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THE REVOLTING MONSTER: A CONSIDERATION OF EXISTENTIALIST THEMES IN MARY SHELLEY’S *FRANKENSTEIN* THROUGH A COMPARISON TO ALBERT CAMUS’ *THE STRANGER*

A Thesis

by

FELIPE JESUS RODRIGUEZ II

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2023

Major Subject: English

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Approved as to style and content by:

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ABSTRACT

THE REVOLTING MONSTER: A CONSIDERATION OF EXISTENTIALIST THEMES IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* THROUGH A COMPARISON TO ALBERT CAMUS' *THE STRANGER* (May 2023)

Felipe J. Rodriguez II, B.A., Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Adam S. Kozaczka

This Master's thesis is concerned with analyzing key themes and ideas in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through an existentialist lens which is made possible through a comparison to themes and ideas in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. I aim to make a contribution to my field by fulfilling a comparison that has long been made since the late 1960s when conversations about British Romanticism and Existentialism were still common. The purpose of my first chapter is to elucidate a new argument about the relationship between these two novels. There is a discernable element of Camusian Revolt exhibited by the Creature in some of the most riveting passages of *Frankenstein*; this element is all the more clearer when placed in conversation with the actions of Meursault, the protagonist of *The Stranger*. Through more specific examples, and a large reliance on the historical context of both novels that this project is concerned with, I am able to draw connections that go further than thematic similarities and show the relevance of these ideas to readers in our time. The second chapter consists of historical context that sets up an understanding of the reception of *Frankenstein* and the ensuing consequences of this novel for ruling body interested in maintaining a permanent underclass within the population. The third chapter examines the species of Revolt within *Frankenstein* by comparing it to *The Stranger* in order to reach conclusions about the significance of these themes today. The final chapter is an observation about the behavior of revolt modeled by the authors discussed in this thesis. It proposes that the act of writing and creating art is in itself an act of revolt which is the true message the authors intended to convey. It also argues that the medium of the novel is the most effective method of expression for revolt because it taps into human experience in a way no other distinct work of art can.

DEDICATION

For Julio

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the 1960s and ‘70s, when conversations about the Existentialist movement were still fresh, a number of scholars decided to make broad connections between Romanticism and Existentialism. The most prevalent arguments for a Romantic-Existentialist connection came from Lucio P. Ruotolo, Stanley C. Russel, and Maurice J. L’Heureux.[1] Their writing largely dealt with the ways in which Existentialist philosophy could be used to examine the artistic and aesthetic achievements of the Romantic era from its German beginnings to mid-nineteenth century Britain. In other words, they did not specifically trace a path from the ideas in Romanticism and then find Existentialist counterparts—arguably History did that already—instead, they lifted ideas found in both movements and evaluated their interrelatedness on a theoretical plane of analysis.

Recently, more concrete connections have been made between the two movements, specifically with two works that I feel are culturally relevant now more than ever before. In regard to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Northop Frye believes the novel “is not, as it is often said to be, a precursor to science fiction: it is a precursor rather of the existential thriller, of such a book as Camus’ *L'Étranger*.”[2] Nicole Pimonte, noting the potential question of anachronism, makes a similar observation: “[t]hough [*Frankenstein*] well predates such existential writers as Albert Camus (1913– 1960) and John Paul Sartre (1905– 1980), Mary’s narrative grapples with many of the same issues, including feelings of anguish and meaninglessness, especially in the face of suffering and human finitude […] point[s] echoed by

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[1] See *Existentialism and the English romantic movement* (1960), *Romanticism and the Existential Predicament* (1965), and *Crosscurrents: Romanticism and Existentialism* (1976), respectively.

