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The Culture of the Body: The Beautiful, Sublime, and Ugly in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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THE CULTURE OF THE BODY: THE BEAUTIFUL, SUBLIME, AND UGLY IN
MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses Edmund Burke's concepts of the sublime and beautiful to consider social categories within *Frankenstein*. Reading the creature as excluded from the aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful, the thesis locates Frankenstein's creation within a category all its own: the ugly. Since the creature is clearly left out of the category of the beautiful, one might imagine he could be comprehended under the classification of sublimity; however, he actually produces horror and disgust. The final section reads the creature's label as ugly as a reflection on the classifications of the beautiful and the sublime. Looking at representations of beauty and sublimity in the novel, the thesis shows that the rejection, violence, and abuse towards the creature throughout *Frankenstein* reflects the structural boundaries that keep bodies deemed unacceptably different from participation in a social world.

DEDICATION

To my grandfather, my idea of beautiful. To the soul who continues to wander this earth watching over us. To one of the people who made me who I am today. You are loved though you are lost. You remain my inspiration, my guardian angel, and my heart and soul. I love and miss you every moment of every day. Thank you, Grandpa. Until we meet again.

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INTRODUCTION

Ugliness is often defined in opposition to beauty. This definition of ugliness, however, provides little understanding of the experience of encountering it. In *Frankenstein*, the creature's¹ monstrosity is inseparable from his perceived ugliness. The creature is undeniably identified as ugly, but why is he considered ugly and what does his ugliness mean? While ugliness is an aesthetic category it is also a cultural and social one, and *Frankenstein* offers a way to consider not only the aesthetic but also the social and cultural aspects of what constitutes the ugly. This thesis explores ugliness through the lens of Edmund Burke's aesthetic categories of beauty and sublimity, showing the way that these aesthetic categories determine the social world that the creature attempts to occupy but from which he is consistently excluded.

Denise Gigante's "Facing the Ugly: The Case of 'Frankenstein'" describes ugliness as "that which disgusts; and it disgusts because it 'insists'" (Gigante 577). She explores ugliness as a highly embodied, interpersonal experience that implicates the person who sees and recognizes ugliness as much as it involves the ugly person. She states that ugliness in *Frankenstein* is less of an aesthetic experience than a question of survival. For Gigante, the creature embodies "the repressed ugliness at the heart of an elaborate symbolic network that is threatened the moment he bursts on the scene, exposing to view his radically unscripted existence" (567). Gigante's essay addresses not just monstrosity, but the ugliness that precedes and predetermines monstrosity.

¹ In using the word creature, I am taking the name, which he is given in the novel, and using it as a way to discuss him as a character. Among scholars who discuss *Frankenstein*, it is common to use "creature" and it is the only name given to him that does not have a derogatory connotation.

Gigante argues that *Frankenstein's* creature is not in fact deformed but is ugly; deformity and ugliness are not interchangeable terms. The ugly, Gigante concludes, threatens to consume and disorder its subject as “the absolute other of the system” (583). While Gigante’s examination of beauty and ugliness provides an in depth look into encountering ugly bodies, this thesis pushes further by exploring the social and cultural implications of ugliness found exclusively in the creature’s isolation from the already established social categories. It is more than merely the creature’s appearance that defines him. His ugliness is perpetuated by the social culture to which he does not have access.

In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, ugliness disrupts social categorization. The creature’s ugly body is a stigmatized² body excluded from respective social categories. The creature’s body is unable to be classified into a social category; consequently, the creature comes to realize his exclusion after being rejected by numerous characters. By looking at the creature’s rejection, further implications can be drawn about bodies and social classifications: “[the] body provides insight into the fact that all bodies are socially constructed—that social attitudes and institutions determine far greater than biological fact the representation of the body’s reality” (Siebers 737). Analyzing how the creature’s body is viewed illuminates the fact that the creature is brought into a world where he is not beautiful or sublime and is never allowed access to either category. Access to these categories is the basis for social acceptance, and the creature’s access would mean

² Disability studies scholars define stigmatization as “occur[ing] only when the social control component is imposed, or when the undesired differentness leads to some restriction in physical and social mobility and access to opportunities that allow an individual to develop his or her potential” (Coleman-Brown 155).

reworking the novel's social classifications. Consequently, in order for the creature to gain access to the categories, he must provoke feelings or passions associated with the sublime or beautiful; however, upon creation, the creature is unable to do so because he defies traditional body standards and subsequently disrupts the social order. The standards outcast the non-aesthetically pleasing and therefore, the creature threatens the existence of the beautiful and sublime categories that rely on these body standards to maintain order through classifications. These classifications are then used by observers to categorize the beautiful and the sublime while also isolating the ugly. Since the creature is a singular being, his ugliness is determined because of his failure to be conceptually classifiable. Thus, it is the creature's failure to function in these categories that shows the absurdity of social categorization.

