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VICTOR AS A GOD, OR THE PARALLELS BETWEEN CREATOR AND CREATURE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MONSTROUS ASPECTS OF VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES UPON HIS OFFSPRING

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Trabalho de Conclusão apresentado ao Curso de Letras - Licenciatura - Habilitação em Inglês e Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM, RS), como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciada em Letras.

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ABSTRACT

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VICTOR AS A GOD, OR THE PARALLELS BETWEEN CREATOR AND CREATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MONSTROUS ASPECTS OF VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES UPON HIS OFFSPRING

This paper analyzes Victor Frankenstein's lack of responsibility over his own actions, choices, and ultimately his own creation, his progeny, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, Or The Modern Prometheus*, first published in 1818, and republished in 1831. Such an attitude has consequences for his Creature, who repeats his creator's habit of believing others, not himself, are responsible for his actions. By abandoning his Creature, Victor indeed condemns him to a life of isolation and misery, but that is not to say it was not the creature's choice to spread havoc wherever he chose to. Taking that into account, this analysis, by bringing selected excerpts from the novel and from critics to guide the discussion, shows that both Victor and the Creature share the limiting view that they have no control over their destiny, and therefore are not to blame for the disgrace that permeates their lives. As a result, this work shows how themes such as parenting, neglect, and responsibility are relevant in the novel.

Keywords: Victor Frankenstein. Responsibility. Progeny. Parenting. Abandonment.

RESUMO

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VICTOR AS A GOD, OR THE PARALLELS BETWEEN CREATOR AND CREATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MONSTROUS ASPECTS OF VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES UPON HIS OFFSPRING

Este artigo analisa a recusa de responsabilidade de Victor Frankenstein sobre suas ações, escolhas, e em última análise, sua própria criação, sua prole, em *Frankenstein ou, o Prometeu Moderno*, de Mary Shelley, primeiramente publicado em 1818 e republicado em 1831. Essa atitude tem consequências para a Criatura, que repete o hábito de seu criador de acreditar que outros, e não ele mesmo, são os responsáveis por suas ações. Ao abandonar sua criatura, Victor de fato condena-a a uma vida de isolamento e tristeza, mas isso não quer dizer que não foi escolha da própria criatura causar destruição conforme seus desejos. Com isso em mente, ao trazer excertos selecionados do romance e de críticos para guiar a discussão, essa análise mostra que tanto Victor quanto a Criatura compartilham uma crença limitante de que não têm controle sobre seus destinos, e por isso não são os culpados pelas desgraças que permeiam suas vidas. Como resultado, este estudo demonstra que temas como parentalidade, negligência e responsabilidade são relevantes no romance.

Palavras-chave: Victor Frankenstein. Responsabilidade. Prole. Parentalidade. Abandono.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly said that unlike motherhood — which starts with conception —, fatherhood starts with birth. Yet, bringing up another sentient being takes a choice, and even abandonment — i.e., the choice to opt-out — is one that will leave its marks. Be it either motherhood or fatherhood, though, it could be argued that the conception of a new life starts with an idea. It is common sense that reality is not usually kind to the expectations of new parents, and it may be harsher in the case of self-centered parents who reflect more on the impact of parenthood on themselves than on their offspring. That is certainly the case of Victor Frankenstein.

First published in 1818, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* was written by Mary Shelley, who decided to return to the text in 1831. Whatever her reasons, she decided this was the final version she would publish of the text, and consequently, that is the one approached in this article. Although the subtitle of the novel shows how the Promethean tale is necessarily connected to the text itself, it is not vital to the argument to be analyzed in this paper. Therefore, it will not be largely emphasized here.

The book is largely read as gothic fiction. When Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, considered to be the first work of gothic fiction, he openly advocated for a new kind of romance that would blend the ancient and the modern. (HOGLE, 2002) This blend came to be a vital part of what we read as gothic fiction: a mode of fiction in which ghosts or other forms of the past come to the present to correct some mistake that happened in the past. Given the rise in popularity the gothic had in the 1790s, the decade of Walpole's death, it is no surprise that there are so many of what nowadays are considered gothic elements in Frankenstein: the sublime setting (KETTERER, 2007, p. 85-91), the science of the past that leads Frankenstein to his doomed endeavors, the horror and death that come from believing one is a god.