[2] Northop Frye, “The Romantic Myth” pg. 44

This thesis follows the model of *Modern Language Association* the existentialists nearly a century later."[3] Even as of last year there are observations by Eileen M. Hunt that further reinforce this connection:

> Shelley directly influenced countless works of post-apocalyptic and dystopian literature. Among the most philosophically and politically significant are […] Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947) […] Camus's two great existential novels from the 1940s, […] share uncanny thematic resemblances to both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. The suicidal protagonist of *The Stranger*, Meursault, has often been compared to the Creature.[4]

Frye, Pimonte, and Hunt all use similar language when talking about these two texts. Scholars are keen on making this comparison, but they all stop at the crossing of thematic similarities, as if that is all there is to be said. It might be the case that they stopped there because they were hesitant to make the effort to cross early-nineteenth century British literature and twentieth century French literature, given that most academics are isolated within their period-determined fields, though Frye's far-reaching arguments would be an exception to this. Only two of the above-mentioned scholars have an intimation of the possibilities for better interpreting the connection between the two texts. There is room however to go a bit further with this comparison. Like the aforementioned scholars, I am not concerned with a potential anachronism because I am not claiming that Shelley is an existentialist; rather, I am working with how key themes, key ideas, character types, and plot elements appear to be shared by both novels.

On the one hand there is Frye, who posits in his transcribed lecture, "The Romantic Myth" (1968), which I have quoted above, that there are several elements which must come together to make the recognizable form of a myth. Myth then forms the basis for a set of ideals and imagination, which evolve over time. The section which I draw from pertains to the great ironic developments of Romanticism. Frye identifies militantly satiric irony in Byron, dramatic irony in Percy Shelley, comedic irony in Austen, and, interestingly, Romantic irony in Mary Shelley. Frye goes on: “[t]he whole point about the monster is that he is not a machine, but an ordinary human being isolated from mankind by extreme ugliness, Blake’s ‘different face’” (44). Part of Romantic Irony, which may be more recognizable as metafictionality, lies in that “Frankenstein hunts down his monster in the same way that moral good attempts to destroy the moral evil it has itself created” (45). However, there are several implications and assumptions – about genre, history, and philosophy – that Frye leaves unaddressed and, therefore, makes this claim seem like more of an offhand comment intended to close off his list of ironic developments from the Romantic era. It is my aim to expand on this notion along those lines and use it to exemplify the locus of my thesis. Additionally, Frye does not outright say this, so I will: just as the Creature in *Frankenstein* is not a Monster, neither is Meursault. The whole point of *The Stranger* is that Camus’ character, Meursault, is not a monster, but an ordinary human being isolated from mankind by extreme indifference, Sartre’s “the Other.” The very society that dwells in meaninglessness punishes the man who acknowledges the absurd when the pangs of existence rear their ugly head.

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[3] Nicole Pimonte, *Frankenstein: Annotated* (2014), pg. 142
[4] Eileen M. Hunt, "Existentialism and IR" (2022), pgs. 16,20

Hunt provides me with a model and a precedent by which to leap the international barriers that separate an early nineteenth-century British author and a mid-twentieth-century French one. She observes some kind of intersectionality in the field of International Relations (IR) and literature and asserts that another of Shelley’s works, *The Last Man* (1826), is “an important source for the existentialist tradition” (1). This recent argument is especially compelling because it allows me to take a different route in fleshing out a connection between the texts that is not necessarily tied down to the historical contexts of both novels. The fact that I am noticing this absence in the specific ways this connection can be made is part of the contribution this project aims to make. One of the ways to tackle the relation between the texts is through their genre. If I take Hunt's assertion that *Frankenstein* has set the precedent as a genre to then influence other genres and traditions wholesale – which I do – then I am able to proceed in examining specific connections.