Although Victor has a connection to the domestic and the beautiful, first through his mother Caroline then through Elizabeth, his efforts to create a beautiful being ultimately fall short. Accordingly, the description upon the creation of the creature reveals Victor's initial intentions to create something that could be considered beautiful, but ultimately becomes something ugly:

His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful.

Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in

which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley 35)

Victor's desire for the creature to have beautiful features fails, resulting in the creature's ugly "watery eyes" and "straight black lips" (35). Additionally, though "his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing," something that could be understood to be beautiful becomes something ugly. Acknowledging the creature's imagined beauty further speaks to his ultimate consideration as a being outside the social system. Since the creature is a singular being, his ugliness cannot fit into existing social structures. The creature's animation, then, exposes the illogicality of the social categories:

the beauty of the whole can arise only from a pure vital principle within, to which all subordinate parts and limbs will then conform. The parts, in a living being, can only be as beautiful as the animating principle which organizes them, and if this 'spark of life' proceeds, as it does in Victor's creation from tormented isolation and guilty secrecy, the resulting assembly will only animate and body forth that condition and display its moral ugliness. (Baldick 175)

Victor deliberately selects the creature's features to be beautiful, but his intentions originate from "tormented isolation and guilty secrecy" (175). This "tormented isolation" (175) can be seen early in the novel during Victor's childhood as well as while he is in college at Ingolstadt. Victor's self-inflicted isolation, in turn, transfers to his creation and constructs the creature's ugliness. The established social constructions do not have room for representations of ugliness; therefore, the creature's ugliness becomes a placeholder and not a derogatory description. His ugliness results from his inability to be classified as

beautiful or sublime because he does not inspire the passions associated with either category. The observers who define the creature's body as ugly present him as a different being from the other characters within the novel in an attempt to protect social order. The novel's already socially categorized characters are threatened by the different being that the creature represents. Furthermore, the creature turns into an example of how ugliness is treated in a society defined by beauty. However, the creature belongs in a new category only defined by himself because he is unclassifiable. While the beautiful and sublime categories work together, the creature does not meet the qualifications to be included in either category. Consequently, the creature's inability to function as beautiful or sublime forces him into isolation.

EXPLANATION OF BEAUTY

The rejection the creature experiences comes from traditional beauty classifications. Beautiful objects, in order to be categorized as such, must meet standards agreed upon by observers. According to Edmund Burke, beauty is “that quality, or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it” (112). These qualities are represented in the novel’s female characters. Specifically, the value placed on beauty is clear in Victor’s mother Caroline, his father’s choice of a bride, and in the description of Elizabeth upon her adoption. When discussing her, Victor describes Elizabeth in relation to her beauty: first, her childhood beauty, and then her womanly beauty. It is obvious that there is a value of acceptance and inclusion based upon beauty, evident in Elizabeth’s adoption by Caroline and her treatment throughout the novel. Addressing the value placed upon beauty expounds the creature’s lack of beauty. By using multiple characters, Shelley “defends, and yet skeptically attacks, domestic and social tranquility” (Bowerbank 419). Beauty and domestic depictions in *Frankenstein* emphasize the importance of the order that the social categories establish. Seemingly innocent and fragile female characters, Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine, portray the beautiful and beloved objects that function to define the beauty category.

The beautiful, elite bourgeois that Caroline Frankenstein represents contrasts starkly with the creature’s “dull yellow eye,” “dun white sockets,” and “straight black lips” (Shelley 35). While Caroline is perceived through the passions associated with beauty by multiple observers, the creature also identifies Caroline as the standard

beautiful woman. Looking at a portrait that young William Frankenstein possesses, the creature aligns Caroline's beauty against his own ugliness:

As I fixed my eyes on the child, I saw something glittering on his breast. I took it; it was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned; I remembered that I was forever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one or expressive of disgust and affright. (100)

Her "dark eyes," "deep lashes," and "lovely lips" present a stereotypical beautiful woman. Beauty, for the creature, produces both dismay and comfort because it is in this moment of beauty's recognition that he also recognizes his own ugliness. He understands he should benefit from beauty and, for a while, thinks he can have it but then comes to realize that he will never get to possess beauty. The creature also knows he will never be able to evoke the feelings that beauty produces in an observer. He recognizes his exclusion from the comforts that beauty produces: "I was for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow" (100). The ugly, poor, and neglected creation is unique because he does not receive affection from beautiful beings.