Although the focus of this paper is on how Victor's "parenting" affects his child/creature, it is also interesting to see how it has been read in recent studies. A brief search[1] on the CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel in Brazil) website has yielded a total of sixty results, taking into account works published between the years 2000 and 2023 in Brazil on the topic.

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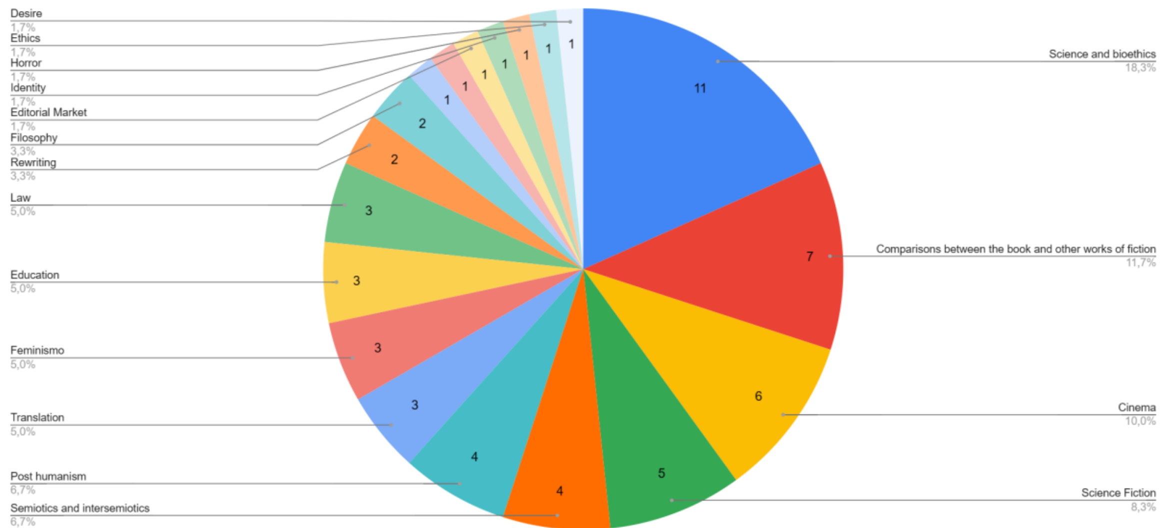
[1] Conducted on April 20th, 2023.



Source: the author, 2023.

As shown in the graphic, it is clear that the book is still relevant to a number of fields of knowledge, and although some of them are clearly linked to literature as a study field, some are completely unrelated. Unsurprisingly for our times, most of the studies are related to science and bioethics, and between this theme and science fiction, we have 26.7% of the results. One says "unsurprisingly" given, for instance, the tech manifesto launched at the time this text was being produced against research involving Artificial Intelligence (AI), which can find an echo in the novel, as "[o]ver the last few decades, the field of biomedical ethics has claimed *Frankenstein* as its classic narrative, a cautionary tale warning that science divorced from ethics will produce monsters" (CALDWELL, 2007, p. 126). Also connected to hyper-modern times, Harold Bloom's words can be added:

> In *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley succeeded not only in creating an enduring myth but also in expressing the dangers of driving scientific activity to its limits without considering the possible human consequences (BLOOM, 2007, p. 14).

Frankenstein goes on to attract the attention of several readers worldwide because it has the ability to resonate with one's reality. The novel also brings up many other numerous themes, all of them equally interesting, including to what extent Mary Shelley's biography influenced her writing (it could be argued that the book examines a story of a birth going absolutely wrong, which in different ways happened to her mother and Mary herself, after her pregnancy) (MELLOR, 2003); the Freudian way in

which the creature attacks the people his creator loves the most, and at the same time the people who hurt him the most, the lover who gave his mother the sickness that ultimately killed her, for instance (MELLOR, 2007); the effects *Frankenstein* had on art — and the interesting confusion between creator and creation in popular media (SPARK, 2007); even the prefix Franken- (as in Frankenfood for GMO, Frankencake for collages of different recipes and desserts) (MELLOR, 2003) is interesting and reveals a lot of the relationship between the book and the readers of different eras. Also, we could even consider whether “Frankenstein’s failure, then, is a parable for the failure of the nineteenth-century socio-political structure to take responsibility—material and spiritual—for the greater populace” (BENNETT, 2007, p. 113). In this work, though, the main theme to be discussed is related to parenting and its conflicts, among other tangents.