Frankenstein and *The Stranger* were born out of historical contexts which are again becoming topically relevant now in the 21st century. Both texts come after massive pan-European military, political, and socioeconomic upheavals, and I would go as far as to say that they are a reaction to them. In the case of *Frankenstein*, much of Britain in the nineteenth-century was stained by the political and military conflicts leading up to the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo and those that followed long after too. Similarly, for *The Stranger*, France in the late 1940s and early 50s would be colored by its experiences during World War II, particularly the burden of Nazi occupation. Both writers experienced severe times of upheaval. Today, an unprecedented set of concerns about social justice, income and education inequality, the implementation of a racial caste system, and a continuous "war economy" means that average people are increasingly interested in times of upheaval and reactions to them. In our time, we have seen the Cold War, Desert Storm, and the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. There was also another war that occurred in America: the "War on Drugs," an aggressive political stratagem which resulted in the dangerous and barbaric practice of mass incarceration across the nation.[5] Corporations continue to amass wealth and power through lobbying to politicians that undermine the interests of the citizenry[6] to protect their bottom line even at the cost of people's lives and the environment.[7] Yet, the American people have shown their capacity for revolt in the face of blatant police brutality as many took to the streets in 2020 to protest the murder of George Floyd. More recently, the people of France have revolted as a reaction to Emmanuel Macron's abuse of power to force a bill to pass without parliamentary vote.[8] Back in America, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has proposed bill SB300, further restricting individuals from receiving an abortion after six weeks, a move that prompted protests which led to the arrests of Democratic Party leaders in Florida.[9] Equally as concerning is the banning of certain books in Florida school districts since 2021[10] and the burning of books in Tennessee.[11] It is not difficult to imagine why people are dissatisfied with what has become permissible under the current political and economic organization of their societies.

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[5] See Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010).

[6] See Edward Segal's "How And Why Corporate Lobbying Will Continue To Matter During The Biden Administration" (2021).

A cursory internet search will show that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* remains a popular reading classic everywhere from public high schools to book clubs seeking to complete the notorious "52 book challenge." The novel is masterfully written and there is no doubt whether readers pick up the 1818 or 1831 version of the text they are bound to be gripped by its inimitable portrayal of creation, rejection, and grief. In recent years, there has also been another novel that has garnered a renewed interest in the some of the aforementioned groups. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted several online magazines and book-related blogs to construct lists of "The Best Pandemic Books to Read During the Coronavirus" (Vulture). In many of these lists, one book remained consistently suggested: Albert Camus' *The Plague*

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[7] See John Seewer's "Ohio sues Norfolk Southern over toxic train derailment" (2023).

[8] See Sylvie Corbet and Elaine Ganley's "France's Macron risks his government to raise retirement age" (2023).

[9] See Giulia Carbonaro's "Ron DeSantis Opponents Arrested in Florida Protesting Abortion Ban" (2023).

[10] See "Florida has 3rd largest number of school book ban incidents" (2022).

[11] See Alejandro Ramirez's "They're Burning Books in Tennessee" (2022).

(1947). The mainstreaming of *The Plague* appeared to have a ripple effect on some of his other works. Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), *The Stranger* (1942), *The Rebel* (1951), and *The Fall* (1956) have also been brought back into the limelight as public interest in this French-Algerian philosopher continues to grow. What I found particularly interesting about the renewed popularity of these works was that *The Stranger* stood out and had found its way to some widely regarded "High School Reading Lists" (GoodReads) and the like that often also contain *Frankenstein*. Notably, *The Stranger* also topped *Le Monde*'s 1999 poll for the "100 Books of the Century." It is apparent to me that the themes present in both of these works have consistently resonated with audiences, due to their unique approaches to dealing with and reacting to the real-world upheavals of one's time.

I am not looking to form a complex and concrete bridge between *Frankenstein* and *The Stranger*; rather I want to discuss their relation with a primary focus on the themes found in *Frankenstein*, and argue that there is another specific element of Existentialism to be uncovered by bringing *The Stranger* into the conversation. In addition to this I seek to understand how individual readers can become convinced that their desire for social change is a monstrous endeavor. The argument I will elucidate in this project is that the Creature is not a purely monstrous being due to its appearance or linguistic faculties that reflect the real-world anxieties of *Frankenstein*'s inception; rather it is indeed a regular human being, experiencing the troubles of the human condition, and the characteristic that explicitly proves it to be human is its engagement in a Camusian form of Revolt, which has in truth always been a quality of the character and message from the novel that is able to be uncovered now that a work like *The Stranger* exists; a work which too was written as a reflection of real-world concerns.

