

# The Identity-Chasing Journey of the Monster in *Frankenstein*

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In the novel *Frankenstein*, the creature “monster” has no name. He is called “monster” and “devil” since he was created. This paper explores the lack of monster’s identity, tracing monster’s identity chasing journey, to figure out lacking proper identity’s impact on the monster. From the analysis of monster’s identity, people are reminded to reconsider their responsibility and stereotypes when communicating with others.

*Keywords:* *Frankenstein (The Modern Prometheus)*, identity seeking, self-cognition

## Introduction

The monster in the novel *Frankenstein* seeks to get rid of the identity known simply as “the monster” by replacing it with a new identity. He tries to achieve this goal via friendship and marriage, but both attempts failed ultimately. The stereotypes and anthropocentrism prove to be the major obstacle in the monster’s journey of identity seeking. Thus, the problem of stereotypes and anthropocentrism existing among humans is addressed in the novel.

### I. The Two Attempts the Monster Makes to Seek Identity

The monster is nameless since he comes to the world. Without name means being rejected by human world. So in the human world, the monster lives in an identity of “others”. He is simply labeled as “devil”, which is an identity not proper with his true place. So in monster’s life, he makes two attempts to seek his proper identity.

#### 1.1 The Monster’s Identity Searching through Friendship

The first attempt is looking for identity in the human world, which failed at last. At first, the monster doesn’t have a clear understanding of himself. He doesn’t understand why he is hit by villagers just because of his terrible appearance. He is confused why everyone escapes from him when seeing him. More or less, the monster feels his difference between him and human. But he has a desire to be loved by humans. He wants to construct close relationships with people. This desire indicates monster’s humanity, because he is not content with fulfilling basic desire such as hunger, thirst and sleep. Driven by a strong desire for love, the monster tries to establish friendship with the Felix family. So the monster shows his kindness through the following actions: providing firewoods silently, observing Felix family’s daily routine and understanding every family member. In order to communicate with this family some day, the monster learns French as an auditor, and he achieves literacy by himself. Learning a language is very difficult even for an adult, but with great desire and natural intelligence the monster does it. After preparing fully, the monster walks out of the dark hole, trying to introduce himself to the

old man. The monster holds the illusion that he may be accepted by a man who cannot see his ugly appearance. But the result shows fate's cruelty: when the old man touched the monster's hand, he is extremely horrified as if he has imagined a terrifying image in his heart. Even the noblest man would not like to be friends with a monster. The monster's beautiful dream of being accepted by humans breaks up completely. Apart from humans' rejection, what the monster receives is stick-beating. The relationship between the monster and humans is doomed to be hindered by a huge gap. The monster doesn't find out identity in the human world. He realizes that the humans are kind, but they are not to him. He is destined to be alienated from human's friendly relation circle.

### **1.2 The Monster's Identity Searching through Marriage**

The monster's second attempt to find identity is threatening Victor Frankenstein to make a monster bride for him. Actually the monster bride is not his ideal bride image. The monster likes human female in deep heart. He can appreciate humans' beauty and virtue. He praises many people especially females he has met: he thinks Safie is as beautiful as an angel; he notices Agatha's charming smile and tender action. He knows Adam has a perfect lover called Eve. Accordingly, he wants to own a female companion as them. But nobody accepts him, not to say a human female would fall in love with him. In agony, the monster turns his eye back to himself. He still can have a monster bride. If the bride is a monster, too, she would not reject the monster. Because they are the same species being rejected by humans. The monster presumes that the alienation would link him and the bride tightly. At this time, the monster's desire for a monster bride is an indication of his identity chasing. A similar species would give him comfort, and drugs him out of the dilemma of no name and no identity. In this way, the bride is him; the bride will be his support; the bride will be a proof of his identity. Asking for a monster bride is the monster's concessive demand. The monster doesn't like his own look, he feels unwell when observing his look from a spot. The monster bride is not his best choice, but last choice to handle his identity problem. However, this is in vain, too, because Victor Frankenstein rips the unfinished bride's body apart. It proclaims the monster's identity-chasing journey's irreversible failure.

## **II. The Reasons for Failing to Get a Proper Identity**

### **2.1 The Monster's Horrible Appearance**

The monster's two attempts are no vain. The surface reason is his horrifying appearance. He doesn't have a good appearance as an advantage to appeal others to understand him. He doesn't gain a voice in the human world because of this shortage. Every time he wants to show people his real image, he would get bit and stick rather than a defending opportunity. The reason of people's rejection is reasonable, though the reaction is too violent. Because the material of making a monster is from human's body (it can be inferred from texts). In other words, the monster has a mixed body of corpses. The corpse reminds people of death, murder and disgusting smell. Uncanny-valley effect can explain why people are afraid of a creature which is similar to them. In addition, the monster is huge. He not only has the bad smell of a corpse, a pieced human body, he is surprisingly huge. His big face would arouse people's fear inevitably. Being afraid of huge things is a common phobia that is diagnosed as "megalophobia". In a word, the monster's appearance causes humans' physiologic panic. People don't want to admit a huge, ugly corpse mixture is of their species. This admission would make humans confused of their own identity. In order not to risk humans' identity, they prefer identifying the monster as no-human. In conclusion, the biological fear is a huge gap that restrains the monster to get identity from the human world.