As previously mentioned, in the course of the narrative we are exposed to a glorified version of Victor, registered according to Walton’s memories of their conversations. However glorified, it is still very clear that though Victor has great agency in the narrative — both living it and telling it to Walton — he chooses to think of himself as a victim of destiny, refusing to reflect on the reasons that guided the plot of the narrative. This may sound reasonable to Walton, but we can detect, as readers, that Victor thinks of himself in a godly manner, too overwhelmed in himself and condescending to perceive his own *Trespasses*. Even the adaptations to the cinema in which Victor is depicted as a mad scientist and the obvious villain of the story show that, if the audience of the movies does not get access to the ambiguities of Victor present in the book, the filmmakers and screenwriters who based their adaptations on *Frankenstein* see him as the one person who caused all the crimes committed in the original text. In the book, Victor justifies his actions by blaming either “Destiny” (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 26), the “Angel of Destruction” (Ibidem, p. 28), his own father (Ibidem, p. 23-24), or anything and anyone but himself, as if he were predestined to the creation of what he perceives as an ungodly creature, yet, the reader gradually becomes aware that those are nothing but excuses.

Finally, it is also necessary to notice the consequences of Victor’s beliefs of the perceived ungodliness of his child on the child itself: in denying his “*daemon*” the attention and the upbringing of his parent/creator, the creature becomes a reflection of both the expectations imposed on him and the nothingness left by the abandonment

of his father, creator, and personal god. Let us now focus on the historical context in which the book was written.

2. THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Whenever we start any literary analysis, the historical background that guides the production of the material under analysis becomes relevant. Given Mary Shelley's marriage to Percy Shelley and friendship with Lord Byron, *Frankenstein* is predictably connected to the Romantic tradition in English Literature. In fact, Diane Long Hoeveler (2003) goes as far as to say that the book is a romantic reinterpretation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But she also points out the possibility that Shelley is also criticizing the "male romantic economy that would substitute for real and therefore powerful female others as being imagined on the model of the poet's own self" (Ibidem, p. 52). One dares to say one possibility does not exclude the other. It is perfectly possible Shelley saw both agreements and disagreements between what she and her friends believed. That being said, the intertextuality between *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost* is certain. And just as certain is the fact that the context in which Mary Shelley lived shaped her writing. In this sense, according to Hogle (2002, p. 5):

> By the time of *Frankenstein,* the many dilemmas for its hero stem from alterations in the anatomical, electrical, and chemical sciences *and* the acceleration of an industrial revolution that may lead to the greater mechanization of life *and* the concomitant rise of a homeless urban working class displaced from the land by the creations of the bourgeois economy *and* the concern that an expanding British Empire may bring Anglos face to face with the very racial others (like the multicolored creature) that are supposed to be kept distant from "us" even while we depend on them economically (see Malchow, *Gothic Images*, pp. 9–40). Even so, the intermixed transitions of this era, where each cultural position seems capable of blurring into its opposite *and* some others besides, become embodied in, even scapegoated on, the half-alive/half-dead, half-organic/half-artificial, and obscurely desirable/obviously repellant specter/creature. He/it locates and focuses our longings and fears as though they are *and are not* ours, allowing them to be visible as part of our present fearfully threatening us and yet making them either a relic of the decaying past or perhaps the avatar of a mechanistic or racially other future (italics from the original).

Just as the British Empire expansion results in contact with racial others, it is also Victor who brings his own fear to life, while setting to create his vision of perfection. This may be what is so scary about bringing a "hideous" child into life. Just as the expansion may have appeared to be brilliant before its consequences came to light, so it was, for Victor, seeing the results of his actions even before his creature had

committed any crimes. Similarly, the very villainization of specific groups of people is part of a system that is going to cause these people to see violence as the only possible means of survival.

Indeed, transcending historical elements, Shelley presents innovations with her work in terms of narrative structure, since, technically, the story is told by Walton, a nobleman who sees himself as emotionally distant from the seamen who accompany him on his journey to know why the compass is attracted to the north, as he writes to his sister[2]. That being the case, along with his scientific pursuit and his romantic view of friendship[3], he is left vulnerable to Victor's version of the events narrated by him. The consequence is that Walton views Victor in very forgiving lights, which are not necessarily the ones through which we as readers might see him. Still, we have access to Victor's narrative through Walton, as he, on his deathbed, retells his life and what brought him to create his being. He talks about how his interest in science started in early childhood, how he perceives his obsession was ungodly, how he abandons his creature as soon as he comes to life, and how the creature goes on to murder multiple people, confirming his suspicion that the creature is evil in nature, delightfully unaware of his own role in the creature's poor choices.