* * *

I regard the plot of *Frankenstein* as one that is inimitable. Sure, Shelley's novel has begotten several theater adaptations, cult-classic film adaptations, parody/homages, as well as an entire body of scholarly work that often reads the novel as an example of precursory science fiction, a religious criticism or mythological allegory, a feminist social commentary and even a biomedical ethics thought experiment.[12] Not to mention the fact that from a more bare-bones perspective everything we are presented with in *Frankenstein* has already been conceptualized before by way of the texts and myths whose influence the text explicitly acknowledges (Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Prometheus myth). However, there is something particularly captivating about this novel and the way it is told that transforms the themes in those stories, particularly the theme of revolt. It is epistolary in style, bearing the torch of tradition of some major English novels. The novel starts as a series of letters sent by Captain Robert Walton to his sister, Margaret Saville, who resides in England. He relates to her the ambitions of his quest and the steps he has taken since his departure. Right up until the moments where Walton has encountered and helped the stranger his crew found floating on a "sledge," the reader has no real reason to doubt the veracity of the letters. The form and function of the framing device – the epistolary form – is effective in producing the effect of realism because its textual features make it easier to suspend one's disbelief. Captain Walton's situation is reminiscent of the various expeditions in search of the elusive Northwest Passage on the other side of the globe that began centuries ago and continued for decades after the date on his letters. It was a journey so cold and treacherous that its history alone, mirrored here in the plight of Walton, may be argued to be an accurate metaphor for the human condition, one that chooses to undertake burdens in defiance of his limitations. But then the plot takes the reader further. Walton helps a stranger, whom he learns is of noble birth and worthy intellect, but above that this stranger has the potential to fulfill Walton's longing for friendship and company during this long and lonely journey. This stranger, revealed to be the eponymous Victor Frankenstein, tells his tumultuous tale. A tale primarily of desire, of creation, and of grief. But within his tale lies another. One of rejection, of anguish, and, as I have proposed, a tale primarily of revolt.

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[12] See Brain Stableford's "Frankenstein and the Origins of Science Fiction" in *Anticipations: Essays on Early Science Fiction and its Precursors,* ed. David Seed. Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1995, pp. 46-57, Jennifer L. Airey's *Religion around Mary Shelley*. Penn State University Press, 2019, David Soyka's "Frankenstein and the Miltonic Creation of Evil." *Extrapolation*, vol. 33 issue 2, 1992, Joyce Zonana's "'They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale': Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 21 issue 2, 1991, pp. 170-184, Adam J. Gross's "Dr. Frankenstein, Or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love Crispr-Cas9." *Jurimetrics,* vol. 56, 2015. and Ted Peters' "Playing God with Frankenstein." *Theology and Science*, pp. 145-150, DOI: 10.1080/14746700.2018.1455264

Considering the plot of *Frankenstein* begets a feeling. Perhaps it is a feeling of being ripped apart and put back together, more than once, with each restitching resulting in a further loss of humanity than the previous iteration. I am of course being metaphorical in that the "restitching" is the endurance of the individual in the face of the injustices I have mentioned. Similarly, *The Stranger* is also a novel that shares in the themes described above more specifically an indifference to those feelings. From the start, Meursault is indifferent about grieving for his mother. Then, he does not desire to advance his career by way of a job promotion, and he has no intentions of creating a meaningful relationship with Marie. Yet, after the murder he commits on the hot Algerian shoreline, he is prosecuted harshly, which leads him to contemplate the extent of his revolt. Meursault, despite all of his interactions with the other characters in the novel makes his isolation apparent by his sparse evaluations of the situations that arise which he actually cares to comment on. One similarity I am keen on exploring is how almost antithetical his lack of emotion is compared to those I discern in *Frankenstein*. As I have mentioned, Meursault does not have desires or generate new ideas – and he certainly feels no grief – even when he does come to murder that nameless Arab on the beach shore, on the fringes of society, so to speak. There may be an argument to be made about how the only genuine emotions felt by Meursault may be those of rejection and anguish, but such an argument would teeter on the line of interpretation and misunderstanding of the novel's themes. Meursault is what some may be inclined to observe as sociopathic, but I call fundamentally indifferent. This indifference is then what becomes the "evil" for which Meursault may be condemned in the eyes of most readers as outright monstrous. However, I do not think that both novels are completely about the loss (or lack thereof) of humanity, especially not when they contain scenes depicting a *discovery* of what makes a person human. With this line of thinking, one may be explicitly compelled to go back and reconsider *Frankenstein* and its potential classification as an existential thriller as Frye suggested. For me, one tantalizing question arises: could *Frankenstein* potentially contextualize a novel like *The Stranger?*