The gendered dichotomy in the novel, thus, creates the ideal feminine beauty. In *Frankenstein's* domestic situation, Shelley gives us multiple representations of beauty. The very family that Shelley sets forth as the embodiment of beautiful perfection reproduces the

reliance on beauty to maintain social order. The ideal beauty label forces Caroline to submit herself to the care and control of her husband, and gives Victor his “pretty present,” (21) Elizabeth, to perpetuate domestic perfection. Both women yield not only their autonomy, but also their lives for “domestic affections” (40). These affections link only with the domestic and women’s role within the sphere.

The ideal woman’s role is ultimately a subjugated role, a woman whose needs are ignored in favor of the people around her. Victor describes Elizabeth’s character as being someone who “was at the time the most beautiful child” and “possessed an attractive softness” (20). While many characters are described by their beauty, Elizabeth embodies the pinnacle of beauty; however, Elizabeth’s beauty comes from her ability to become Caroline’s reincarnation: “I have often heard my mother say, that she was the most beautiful child she had ever seen, and showed signs even then of a gentle and affectionate disposition” (20). Her ability to be subjugated and fit the beauty standard carries more importance than anything else. Caroline recognizes that Elizabeth conforms to these beautiful standards and will make a respectable wife for Victor. Elizabeth’s beauty, in relation to her promising domestic capabilities, makes her attractive to Victor who explains:

She was docile and good tempered, yet gay and playful as a summer insect. Although she was lively and animated, her feelings were strong and deep, and her disposition uncommonly affectionate. No one could better enjoy liberty, yet no one could submit with more grace than she did to constraint and caprice. Her imagination was luxuriant, yet her capability of application was great. Her

person was the image of her mind; her hazel eyes, although as lively as a bird's, possessed an attractive softness. Her figure was light and airy; and, though capable of enduring great fatigue, she appeared the most fragile creature in the world. While I admired her understanding and fancy, I loved to tend on her, as I should on a favourite animal; and I never saw so much grace both of person and mind united to so little pretension. (20)

Elizabeth models traditional feminine characteristics: she is beautiful, sweet, and nurturing. After Elizabeth's initial portrayal as "the most beautiful child" (20), her character never really develops. In fact, her appearance defines her; therefore, Elizabeth functions as the novel's ideal feminine representative that will stifle itself for other's benefit. Victor sees that people love Elizabeth for her beauty, which also becomes the reason he loves her. To him, she is "the most fragile creature in the world" (20).

Moreover, beauty derives from fragility. Elizabeth is "docile and good tempered" (66), yet "gay and playful" (66); these seemingly paradoxical qualities underscore Elizabeth's role as the model woman whose sole duty concerns tending to her husband and family.

Justine, like Elizabeth, also becomes another Caroline figure. Justine is, like the other women, an ideal beauty who is domesticated, virtuous, passive, and devoted to others. Due to the fact that she is a beautiful woman, she takes on the burden that society deems she must. By framing Justine for William's murder, the creature turns her into an inactive, docile victim of beauty:

I left the spot where I had committed the murder, and was seeking a more secluded hiding-place, when I perceived a woman passing near me. She was

young, not indeed so beautiful as her whose portrait I held, but of an agreeable aspect, and blooming in the loveliness of youth and health. Here, I thought, is one of those whose smiles are bestowed on all but me; she shall not escape: thanks to the lessons of Felix, and the sanguinary laws of man, I have learned how to work mischief. I approached her unperceived, and placed the portrait securely in one of the folds of her dress. (101)

In this moment, the creature again recognizes his own ugliness. He can perceive Justine's beauty, and therefore, punishes her for her beauty. She represents all that he cannot have: beauty, acceptance, and love. The creature exploits "the lessons of Felix, and the sanguinary laws of man" (101) in order to disrupt the category of beauty. By identifying these "lessons" and "laws" (101), the creature uses them to show that his inability to be classified as beautiful causes him to murder William; therefore, he picks someone who is beautiful to suffer for the crime he commits because he wants to punish the beautiful for his own rejection.

