “cheek [grows] pale with study, and [his] person...become[s] emaciated with confinement” (55). As much as he resembles a starving prisoner, Victor begins to resemble a living corpse, having sacrificed the normal

body to his scientific pursuits and, once the creature is built, the protection of other human beings.

The deaths of both Victor and his creation leave the reader uncertain whether or not Victor has succeeded in othering his monster. From the moment of his animation, the monster is denied the most rudimentary possession that makes a person belong: he is not given a name. In film adaptations, the “images of Dr. Frankenstein and his creation have fused into one, with the monster now taking the name of its creator,” emphasizing the modern imagination’s incapacity to untangle man from monster and prompting one to consider whether or not it can be done (Helman 14). While being unnamed does not allow the creature his own, separate identity, it does tie him inextricably to his creator’s, a fact that is reiterated in the text through the parallels of isolation and loneliness felt by both characters. The barren Orkneys where Victor makes the creature’s companion are “scarcely more than...rock[s]” parallel the “desert mountains and dreary glaciers” which are the creature’s “refuge” (168, 103). Both men are alone in the wilderness in a physical sense, but the creature, with his ugly body, and Victor, with his ugly mind, are both isolated inside their own existences. Unlike the creature, Victor can enjoy the presence of a friend, but by the end of the novel realizes that people “interfere with the solitude [he] covet[s] for...his task,” and is left alone in his pursuits (158).

Shelley illustrates the isolation both characters feel with palpable irony. Victor’s toils require isolation, yet the fruit of his labour is meant to alleviate the loneliness of his creature. When stranded on the Orkneys, forced to construct the monster’s female partner, he “walk[s] about...like a restless spectre, separated from all it love[s], and miserable in the separation” (174). Had one read this passage without knowing its placement in the

text, it could easily be the creature speaking, but it is Victor's voice pronouncing his loneliness. In this moment, as in many others, the distinction between the two characters dissipates. In his attempt to other his creation, Victor is drawn ever-closer to the ugly body. The creature is continually a construction outside of him, separated from Victor until, like Kant's "shadow form of the beautiful," he becomes a hulking adumbration of the normal. Victor and his creature become indiscernible from each other, each embodying a distorted doppelgänger of the other.

Broadly speaking, this aspect of the text is itself a means of reinforcing the other as a threat; the creature is in part responsible for driving Victor to madness and eventually causes his death. In the attempt to construct ugliness as something human-but-not, one blurs the distinctions between the two. It is ultimately this sameness that frightens more palpably than anything else. Based on this, Wick analyses the category of the "abhuman," a term coined by the horror novelist William Hope Hodgson (7). Abhuman is the epitome of human fear of the other; it is not the same as human, nor is it strikingly different, but treads a narrow space in between. It offers the reader possibility and does not disguise the threat of the othered body. The fear of the ugly body is contained not in the obviousness of its difference, but in its similarity to the human form. Human fear of the ugly or monstrous construction is not that it is radically different, but that it exists, as Hodgson puts it, as a "parody of the human" (qtd. in Wick 8). It is fearful not because it is not human, but because it may be just that. In her discussion of Hodgson's "Demons of the Sea", Wick emphasizes the sailors' capacity to identify the monsters they encounter as "relate[able] instantly to the human," discernable not for their difference but rather for their similarity to human beings (8). Even before they are sighted, the monsters sound eerily human,

almost human but found “wanting...[and] threatening,” not unlike the undead zombies of popular horror films (8).

Victor’s creation possesses a disharmony of human and non-human characteristics that leaves both reader and creator constantly unable to concretely accept or reject his humanity. He craves “admiration” from the DeLaceys for admiring their good qualities; like so many, he wants to be recognized as one who distinguishes the good in others and is himself recognized and valued as being good (133). He recognizes the fact that his physical ugliness leaves him “solitary and abhorred” and so attempts to compensate with characteristics that he knows human beings value (133). Faced with this portrait, one finds oneself trapped in the binaries of human and non-human, or human and abhuman: the creature’s large stature makes him too massive to be a man, yet his body as a whole is not disproportionate. He possesses reason and yet seems unable to control feelings of violence or passion. Despite his lack of control, however, he cannot be dismissed as childlike, relegated to the popular Boris Karloff portrayal, “lumbering through the village streets like some huge and uncomprehending hydrocephalic child” (Helman 14). He is a rational creature, one that Victor notes proves his “fine sensations”; Victor feels he “owe[s] him all the portion of happiness that it [is] in [his] power to bestow”—he feels an obligation to his creation, due in some part to the humanity of what he has constructed (148). Again and again, the reader is forced to contemplate the gap between human and other that narrows after each encounter, but never closes. It is this lack of closure that is so fundamental to the monster’s construction, refusing to be classified as either one thing or another.

The ugly body in Shelley’s text is subject to any number of binaries, many of them simultaneously. It is human and abhuman, rational and irrational, organic and mechanical,

existing both inside the frame of aesthetic discourse while simultaneously throwing itself against the discourse's boundaries in an attempt to escape. The creature's body, composed of spare parts, is made up of that which is rejected and deceased, but those parts are also *human* despite their abhuman qualities. His body is the stitched-together pieces of men, and cannot be discarded as merely monstrous. *Frankenstein* is the act of "alterity...shift[ing] uncomfortably close to the self," forcing the reader to re-examine what is normal, and what is unconsciously categorized as such without hesitation (Wick 11).

In Shelley's text, the ugly body is a fragmented human identity, and it turns its gaze not only onto the reader, but onto itself. Faced with the possibility of having to accept the almost-human, Shelley must set the monster adrift and allow it to be sucked back into the darkness of nature at the end of the novel. She must do this not because of its ugliness and distance from the human, but because of its kinship to it. The creature's ugly body, unable to conform or be denied, leaves the reader feeling disquieted and upset by some *thing* that is not one thing or the other, but bears a striking resemblance to a human being without being accepted as one.

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