There is a certain self-reflexivity that arises from comparing these texts. I believe that self-reflexivity to be one that forces the reader to evaluate not only their own ontological (perhaps even ethical) position but also their cultural and political situation. One might read *The Stranger* and then read the context under which it was written and perhaps be drawn to a conclusion that the novel's cultural-political circumstances are indicators for the sentiment that Camus intended to represent: a continued commentary on his ideas on absurdism and the condition of man in revolt. But there is another time and place where extremely similar real-world circumstances to Camus' experience also gave rise to a depiction of the same themes that he portrays. We see these themes arise when Mary Shelley first published *Frankenstein*. The similarities in the context under which Shelley wrote make it almost impossible to *not* arrive at such conclusions. Therefore, before *Frankenstein* can be interpreted through any other lens, it must also be primarily understood as a reaction to these historical developments.

I am empowered to take the approach that I am taking due to Mike Goode's *Romantic Capabilities: Blake, Scott, Austen, and the New Messages of Old Media* (2020). Goode examines how "a number of Romantic poems and novels have behaved as they have grown older and associated with newer media forms, and especially […] the critical and political insights to be gained when these behaviors reveal capabilities that were already there" (1). Goode's focus is largely on the digital and virtual forms of new media and their ability to uncover potentials in Romantic literature that have always been there, for example the potential for quotes by William Blake to go viral online and elicit certain reactions in politically-minded spaces which shows the appeal and relevance of his work. My goal is to do something similar without the proximity to new media; rather, I would invite the notion that a new genre (relative to the time of *Frankenstein*'s publication) like the existential thriller also possesses this ability to uncover a new message that has always existed in the novel, yet merely required the passage of time and the course of History in order to be identified.

This is why I cannot dispense entirely with the importance of the historical context of each novel; however I prefer to spend more time on the context of *Frankenstein* as it is the focus of this project and supplement my analysis with the context of *The Stranger* as I move throughout. When it comes to *Frankenstein*, it is necessary to understand the reception of the work and its place amid the growing concern of the time: a reading public. William St. Clair argues in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004) that the Romantic Period in Britain was a time when the widespread interest in reading among the masses made those in power uneasy. St. Clair claims that the growth and impact of reading was facilitated by the manufacture, selling, borrowing, and widespread distribution of books (7). While I am not concerned with the materiality of texts to the degree that he is, I am compelled to begin this project with St. Clair's assertion that "[t]here seems always to have been a large, politically powerful, constituency that wished to discourage reading altogether, particularly among the less-well educated" (11). It is evident that in Romantic Britain, the interests of industry and capital end up subverting any and all political ambitions. For instance, St. Clair notes that after 1774, the private ownership of most prior literature had ended, thus enabling the reprinting and proliferation of abridged and adapted texts (349). Nevertheless, the publishing industry would change yet again with the Copyright Act of 1842, but between 1774 and 1841, consumer's new purchasing power caused "an explosion of reading in the romantic period, [and] a growth in the size of the reading nation" (355). What then are the implications of this expanded consciousness among the masses? Surely not the anathema of the French Revolution espoused by Jacobin novels, you know, those pesky works that criticized the social order and sowed ideas that traditions, i.e., the status quo, could be changed or done away with. Additionally, I wish to point out that the Romantic and Existentialist reaction to the French Revolution shows how close the ideas espoused by both movements are. What I mean is that there were several Romantic writers whose radicalism made them approve of the event, and later some Existentialists would also reflect on the Revolution's significance prior to the World Wars that founded existentialist thought.