It is also interesting to notice how the different levels of the narrative could be seen as pieces that, in an analogy with the very construction of the creature, help give birth to a whole literary work. Indeed, we can perceive that:

> In *Frankenstein*, the exploration of power is played out on four different narrative-levels. First, the letters from the seafarer Robert Walton to his sister Margaret Walton Saville form the outer-frame for its particular story as well as for the other narratives. Second, the scientist Victor Frankenstein's telling of his version of the story of the history of his creation, abandonment, and death-struggle with the Creature. Third, the incorporation of the Creature's version of his abandonment, his desperate loneliness, and his transformation from goodness to evil as he mirrors his creator's values. And fourth, the Felix-Safie tale of heroism, injustice and love told within the Creature's story. To this, one might add a larger outer-frame: the unknown reader, escorted through Dantean circles of terror and pity, led on by the seductive attraction of reading letters addressed to someone else (BENNETT, 2008, p. 109).

Those four levels of narration also create a sense that "reality" may be more and more

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[2] "I shall certainly find no friend on the wide ocean, nor even here in Archangel, among merchants and seamen" (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 9).

[3] "I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to mine" (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 9).

edited as we go further and further through said "Dantean circles", as Gamer (2002, p. 102) argues in the following:

> Aside from shrouding Victor's incredible story within a series of second-hand accounts told by implacable enemies, Shelley creates a situation in which it becomes impossible to know the reliability of a given narrator, let alone determine the credibility of the other testimonies contained within a given narrator's discourse. This reading experience, in turn, leads us to examine our own processes of interpretation, since as readers we are confronted by psychological challenges similar to those faced by Shelley's characters.

According to Shelley herself, the story of this unholy birth was conceived in a "wet, ungenial summer" in Switzerland, in which, after reading German ghost stories translated into French, Lord Byron, John Polidori, Percy Shelley and the author herself agreed to write their own horror stories, and after some days, Mary Shelley thought of

> the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken (SHELLEY, 1831).

and so *Frankenstein* was born. Interestingly, Mary Shelley had already at this point seen a child of her own, born one year prior, die only several days after her birth, which is certainly a tragedy for a young mother, and might be one of the reasons why she chose to write a story about an unholy birth as her horror story (MELLOR, 2019). She does see *Frankenstein* as her "hideous progeny" after all.

Romanticism helped pave the way for the Gothic, a genre that manages to consistently keep its popularity. Many researchers devote time and study to try to find an explanation for such popularity, and Hogle's view helps understand the phenomenon:

> The Gothic has lasted as it has because its symbolic mechanisms, particularly its haunting and frightening specters, have permitted us to cast many anomalies in our modern conditions, even as these change, over onto antiquated or at least haunted spaces and highly anomalous creatures. This way our contradictions can be confronted by, yet removed from us into, the seemingly unreal, the alien, the ancient, and the grotesque. Some Gothic tales, such as *Frankenstein* or *Dracula,* have a lasting resonance of this kind, so much so that we keep telling them over and over again with different elements but certain constant features. Such recastings help us both deal with newly

> ascendant cultural and psychological contradictions and still provide us with a recurring method for shaping and obscuring our fears and forbidden desires (HOGLE, 2002, p. 6).

As part of her historical context, as seen by the ideals championed by the Romantics in a place marked with strict social norms, Shelley was born to two revolutionary minds, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and educated by her father, given her own mother's death of puerperal fever a few days after her birth. She was well versed in the liberal arts, and, to her father's disappointment, eloped with the married Percy Shelley (who was five years older than she was) already pregnant. Given these facts, it is fair to say she did not live the most ordinary of lives, moving constantly and being acquainted with many authors — and married to one — we praise to this day. Still, we can see echoes of her time in the use of literature relevant to her fellow romantics, especially *Paradise Lost*. For the sake of our argument, though, it is important to focus on two major characters of *Frankenstein.* Let us begin by discussing Victor's role in the story.