## **2.2 The Stereotypes and Anthropocentrism of the Humans**

The profound reasons of failing to get identity are humans' stereotypes to monster and humans' anthropocentrism. The surface reason we discussed before is from the perspective of biology. It indicates humans' rooted stereotype. In this novel, the monster is not favorable in appearance. So nearly everyone except the blind man would scream at first when see him, then take weapons to bit him. The over violent reaction shows humans' extreme arrogance. They don't give the monster an opportunity to introduce him. What they see is a total monster. But the monster has a human heart, which no human wants to understand. People labels the monster with "devil" "life's threats" "robber" "killing machine" before the monster has any action. When the monster takes revenges to Victor and kills people, Victor is more convinced that what he produced is a monster. But he omits the most important thing of the monster. In the course of unfair labeling, the monster's progress to be a human is wiped out. He takes a lot initiatives before: he learns language for communicating with people; he provides firewoods for months to expect people would know he is not a monster; he reads books and thinks about humanization; he forebears hit silently without fighting back. The monster has a human heart, he even performs human's role better than some real human. Besides, he chooses to be sensible. He hides his strength and something that might endanger humans, just wants to be accepted. But these efforts are nothing in humans' eyes, because the monster is a danger to them on earth. They never meet such a human-monster, so they lack experience. They don't want to meet such a human-monster, so they expel the monster. But they have no idea where the monster should go.

Compared with the effort which the monster makes, humans' giving for monster are rare. The monster is stepping forward, whereas the humans are stepping backwards, with weapons. In this way, humans seem more selfish and unreasonable. Their indifferent attitude to monster's kindness and extreme hate to monster is due to humans' stereotype and anthropocentrism. Humans can't examine others in a objective way once they feel dangerous or imagine potential dangers. They reject to listen to friendly voice, but augment the unfriendly voice and prove that their alertness is predictive. Because of this anthropocentrism, the link between humans and "others" can't be established. As long as humans hold extreme stereotypes to what they don't know, there is no possibility to communicate with "others" equally. Consequently, the monster's looking for identity in human world is in vain.

## **III. Failing of Getting an Identity's Impact on the Monster**

### **3.1 The Monster's Miserable Transition of Identity**

The first impact of failing to get identity is that the monster has an identity transition. The monster becomes from half-human half-beast to a complete beast. The proof is monster's abandoning reason. The difference between man and others is reason. The monster at first only has basic ability: he can feels heat, light, hunger and thirst. He can cry. Before he behaves like a human, he is more like an baby with a big body. After learning language, he can understand people's thought. He also can speaks out his own mind. At this time, he behaves like a human, with a human heart. As he thinks, he is like a human because he receives human education, he can appreciate good virtues and hates evil things. After education the monster's reason is growing fast and mature though before education he can think slowly. Just because of education, the monster regards himself as a human, so he looks for identity in human world. However, humans'rejection is the most obvious opposition of his

assumption. The outside world gives the monster a warning: the monster is different from humans, and the monster is wild and cruel. Then the monster changes his attitude to humans. He came across Victor's brother and killed him. Then he framed it on an innocent maid. Through two times' killing, we can see the monster gives up his reason. He used to hide his strength, but later he shows it and uses it without restraint. He gives up his reason and allows the evil desire to control him. From pursuing reason to abandoning reason, from oppressing evil desire to releasing evil desire, the monster becomes a real monster from half-human half-beast. It means the monster gives up finding identity and accepts "monster" "devil" as his social identity. In the past, he tries to get rid of the negative label. After realizing he is doomed to be lonely, he accepts the social identity formed by humans' stereotype and misunderstanding. His regards his social identity as his personal identity. His journey of finding his true personal identity stops. This is the tragedy of the monster. It's also an inevitable result caused by collective pressure.

### **3.2 The Monster's Changing Self-Cognition**

The second impact of failing to get identity is that the monster's view on himself has changed. "Monster" and "devil" are labels formed by humans' stereotypes, which can be regarded as improper social identities. This is not the the monster's true image in his heart. He thinks he is a human, but nobody admits that he is a human. There is a conflict between his personal identity and social identity. At last his personal identity submits to the social identity. Driven by hate, the monster killed Victor's brother, friend and lover and Victor. In the end of the story, the monster moans: "Evil thenceforth became my good. Urged thus far, I had no choice but to adapt my nature to an element which I had willingly chosen" (Shelley, 2004, p. 181). As the monster says, he is not free from his emotion. He kills so many people for revenge, but he still feels painful. His revenge is not a power's demonstration, but the last fight to unfair fate. The monster is not content with his miserable life. He doesn't want to live a no-name life. But this is his only choice. Driven by hate, he wants his creator to feel the same pain as he suffers. But even Victor died the monster doesn't find release of life. What's waiting for him is endless loneliness. Besides, he has to carry the nightmare of murdering in the rest of his life. In this helpless scene, the crime he commits would linger in his heart, which makes him realize his beast side. The monster's ideal view on himself has gone with his revenge finished. He has to accept that he not only looks like a monster, but also does things like a monster. This is the tragedy of the monster.

## **Conclusion**

In the journey of seeking identity, the monster gains nothing but a worse name. He is born with the name "monster" and doesn't get rid of it or replace it with a new identity. His social identity labels him, circles him and defeats him. The monster doesn't find out his personal identity. So he chooses to compel to the world's stereotypes, which leads to a tragedy. The novel reminds the readers to reconsider humans' stereotypes to others. Besides, the anthropocentrism hinders humans to accepts things that are beyond their recognition system. If we want to take use of technology in creating something intelligent, we should first remove our superiority and stereotypes. Otherwise what we serve as creators to creation are only neglect and misunderstanding, That will be the tragedy both for humans and creation. Last but no least, rejecting others is an escape of responsibility. Giving the creation a proper identity is an urgent problem waiting to be solved. As long as these basic problems are not solved well, creating intelligent creation should be regarded as a dangerous field for all humans.

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