Shelley exposes these idealistic beauties and paints an incisive reflection of social categorization. The beautiful produces pleasure, linking to the social passions, to community and domesticity, but also to weakness, imperfection, deceit and illness. In Edmund Burke's model, the beautiful is present primarily "in the female sex, [and] almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection" (137). The need for a woman to be weak and imperfect to be beautiful presents itself through Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine. While these women are depicted as beautiful and domestic, they also encompass the "weakness" that Burke notes. Caroline ultimately dies from scarlet fever while

Elizabeth and Justine become victims of Victor's actions and the creature's rage. Their weakness is evident in the fact that they become circumstantial victims. Caroline's ultimate need to maintain the domestic order leads to Elizabeth's adoption. Elizabeth and Justine subsequently fill Caroline's role.

The representations of beauty, shown in Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine, further perpetuate the ugly label applied to the creature by presenting beautiful bodies in comparison to his ugly body. The reason for this ugly label results from the creature's inability to be perceived as beautiful by observers. He is excluded from the category in every way, which then results in the creature committing crimes against the beautiful. Therefore, the creature is alienated from the beautiful and forced to find a new place within the novel's social confines

THE UGLY VERSUS THE SUBLIME

The sublime classification, similar to beauty, is applied by the observer. While the creature should be in all accounts sublime due to his size and apparent capacity to produce awe or even admiration, he actually produces horror and disgust; therefore, the creature's social placement continues to be a question. His inability to evoke passions of sublimity or beauty further enforces his ugliness because he is unable to be classified in a category:

If beauty is a transparency, in the sense that it is nothing distinct from the feeling of the subject, and if ugliness is its radical antithesis, then what emerges is an anti-transparency, an opacity or material abhorrence that leaks through representation to disorder the mind of the subject. We may imagine beauty as a form causing delight, but the ugly stops us in our tracks as something we can't even imagine (Gigante 578).

The creature's ugliness in juxtaposition to the beauty that surrounds him creates a tension within the constructions that govern perceptions of other social beings. The ability to incite "delight" allows the beautiful to express a power over the unimaginable ugly. The unimaginable ugly, however, still does not constitute the sublime. When the creature encounters those who are beautiful, he is almost always immediately met with contempt. In his outsider role, the creature is considered an ugly figure rather than any expression of the sublimity that could be assigned to his size.

Since the creature is clearly left out of the category of the beautiful, one might imagine he could be comprehended under the classification of sublimity. Edmund Burke associates several qualities with objects that produce the feelings of sublimity. Some of

these qualities include vastness, roughness, grandeur, as well as many others.

Qualifications for sublimity also depend upon regarding an object with horror, but not so much that we feel physically threatened or are in severe pain. The sublime is, according to Burke, a state between indifference and total pain. The creature, conversely, cannot be categorized as sublime due to the fact that he does not embody or produce traditional sublime qualities. The mere fact that the creature is seen as ugly does not justify a sublime classification. The monster is male, gigantic, rough-hewn, and unfinished; however, taken as a sublime figure, he would be bearable, even admirable, which contradicts his treatment throughout the novel.

Burke makes the opposition of pleasure and pain the source of the two aesthetic categories, associating beauty with the experience of pleasure and sublimity with pain. According to Burke, the pleasure deriving from beauty has a relaxing effect on the fibers of the body, whereas sublimity, in contrast, tightens these fibers. Thus, applying Burke's theory to the creature shows the issue with the social categories in the novel:

In short, the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject, without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other upon the passions. (142-143)

Burke uses this beauty and sublime theory to offer a purely aesthetic explanation of these effects; that is, Burke explains beauty and sublimity in terms of the perception process and its effect upon the observer, further enforcing the issue of the creature's inability to be perceived as either beautiful or sublime. Even though the classifications of the

beautiful and sublime “stand on foundations so different” (142), they are still classifications that allow social functioning. Those who provoke feelings associated with beauty or sublimity operate as social beings while the creature operates as the ugly social outcast.