3. THE (UN)GODLY CREATOR

Victor is first presented to us by Walton, a character that, as Victor himself, is interested in exploring the mysteries of nature[4], and, in his obsession, experiences the solitude Victor later experiences in creating life from death. Given his perceived loneliness — amplified by the aforementioned notion seamen will not be fit for the role of friends — and the similar beliefs both men have, Walton feels drawn to Victor as previously mentioned. This feeling may make him not a very reliable narrator, as he writes down what Victor told him about his past. Still, even through his complimentary view of Victor, the reader starts to notice — although maybe Walton himself seems unable to follow that movement — that Victor is far from the hero of the narrative that unfolds.

According to Walton, Victor starts his account in his youth, given his understanding that his obsession with science started at this point. At a very young

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[4] As seen in: "I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle" (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 7).

age, he took an interest in "the secrets of heaven and earth"[5] which led him to the creation of his creature. He agrees that he was not perfect[6], but he still does not take responsibility for his pursuit. When his studies lead him to Agrippa, he blames his father for not explaining properly why those studies were not appropriate:

> If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded and that a modern system of science had been introduced which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical, under such circumstances I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside and have contented my imagination, warmed as it was, by returning with greater ardour to my former studies. It is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 23-24).

Which, allegedly, could have saved him from his research. When, later at the age of fifteen, he sees a tree destroyed by lightning, he becomes interested in electricity, and he uses Fate as an excuse for his undoing:

> Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin. When I look back, it seems to me as if this almost miraculous change of inclination and will was the immediate suggestion of the guardian angel of my life—the last effort made by the spirit of preservation to avert the storm that was even then hanging in the stars and ready to envelop me. Her victory was announced by an unusual tranquillity and gladness of soul which followed the relinquishing of my ancient and latterly tormenting studies that I was to be taught to associate evil with their prosecution, happiness with their disregard. It was a strong effort of the spirit of good, but it was ineffectual. Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction (Ibidem, p. 25).

When he goes to university, it is a conversation with a professor that seals his fate[7]. In sum, he goes on and on along his narration attributing guilt to everyone and anyone but himself. From his perspective, he is only a victim of fate, with no agency in what happened in his life.

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[5] As seen in the following: "It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world" (Ibidem, p. 22)

[6] As seen in: "My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement" (Ibidem, p. 22)

[7] As seen in: "Thus ended a day memorable to me; it decided my future destiny" (Ibidem, p. 32).

It is also a central part of his character and his relationship with his creature the reasons that lead him to create life from death. When he discovers the secret to animate “lifeless matter” (Ibidem, p. 33) he sets out to create a human being of his own, bettered and bigger than godly humans. At first, he claims to do it for scientific purposes[8]. Still, only one paragraph later, he reveals other intentions:

> A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs (Ibidem, p. 35).

He would like not only to be godlike and create life, but to be worshiped as one. Yet, when he does succeed, just as knowledge expels Eve from paradise, his expectations are crushed, and he sees himself in the presence of a horrendous creature. He chooses to abandon his offspring — perhaps sealing the fate of the creature as horrendous not only in flesh but also in action. Later in the narrative, Victor himself calls his creature a *daemon* (Ibidem, p. 51), even before the creature compares himself to Satan, and by extension Victor already compares himself to a god.

The excerpts mentioned in the last paragraph show more than his God Complex, though. By choosing to make improvements to the human body, he also shows his own understanding of perfection, and taking into account this understanding and his own God Complex — which makes him infallible, therefore, perfect — he creates his monster “in his own image” (Gn 1, 27). And when his perfect creation is brought to life, Victor is utterly terrified. Could it be that, by extension, God felt the same way about humanity? Either way, it is his inability to accept responsibility, not his God Complex, that condemns him. In this sense, Harold Bloom’s words come to mind:

> For the crime he has committed in crossing the boundaries of forbidden intelligence, and his subsequent attempts to conceal all knowledge and responsibility for what he has unleashed, Victor Frankenstein places himself, and his creature, beyond all possibility of redemption (BLOOM, 2007, p. 19).

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[8] As seen in: “I considered the improvement which every day takes place in science and mechanics, I was encouraged to hope my present attempts would at least lay the foundations of future success” (Ibidem, p. 34).

One could argue that creating his creature was not Victor's major crime, though, but abandoning him to his own luck. Had he not abandoned his "Adam", the creature would not have felt the rage and loneliness of abandonment that lead to the murders the creature, with no guidance to learn about how to live with others, committed.

