

Splicing *Les Fleurs du Mal*¹: Research on the Identity of the Monster in *Frankenstein*

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Mary Shelly's novel *Frankenstein* written in 1818 was considered to be the world's first science fiction. The monster in the work is a humanoid creature created by the protagonist Frankenstein using science and technology. The monster began to seek human identity from the day it was born. However, due to its special identity, the monster could not integrate into the human world and eventually died. Through comparing the humanoid creature in the novel with the monster in Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog*, the author mainly analyzes the same and different metaphors of the image "monster" in both works and reveals the realistic meaning of the works. Finally, the author briefly summarizes the theme of *Frankenstein*: the eternal conflict between human beings and the scientific development and the deteriorating anthropocentrism in the process of modernization.

Keywords: allegory, ethics, humanitarian concern, identity

Introduction

According to human's recognition, a monster is a vicious and evil creature. In *Frankenstein*, the monster actively learned human's language and knowledge. It wished to join the human society and humans can recognize its existence. Thus, it spared no efforts to win the affections of the De Laceys but failed and expelled. Comparing to the monster in *The Heart of a Dog*, Professor Phillip transformed a stray dog Sallick into human via transplanting a dead man's pituitary gland and testicles. The author called the transformed Sallick Serguei, which is completely an artificial monster with human shape and language ability. He was so shameless and obscene that he even drew his gun and tried to kill the professor. Finally, the professor sewed the dog's pituitary gland back together. And it turned back into a dog again. In this novel, he did not feel confused about his double identity. He was not bothered by his dog identity at all and became a member of human beings very naturally. This paper intends to delve into the identity of the monster in *Frankenstein* while comparing the similar literary character in Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog* (2020), so as to grasp the overall "monster" image in literary works concerning the relationship between man and nature and technology, as well as the complexity of human nature. Based on that, the author is aimed to discuss the realistic meaning of *Frankenstein*.

The Monster's Pursuit of Human Identity in *Frankenstein*

The monster in *Frankenstein*, as a creature created by unnatural selection or scientific transformation, is destined to lack a certain ethical identity based on kinship in human society at the beginning of its birth. Its creator

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¹ The representative collection of poems of a famous French poet, Charles Pierre Baudelaire.

Frankenstein abandoned him ruthlessly because of its hideous looking, but in practice, the monster was born with kind heart as pure and innocent as children. As the monster grew, it learned from its creator,

I heard of the difference of sexes; and the birth and growth of children; how the father doated on the smiles of the infant, and the lively sallies of the older child; how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up in the precious charge; how the mind of youth expanded and gained knowledge; of brother, sister, and all the various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds. (Shelly, 2003, p. 144)

Also, the observation of human beings around him naturally makes the monster think “Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?” (Shelly, 2003, p. 152). So, with the confusion of its own identity, the monster sets out on the path of seeking enlightenment from humans to establish its identity in the human world.

The monster was repeatedly attacked by humans because of his ugly looking. One day, it came across the De Lacey family in the forest and firstly learned words like appellations between family members and their names, so the monster tried to learn the human language and believed that this skill will help him integrate into the human society. It began to read *Paradise Lost*, *The Biography of Celebrities*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and *The Fall of the Empire*, in which the monster realized that “He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle, and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike” (Shelly, 2003, p. 143). Meanwhile, it was deeply impressed by the harmonious atmosphere of the De Lacey family and felt compassionate about its own loneliness. Therefore, it urgently wanted to become a member of the human world and owned the identity of “human”, so as to live a normal life and be loved.

Despite its efforts to integrate into human society, the monster is despised and abandoned by the De Lacey family because of its ugly appearance. In the meantime, it saved a drowning girl, but its kindness was not appreciated. Instead, it was shot by the girl’s father. The monster suffered a series of unfair treatment so that it started to hate human and filled with the anger of revenge. It gave its last expectation on human to Frankenstein’s brother William, but the young William did not show a bit of friendship to it, but shouted it as “Monster! Ugly wretch! You wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces—You are an ogre...” (Shelly, 2003, p. 165). It completely lost hope in humans and strangled him in a rage while going to the path of revenge. It subsequently killed Frankenstein’s friend, family members, and lover and in the end led its creator Frankenstein towards the death and then chose to end its own life.