Burke also focuses on the perception of objects, which might be beautiful or sublime, and on the physiological effects created by those objects. The passions concerning self-preservation turn on pain, and the passions that concern society turn on pleasure. Furthermore, Burke states: “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*” (51). Burke’s sublime produces delight, a feeling which, he says, arises from the cessation of pain (168). The pain and danger that the creature provokes stems from his inability to arouse feelings of beauty or sublimity. The “delightful horror” also provokes “astonishment; the subordinate degrees are awe, reverence, and respect” (168). According to Burke, when something is sublime it has the capability of evoking all these passions; in its fullest, the sublime produces a mixture of great astonishment with a degree of fear, especially the fear of death (52). The creature should be considered a “delightful horror” that inspires awe and reverence, but instead he prompts disgust. Everyone reacts to the creature with extreme repulsion. Ultimately, the creature’s inability to conjure feelings of beauty or sublimity enforce his ugliness.

Burke also maintains that the qualification of the sublime requires the object to have vastness or “greatness of dimension” (73), which is the most obvious difference

between sublimity and beauty (91). With this distinction, the creature can only be considered vast in regards to his height. The creature again recognizes his own ugliness by expressing: “My person was hideous and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them” (Shelley 89). Compared to those in the beauty category, the creature has more powerful muscles and arteries, he can bear the extreme heat and cold with less injury to his frame, and he is physically stronger in every aspect. Based on his attributes, he should elicit senses of the sublime but is instead met with hostility.

It is the beautiful that are well-formed and aesthetically pleasing, while sublime objects are perceived with tension. How a body is perceived determines where it is placed among social constructions. Furthermore, bodies that are between the non-aesthetically pleasing and ugly status can find a place in the sublime category:

The sublime thus allows for the social system that relies on aesthetics to mediate the all-too-inevitable gaps that arise when the subject meets with situations that are not habitual. The sublime fills the cracks in the precarious ideological structure of the aesthetics of beauty. (Hancock 35)

If the body cannot be categorized as beautiful or sublime, it has no category into which it may fit. Therefore, the ugly body becomes the site for isolation and oppression due to its inability to be classified in an already established social construction.

EXILED FROM BEAUTY AND SUBLIMITY: THE UGLY

Acting as a mirror to societal fears of the unknown, the creature lives as an outcast from society and becomes a being labeled through his ugliness. In aesthetic terms, ugliness is seen as “in-sensible and un-intelligible, irreprehensible and unnamable, the absolute other of the system” (Gigante 583). Social classifications depend on observers being able to identify beauty and sublimity and reject other bodies that cannot represent these categories. The creature’s label as ugly occurs as a reflection on these classifications; meaning the strict classifications make it impossible for the creature to join the social categories already put in place because he does not trigger passions of beauty or sublimity. Since the creature does not prompt these passions, he respectively becomes an excluded being. The creature’s inability to contribute to the already established social constructions, as well as his horrid appearance, leads to his rejection, which also works to exploit the absurdity of the categories.

Mary Shelley uses the creature to demonstrate the consequences of ugliness. Because the created being is so fully labeled ugly he lacks the ability to be socially accepted. Ugly is not beautiful nor sublime; therefore, ugliness forces the creature to find another way to function socially. Since his creation, the creature is left in a constant state of limbo between the beautiful and sublime. He is unable to function with the beautiful and still not accepted as sublime. When creating the creature, Victor fails to give him the innate beauty that society expects in order to fit within certain biological parameters and social conventions. Consequently, the creature must figure out that he belongs in a category all to himself. The creature believes humans are socialized to make predictions

about things based on their aesthetic appeal. For instance, he even mentions that he knows he can never befriend any human who can see his form:

Shall I respect, when he contemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. (Shelley 102)

This moment reveals the creature's own understanding of the social categorization that he, as an ugly body, revolts against. The creature criticizes social structures and the beings that inhabit them while wishing to change the stigmas and biases against him. The ability to question structural injustices within society can be seen throughout his philosophical and intellectual discourse; however, despite his ability to identify societal injustice, the creature is still considered an ugly body. Shelley ultimately uses the creature to reflect on the mistreatment of the abnormal ugly body. She repeatedly dwells on moments of the creature's isolation and, in doing so, seeks to complicate conventional beautiful and sublime classifications. Ugliness reinforces these classifications due to the fact that creating a new sphere allows for the strict social structures of both categories to remain intact. Mary Shelley's creature, then, is contradictory to beauty and sublimity and serves to avow the effectiveness of determining categorization through physical attributes that function to "separate out the good from the ugly, the bad from the pure, the perverted from the kind, the sexual from the spiritual, the beautiful from the unhealthy" (Halberstam 59). The classification of beings into categories further presents the issue that the creature is brought into a society that is structured to reject him. Victor gives him

particular characteristics, and makes him into the ugly body that society labels him to be. By creating him with specific features, Victor takes away the creature's ability to function as either beautiful or sublime.