The one thing that mitigates Victor's crimes, although it does not forgive them, is the understanding he has about his own father. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007, p. 100) put it:

> On the surface, Victor seems at first more Adamic than Satanic or Eve-like. His Edenic childhood is an interlude of prelapsarian innocence in which, like Adam, he is sheltered by his benevolent father as a sensitive plant might be "sheltered by the gardener, from every rougher wind" (19–20, chap. 1). When cherubic Elizabeth Lavenza joins the family, she seems as "heaven-sent" as Milton's Eve, as much Victor's "possession" as Adam's rib is Adam's. Moreover, though he is evidently forbidden almost nothing ("My parents [were not] tyrants ... but the agents and creators of many delights"), Victor hints to Walton that his deific father, like Adam's and Walton's, did on one occasion arbitrarily forbid him to pursue his interest in arcane knowledge. Indeed, like Eve and Satan, Victor blames his own fall at least in part on his father's apparent arbitrariness. "If ... my father had taken the pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded.... It is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin" (24–25, chap. 2).

Given Victor's description of his childhood, it is safe to assume that, although he gives a very kind description of his father, that he sees his own father as his personal god. While blaming his father for his own actions, and acting like Milton's Satan (and also like his creature, later in the novel), he gives his father the power to define his destiny. As previously stated, he does that to avoid culpability, but Laura P. Claridge (2007, p. 105) gives one more reason for him to choose this specific culprit at this point:

> That Victor insists upon remembering "the best of all possible worlds" is the psychological defense of an only child (as he was for a long time) who maintains a love/hate relationship with his parents because he senses that they share an affection that in some way excludes him. Victor is an object of their love, not a participant in it; he is "their plaything and their idol" (p. 33). In his recollections of his parents' relationship—recollections more fully developed in the 1831 edition—he emphasizes their devotion to each other, to the (implicit) detriment of their child. If, as Victor claims, everything was centered on fulfilling the mother's wishes, one must wonder at the son's extravagant account of the love left over for him: "they seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon me" (p. 33). The narrator strains his credibility too far when he assures us that "every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control" (p. 34)—precisely those virtues that the young adult scientist will lack.

By pointing out the possible negligence Victor might have suffered as a child, especially coming from the people he put in a godly position, Claridge (2007, p. 105) points us in the direction of understanding *Frankenstein* as a novel about generational trauma, the trauma that is perpetuated through generations. Alphonse Frankenstein neglects his child and therefore does not take responsibility for him. Victor, following his father's footsteps, does the same. And so does his nameless creature, by not taking responsibility for his crimes, as is going to be discussed in the next item.

4. THE SATANIC CREATURE

In this item, we focus on the creature. Indeed, by abandoning his nameless creature to its own luck, Victor denies his creation not only an education but even an identity. As Eric Landowski claims in the first chapter of his book *Presenças do Outro* [*Presences of the Other* in a free translation] (2012), it is not just how one defines themselves in the image others send them of themselves that forms one's identity, it is also how one sees the *otherness in others* that shows a distinction between "me" and "them".

Though *othered* by everyone he encounters, Victor's creature has almost no contact with *others* throughout the book. The only characters he talks to are Victor, who openly antagonizes him, and Walton, at the very end of the book. Throughout the novel, he is completely isolated. Despite his intelligence and nearly self-learned ability to speak and read — and being well-versed in literature — most people he contacts are unwilling to barely dialog with him. And no one is kind to him. Even the blind man, a perfect example of another character who could be viewed as *the other* — nearly isolated from society —, gives up on him upon hearing his son's reaction to seeing the creature, following the lead of his link to the world at large. Victor abandons him and when forced to confront his mistakes, makes no attempt to understand his creation. The reflection the creature sees of himself in others is always antagonistic: he is always *the other*. And he never gets to come close to knowing another human being in a way that could help him create a clear sense of identity for himself. It is not clear to him what he, the creature, *is*, but all he sees in others about himself is that he is *not good*. And all he can see in others is conflict.