The Metaphor of the Monster in *Frankenstein* and *The Heart of a Dog*

The Heart of a Dog is a novella written by a Russian writer Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov in 1925. This novel reflects the social life of Moscow in the 1920s. The Europe renowned medical professor Preobrajensky and his assistant Dr. Bolmental made a bold experiment. They implant a dead man’s pituitary and testicular in a dog’s body, trying to discover the mystery of what makes human body younger. Surprisingly, however, the results of the experiment led to the humanization of the dog. Despite his human appearance and language ability, this humanoid creature has no sense of morality. He is shameless and indecent, does whatever he wants, and stirs up the professor’s family. Finally, he even pulled a gun to threaten the life of his creator, so the professor and his assistant had to turn him into the form of a dog (Wang, 2011). The plot of *The Heart of a Dog* is absurd and bizarre. It mainly tells the process of the stray dog Sallick, who became a human after the operation, and then turned back to a dog. The theme of a dog turning into a human is the greatest absurdity and grotesque. What is

even more absurd is that after the stray dog became a human, he was appointed by the government as a public servant, performing official duties for the government. In this novella, the writer uses ingenious artistic techniques to integrate reality and fantasy, tragedy and comedy, light-hearted humor, and bitter satire, and at the same time puts forward a series of major propositions related to the development of human beings, such as human's evolution and revolution, the desire to know the world and the dangerous consequences of scientific experiments, the moral responsibility of man for his own actions, etc.

In *Frankenstein*, the biologist Frankenstein created the monster by using scientific knowledge, but its ugly appearance made Frankenstein choose to evade his due responsibility. Through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Reformation, the western European society completed its cultural transformation from traditional agricultural civilization to modern industrial civilization and created a new way of human existence—the rationalism, in which people's free will, rationality, and creativity had been fully reflected. People believe that the power of reason will effectively push human society forward (Huo, 2006). Frankenstein was a typical scientist at that time who was controlled by reason. In his mind, scientific experiments came first and other matters such as health and emotions could be left behind. The book says that "The same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time" (Shelly, 2003, p. 83). However, the monster he created holds dear to emotions. It understands that families are connected by blood kinship and longs for others' love and care. Mary Shelley used the image of monster to criticize the "science geek" represented by Frankenstein, who only put reason first and ignored emotion and the resulting anthropocentrism.

Like the monster in *Frankenstein*, the humanoid creature in *The Heart of a Dog* was also created in a lab by humans using technology. The difference is that Sallick, the monster in *The Heart of a Dog*, is not born with kindness and has moral consciousness. On the contrary, the medical professor transplanted the pituitary of a recently dead criminal Klim Chugunkin into its body and named him Sallick. After that, everything has changed. Sallick gradually grew out of the dog shape but looked more like human. The "humanoid creature" Sallick began to walk upright and master the human language. It often said some vulgar words and showed rudeness, stealing habit, greed, lechery, and other characteristics of social scum. The author uses a series of atrocities committed by Sallick to illustrate that hatred and revenge are not desirable and will only bring disastrous consequences. This shining humanitarian concern coincides with the theme of *Frankenstein*. The monster in *Frankenstein* is born with innate humane kindness and sensibility, which is exactly what the author wants to emphasize. By contrast, the monster Sallick created by Bulgakov inherits the worst side of humanity, and technology has failed to change it. It should be pointed out that the two humanoid monsters share a common metaphor, that is, a real man must be blessed with higher moral awareness and humanitarian spirit, and he ought to take responsibility for society, nature and his own behavior. It is an inevitable duty for him to carry out.

Conclusion

Frankenstein's life was a tragedy. His great enthusiasm for science directly led to his tragic life. The humanoid monster he created is innocent. After being abandoned by its creator, it was forced to enter the human society to seek recognition and identification. However, it was treated unfairly everywhere, though it has some noble qualities of human beings. Our resistance to new forms of life makes us wonder whether our cognition is expanding as science and technology develop. Can people coexist with creatures beyond their own life forms?

In the process of modernization,

Western culture has gradually evolved into a ration-centered path in which especially scientific rationality is advancing and expanding, and is increasingly moving towards a framework that rationalism and scientism come first. In this process of rationalization, people naturally belong to the category of universal rational subject, and there will be no others, and others with otherness will not be allowed to become one of the carriers of western culture. (Yang, 2001, pp. 179-184)

If human beings go to the extreme in the pursuit of rationalism, especially in scientific experiments, they violate the laws of nature and will fully slave and transform all things on earth, and then human beings will have to face the resulting devastating consequences. It can be said that Mary Shelley's description in the novel *Frankenstein* is a wake-up call for the evil consequences of mankind's blind use of technology and their anthropocentrism.

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