Throughout the novel, the creature experiences rejection when he tries to approach the beautiful. His ugly appearance is the first thing people see when meeting him, which raises inner repulsion and fear. The stigma against the creature is ultimately due to the fear he incites upon interaction with the beautiful. He threatens the functioning of society due to his inability to be classified into an already established category. When the creature starts to recognize his ugliness, he begins to react to his own treatment by others within the novel:

When normal and stigmatized do in fact enter one another's immediate presence, especially when they there attempt to sustain a joint conversational encounter, there occurs one of the primal scenes of sociology; for, in many cases, these moments will be the ones when the causes and effects of stigma must be directly confronted on both sides. (Goffman 139)

When the normal³, or in this case the beautiful, come into contact with the stigmatized, the creature, the two reveal themselves to be incompatible. An example of this treatment can be seen in the creature's attempt at a positive interaction with the beautiful. The

³ Disability studies scholar Lennard J. Davis defines "normal" in relation to the ideal. He states, "The notion of the ideal implies that, in this case, the human body as visualized in art or imagination must be composed from the ideal parts of living models...the concept of a norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm" (2-3). The normal or norm is considered to be the beautiful or sublime in *Frankenstein*. Additionally, the creature cannot be a part of the normal because he is not "composed from the ideal parts of living models."

creature eventually decides that the De Lacey's are his best opportunity for sanctuary within the cruel world that continues to reject him. One day while Agatha, Felix, and Safie are absent, the creature enters the cottage and introduces himself to the patriarch, begging him for help and friendship. The blind man presents hope for the creature's acceptance; therefore, the creature waits for the moment when the old man is alone to approach him. Unfortunately, the creature's attempt at interacting with the beautiful ends tragically:

At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted, and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung, in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sank within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained. I saw him on the point of repeating his blow, when, overcome by pain and anguish, I quitted the cottage, and in the general tumult escaped unperceived to my hovel. (Shelley 94)

The creature's last attempt to find a home within pre-existing social categories fails. While none of the family members say anything, they react in various ways because they have never encountered a being like him; Safie flees, Agatha faints, and Felix beats and forces the creature back into isolation. They do not regard him with any sort of understanding like De Lacey does, but instead automatically force him out of their home.

The family's reaction is a direct consequence to the creature's ugly body. On the other hand, De Lacey's inability to see the creature's ugly body, in turn, allows him to find momentary comfort. According to Gretchen Henderson, "The De Lacey family meets the monster, however, they see only his surface. Both viewer and viewed becomes aware of their wider cultural context and expected behaviours, as ugly social actions contribute to ugly reactions" (138). The creature's need to interact with the De Laceys turns into an act against the beautiful and sublime. Even further, "when Felix, Agatha, and Safie enter the cottage, and the creature is brutally returned to the specular order" (Brooks 377) the creature relinquishes his fate to the beautiful and sublime. If there is something poignant about the creature's experience in the De Lacey cottage, it is that the scene illustrates his need for his own social category. He observes this family for so long that he feels like a part of their family, but their rejection makes him realize that he is too different to be accepted by anyone. His ugliness excludes him from families and all other social constructions dependent on beauty. In addition, even though De Lacey does not embody the typical able-bodied classification that elicits beauty, he can still function in a social category, which directly contrasts him with the creature; in the end, De Lacey joins his family to exile the creature.

By having different representations of social constructions, Shelley suggests that society inevitably reacts to beautiful people with acceptance and to the ugly with repulsion. Although the creature has amiable intentions in accordance with society's values and rules, society has already labeled his ugliness because of the strict beautiful

and sublime classifications. The identity clash, spurred by the beautiful and sublime, creates a conflation of the ugly with negative connotations:

William Frankenstein's fatal encounter with the Creature—"monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces" (F, 169)—contains a fundamental insight into the nature of ugliness itself: the ugly is that which threatens to consume and disorder the subject. (Gigante 569)

Gigante asserts that the creature's ugliness comes from the threat of ugliness that he represents. This ugliness "threatens to consume" the creature, meaning he can only be regarded as ugly, which confuses and frustrates him. His frustration then leads to his crimes against the beautiful. Gigante further enforces the issue of the creature's inability to be classified due to the fact that his ugliness prevents him from being perceived with passions associated with beauty or sublimity. Because the creature is a new being, his presence threatens both the beautiful and the sublime. He is unknown and, for this reason, perceived as dangerous. The fact that the creature cannot be identified by anything previously known leads to his rejection.