It is unsurprising that Victor does not name his creature, given his immediate rejection of him, but the creature also does not name himself. This makes sense, given

there would be none who would call him by any name he had chosen, but this is certainly a clue to the fact he has no defined identity for himself. As previously said, he is utterly isolated, and therefore does not have the chance to “run into” the problem of not having a name. When other characters call him a *daemon*, a monster, a wretch, he has no objection to that, and how could he? Only by recounting his narrative, he has had the opportunity to think of himself in any other way. It is no surprise then that he compares himself to Milton’s Satan, a victim and a servant of the hatred he has seen and felt.

Depriving the creature of a peaceful upbringing is not the only fault Victor has committed toward his offspring, though. The rejection the creature endures is also the consequence of his hideous appearance, the only possible result of a creature made from both animal and human parts, eight feet tall, with patches of skin that “scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” (Shelley, p. 37). In his egotism, Victor did not conceive for a second if such a creature would desire life, and *what life* would be possible for a being so different, inescapably large, and physically horrendous.

Given the unease of not being sure about his own identity, the sense of abandonment created by the lack of his creator's presence, and the isolation imposed upon him, unknowingly the creature falls into his creator's mistake. As the creature says:

> Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing? (Ibidem, p. 70-71),

he shows not to believe that he has any culpability for his crimes — so far, the murder of a child, if not also the complicity in Justine’s death. Even before that, upon meeting Frankenstein, the creature says: “I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed” (Ibidem, p. 69), not only quoting his favorite book, but also showing no degree of responsibility over his acts. It was true that when the creature was first abandoned he had done “no misdeed”, but at this point in the narrative a child and his servant had already died. Yet, the creature goes on through the entirety of Chapter 11 to exempt himself from guilt. It was Frankenstein who created him, and, therefore, Victor was the only culprit of all disgrace. Paradoxically, that is the same feeling Victor has towards creating life.

And just as Victor does not reflect on how his actions would affect his creation/child, the monster does not consider the possibility of being rejected by the female creature he asks of his creator/father, in an interesting twist of Frankenstein's story: given to him as a present (as the female creature would be to the male creature), Elizabeth does not reject Victor, but is pushed away by him.

The parallels between Victor Frankenstein and his creature may be a consequence of the Doppelgänger argument, commented by Crisman (2007, p. 121):

> The analysis that follows will make an assumption so old in *Frankenstein* criticism that it no longer needs extensive proof: that Victor's "creature" functions also as "his own Doppelgänger, his alter ego, his objectified id"; "it is customary by now to discuss Frankenstein and the monster as the feuding halves of a single personality" (Knoepflmacher 109), and most critics agree that "the monster's ugliness symbolizes his creator's own monstrosity".

Just as God allegedly created Man in his own image, so did Frankenstein create his monster undeniably as an image of his own ego, his own monstrosity. Not only is the creature hideous and murderous, but also intelligent and unable to accept responsibility. Considering Bennet's argument already mentioned that adds the reader to the multiple levels of the narrative, the horrors of humanity may also be the reflection of the monstrosity of the God who allegedly created it. As Betty T. Bennet (2007, p. 111) puts it,

> The Creature, as constructed by Mary Shelley, is the living metaphor of that 'other', and as such expresses the position of any 'outsider' to the established authority. As the Creature educates himself first through contact with nature, then with Milton, Plutarch, Volney, and Goethe, and language itself, he is an argument for enlightenment theory as propounded by Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and the Shelleys. His innocence is destroyed by emulating the value system of power prevalent in the nineteenth century, the system perpetuated by his creator.

and just as it is the system perpetuated by the creature's creator that corrupts the creature, so is the power dynamic imposed by God that deviates humanity from its innocence.

But there are other relevant parallels between creation and creator. They will be discussed in the next section.

5. HIS OWN IMAGE

Hopefully it has become clear by now that there are many aspects in common between creator and creature in *Frankenstein*. We are now going to discuss a few other relevant parallels between the two characters and the possible reasons for such similarities.

According to Gilbert and Gubar (2007, p. 99),

> each is at one time or another like God (Victor as creator, the monster as his creator's 'Master'), like Adam (Victor as innocent child, the monster as primordial 'creature'), and like Satan (Victor as tormented overreacher, the monster as vengeful fiend).

This is no surprise, given the unintentional habit the creature has of following his creator's footsteps. As already mentioned, many critics understand these similarities as part of the Doppelgänger argument, which sees both Victor and his offspring as two sides of the same coin, but it is equally reasonable to assume that this is a consequence of each one's upbringing.