The harder the creature tries to obtain either sublime or beautiful qualities, the further isolated he becomes until ultimately he realizes that he does not fit into either classification. His curiosity about his own ugly appearance surfaces as he contemplates his own existence:

Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I

was more agile than they and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs.

When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned?

(Shelley 83)

Victor's creation attempts to become part of society but ultimately is unable to do so. Since Victor made the creature with all his unique qualities, there is no being that is similar to him. He is singular in appearance and the way he is made; it is his singularity that makes him ugly and unable to relate to the beautiful or sublime. The creature generates rejection because he should not exist, which is the most evident in Victor's immediate repulsion upon the creature's creation. The body that Victor assembled should not exist within society and is classified as ugly because "the ugly is that which disgusts; and it disgusts because it 'insists'" (Gigante 577). Despite the creature's relentless rejection, he "insists" (577) as a body. He continues to seek access to a social category while the social spheres expel others that are different, and the creature is much more different than anything either category is equipped to handle. In consequence, the creature is universally met with hostility and disgust.

We can see beauty and sublimity among already categorized bodies, but there is no place in those categories for the ugly creature. As the creature becomes more and more aware of his ugliness, he begins to question why he was made the way he is. After reading Victor's journal, a moment of distress and emotion from the creature reveals how he reacts to his own ugliness:

You minutely described in these papers every step you took in the progress of your work; this history was mingled with accounts of domestic occurrences. You, doubtless, recollect these papers. Here they are. Every thing is related in them which bears reference to my accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors and rendered mine ineffaceable. I sickened as I read. "Hateful day when I received life!" I exclaimed in agony. "Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested. (Shelley 90-91)

The creature refers to himself as a creature "so hideous" that even his creator "turned from [him] in disgust" (90). He believes himself to be a mutation, a "filthy type" (90), not allowed within the social structures. In the creature's case, filthy means disgraceful, contemptible, or degraded. He juxtaposes himself against the "normal" beauty when he notes God "made man beautiful and alluring," but the semi-colon here further emphasizes that his form is not beautiful, but rather a "filthy type" of it (90). These lines further indicate that he lacks the physical characteristics to be defined as beautiful, and he also lacks the prestige of being identified as sublime. Victor made the monster in his own image: reckless, destructive, and a hideous being. Overall, the creature is a downgraded

image of Victor, but he also includes the things Victor wanted: strength, height, a brain capable of consciousness but not beauty. Victor repeatedly uses the word “filthy” within the novel to describe the creature: “filthy creation” (34), “filthy daemon” (50), and “filthy mass (103). However, in the excerpt above the creature calls himself “filthy.” By applying “filthy” to “type,” the creature identifies himself as an unwanted life, but also an abandoned, disfigured creation that is subsequently shunned by his respective community. He is the “filthy” version of the beautiful around him, but his distinction from beauty implies more than just ugliness; more than unattractive, he is the “abject,” which “disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4). The creature represents a threat to the beautiful and sublime social constructions. He suffers because of the sorrow he feels about his exclusion and ugliness in relation to his abjectness. This creature is not born but rather, made, and the creature’s ugliness presents a problem of comparison: resemblance to his creator’s humanity only increases his ugliness. It is society and its social structures that deems the creature ugly. The creature is essentially a bad and “horrid” copy of those who are considered beautiful or sublime while also lacking the social environment that they have access to because he is a “filthy type.”

The “filthy” creature, therefore, conspicuously criticizes a society that evaluates people on behalf of their ability to evoke a sense of beauty or sublimity. In response to his inability to interact with anyone around him, the creature becomes violent and unable to control his resentment towards Victor. Denying the social structure’s classifications through his thoughts, the creature expresses:

From you only could I hope for succour; although toward you I felt no sentiment but that of hatred. Unfeeling, heartless creator! you had endowed me with perceptions and passions, and then cast me abroad an object for the scorn and horror of mankind. But on you only had I any claim for pity and redress, and from you I determined to seek that justice which I vainly attempted to gain from any other being that wore the human form. (Shelley 98)

This moment offers two interesting insights. Firstly, the monster does not want to be compared to the beautiful or sublime; Secondly, he realizes he does not belong anywhere because he is not beautiful or sublime. He is placed outside the beautiful, outside the sublime, and outside the social system due to the fact that he does not meet the criteria to fit into these categories. At this moment, the creature refuses to be like the others while still understanding the differences between beauty, sublimity, and himself.