On the one hand, Victor was brought up by a father he saw as a God, and — as already stated (CLARIDGE, 2007, p. 104-105) — might have neglected him by allowing him to do as he pleased, with very little of what could be called boundaries, which were not even very strictly imposed: though his father arbitrarily told him not to read Agrippa, for example, he does nothing to prevent it. As a consequence, adult Victor wishes to be a god, like he thought his father to be, but neglects his own child, his creation, like his father before him. By contrast, we have the nameless creature, who grew to hate his father/creator/god, and decided to wreak havoc in his "god's kingdom"; and repeating his father's mistake of refusing to take responsibility for his actions. Paradoxically though, the aforementioned havoc comes to aid Victor's desires. As Gamer (2002, p. 101) puts it,

> Paul Cantor has argued that the creation becomes an agent through which Victor freely can associate love and death: "He himself sees that the monster serves his own destructive urges… [and] seems to know intuitively what the monster has done… Frankenstein knows the monster's intentions because deep down they are his own".

There are no people who can hurt us as much as the people we love. It would be easy for Victor to openly hate whoever had given his mother the illness that had killed her. Except the person who did it was his foster sister *and* future wife. The complexity of those feelings prevented him from fully exploring them. The same could be said about the other victims in the novel, already explored by critics such as Claridge (2007). But

the creature, in his childlike perception of those feelings, does not understand this complexity, and for that, causes both harm and pleasure for his creator.

But if it is the people we love the most who have the most potential to hurt us, how come Victor is so hurt by the monster he hates more than anything? We may guess that it is precisely because Victor sees in the monster a reflection of himself, of his own desires, and he does not hate himself. He is not hurt just by his creation's actions, but also by the fact that they were perpetrated *by his creation*.

6. FINAL REMARKS

After presenting this analysis, we can perceive that *Frankenstein* is a book which focuses, among other themes, on the otherness we encounter in our own children. About how the world is as part of ourselves as we are. Just as terrifying as watching our beloved children go into the world, independently from us, one could argue, is watching our children grow distant from our unavoidable expectations, whatever they may be, or even realizing the consequences those expectations have upon our children.

That is Victor Frankenstein's mistake, as already established in this paper. In refusing to accept responsibility for his offspring, he condemns his creature to a life of loneliness and is completely blinded by his god complex in terms of what would be the consequences of this abandonment. Up to the end of the novel, Victor still neglects to see how one might be responsible for the deaths that may occur given the pursuit of science divorced from ethics: when Walton talks to him about the possibility of turning back and giving up on his research, for there was a real possibility that his sailors could die if he did not do so, Victor's answer shows that even in his deathbed he still has not learned how one's actions can be responsible for others' downfall:

> that requires not this preparation; ye need not have come thus far and dragged your captain to the shame of a defeat merely to prove yourselves cowards. Oh! Be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes and firm as a rock (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 155),

.

Interestingly, though, the creature does learn this lesson, even if only in the very end of the novel. Despite still somewhat looking for excuses for his actions[9], he does realize his power over the horrors of the novel. He does show remorse for what he could have done differently:

> "That is also my victim!" he exclaimed. "In his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close! Oh, Frankenstein! Generous and self-devoted being! What does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst. Alas! He is cold, he cannot answer me" (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 159),

But right up to this point, he still sees his creator as the one to blame for his crimes, just like his creator before him.

This irresponsibility over one's creations is probably why the scientific community has taken this work of fiction as a cautionary tale in relation to AI, more than any other book that may deal more directly with robots and artificial intelligence, as our brief search on the CAPES website has shown. Former chief business officer for Google X, Mo Gawdat talks specifically about this lack of responsibility in an interview on the Diary of a CEO channel on YouTube with its owner Steven Bartlett about the future of AI, and how the only chance we have of not creating a problem for ourselves is loving and educating our robots as children. Creating a parallel with the past, he says that "[w]hat went wrong in the 20th century, interestingly, is that we have given too much power to people who didn't assume responsibility" (GAWDAT, 2023).

This is only one example of how *Frankenstein* continues to be relevant to this day. Previous generations have found other themes to be relevant for them, and that is probably what is going to happen to future generations as well. But it will continue to be relevant, as it has been for two centuries already.

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[9] As seen in: "I was the slave, not the master, of an impulse which I detested yet could not disobey" (SHELLEY, 2008, p. 159-160).

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