Additionally, the creature is so horrifying because there is no other being similar to him, which makes him unable to successfully create his own social category. The creature's need for a companion, then, stems from his need for an additional ugly being:

What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself: the gratification is small, but it is all that I can receive, and it shall content me. It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel. (102)

One ugly creature remains an anomaly while multiple can create a world they can occupy together. The creature also feels the need for a mate in a world where acceptance comes

from having people who have similar qualities to you. He realizes that they will still never be regarded as beautiful or sublime, but they will “be [ugly] monsters” (102) together.

Defeated and beaten down by the beautiful and sublime, the creature “disappears into the darkness at the novel’s end, vowing to build its own funeral pyre; for it is as immune to human justice as it was repulsive to human love” (Poovey 129). The numerous failed attempts to join the sublime or beautiful ultimately leads to the creature’s realization that he will never gain acceptance into society; in consequence, he decides that he no longer wants to live in a world full of rejection:

I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away: my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think this. Farewell. (Shelley 161)

The creature has now lost his one potential connection to the beautiful, domestic sphere and no longer feels that he can live in a world filled with constant pressure to conform to a standard. He is denied a mate by Victor and will live out his days as an isolated ugly being cursed to inhabit a world where beauty, sublimity, and the logic underlying them both determines worth and acceptance. Consequently, he decides he would rather “exult in the agony of the torturing flames” (161). The image of his funeral pile contributes contradictory ideas. On the one hand, it offers complete destruction and nonentity, seen here in the anticipatory vision of the fading light of the flames, the windblown ashes, and

the spirit's sleep. On the other hand, it offers a promise of a renewed life, or one final intense experience of what it is to be alive. As the creature stands by the ship's cabin-window, soon to be "lost in darkness and distance" (161), the note of triumph and enthusiasm in his voice belies the expressed wish for death and oblivion. His own death is the one thing that he can control in a world that does nothing but try to control him. That agony and that light will only make outward and visible the "burning miseries" he feels inwardly. We know well the creature's desperate need, always frustrated in life, for acceptance from others, even for simple acknowledgment of the fact of his existence. The spectacular character's death by fire, then, has a special appeal for him.

CONCLUSION

Characters like the creature that represent ugly bodies are defined as such because they are outside the conventional and accepted cultural social categories. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's discussion of monsters illuminates the issues of creating a creature that reflects the fears and anxieties of society as a whole. According to Cohen, "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy...The monstrous body is pure culture" (4). A monster embodies uncertainty and appears at a point of cultural indecision. The creature needs to be examined in relation to the culture and time in which he is created. The creature's very nature is to defy categorization, scientific laws, and rational order. He does not fit into the neat and easy categories that are already established because he defies current knowledge. He is always outside of society, but still remains dangerously enticing; he is scary but at the same time we need him as an example of the reliance on social categorization. The creature represents a being that asks us to reevaluate cultural assumptions on perception toward differences and tolerance towards its expression. The "monster" brings out the flaws of society and social categorization. The monster, too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual term, is a revolution in the very logic of meaning. We are the creators of monsters; they make us question why we have created them. Cohen's ideas invite us to examine our culture and the assumptions we make about other people and ask us to ponder why we create them.

The creature's ongoing exclusion is a direct result of the socially constructed culture's response to different and ugly bodies. Since the creature becomes a representation of the "ugly" —a thing feared or dreaded—he consequently signifies a

body outside the beautiful and sublime. As Gretchen Henderson claims, perceptions of ugly bodies reveal less about the figures themselves than about the perceiving culture (28); for this reason, the creature's actions throughout the novel are a reflection of society's futile reliance on beauty and sublimity. The importance placed on classifications is evident by the way the creature is judged based on his position as an ugly being. Consequently, these social constructions reject bodies that aren't typical and able-bodied and who do not adhere to traditional aesthetic beauty standards. Objects that are regarded as beautiful or sublime enable these constructions and, even further, function to maintain the social order that the creature threatens; therefore, exposing the classifications of the beautiful and sublime reveals the treatment of the creature's ugliness.

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