However, there were plenty of Romantic writers who absolutely abhorred the Revolution: the King is dead at the hands of the peasantry, was that not only the stuff of nightmares? There were contemporary critics of the time who certainly thought so, Burke and de Maistre come to mind as the foremost reactionaries of the publishing boom. According to Patrick Brantlinger, Burke's apprehensions toward new writings that challenge the status quo are founded in antiquity, which, for Burke, is an authentic authority unmarred by the revolutionary ideas engendered by mass literacy—these are a monstrous development that uses language to disrupt the logos of the age. Brantlinger notes that for Burke and de Maistre, the Monster they fear is one akin to the Hobbesian leviathan because "the crowd is a central actor in all accounts of the Revolution; the crowd is central as well in many Gothic romances where it sometimes figures as a metaphor or, at least, specular image for the reading public" (49). We begin to see here the real-world developments that are reflected in *Frankenstein*. That very crowd that forces the Monster to retreat to the hovel poses the same threat to the status quo of the 19th century that the crowd believes the Monster poses to humanity. To add yet another layer of irony, these reactionary thinkers would have "to use what, at least on some subliminal level, they considered to be the monster-producing instruments of terror—reason, representation, writing, literacy—to oppose those very instruments" (57). I will return to the connection between St. Clair and Brantlinger more closely in the second chapter of this thesis; for now I would like to discuss where these connections are leading us in the overarching analysis.

Brantlinger opens the door to a discussion on the perceptions of monstrosity in early-nineteenth century fiction and beyond. For this reason, it is certainly worthwhile to preface the central concern of my third chapter with Peter Brooks' "What is a Monster? (According to Frankenstein)" (1993), wherein he makes a compelling argument that considers the Monster's linguistic and rational capabilities as central to the achievement of its goals. The Monster, having recognized its unique ontological position, ardently desires to no longer be an outcast or, at the very least, wishes to have an equal. Before the Monster develops the desire for the latter, it endeavors to gain the abilities of its creator's kind by learning language and speech during its stint in the hovel. Through observation and practice, it learns that there is a world which it can inhabit that is not conditional on its appearance. Brooks makes it clear that an outcast or a being of a perceived lower stratum is still considered monstrous despite how perfect its linguistic capabilities may be. Thus, after experiencing rejection by the DeLacey clan, the Monster takes to violence (at first unknowingly) against its uncle William.[13] Brooks' argument backs my claim that the perception of monstrosity, at least in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have less to do with physical deformity and more with the capacity for awareness of an individual.

Earlier, I referred to the Sartrean "Other" as the recognizable analogue to an interpretation of *The Stranger*, and though that concept may have a role in this discussion, I did so mostly to parallel Northop Frye's reference to "Blake's 'different face,'" which is a reference to Blake's "Poem from Letters" and specifically one to his friend Thomas Butts.[14] Though the analogies to the identifying characteristics of the protagonists of *Frankenstein* and *The Stranger* to other concepts from each author's respective contemporaries is a valid avenue for analysis, I would like to draw attention to another piece of literary criticism that encompasses what I am ultimately trying to achieve with this interrogation of the term Monster. Jack Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995) opens with the idea that in nineteenth century literature there is an intrinsically metaphorical aspect to the Monster's constitution within a given piece of fiction. Halberstam and Owen Morawitz[15] have made salient arguments and observations regarding *Frankenstein* which underpin my reading of Camus' Meursault as also an Otherized person and not the Monster he is made out to be during his trial.

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[13] There have been plenty of readings written about the familial dynamics of *Frankenstein* and the parental overtones of the novel as a whole. I myself am particular to Jillmarie Murphy's "Monstrous Kinships: Attachment and Loss in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Herman Melville's *Pierre*" in *Monstrous Kinships: Realism and Attachment Theory in the Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Novel* (2011). Murphy's analysis centers on the motifs of "[p]arental detachment, emotional deprivation, and isolation" (33) that afflict the principal characters in both novels and attributes their presence to the traumatic histories of their respective authors. Given that I agree with the importance of knowing this reading of *Frankenstein,* I also accept the assumptions associated with it, hence why I refer to William Frankenstein as the Creature's uncle.

[14] Blake writes, "O! WHY was I born with a different face? / Why was I not born like the rest of my race?" It is easy to see why Frye chose to reference this.

The purpose of the third chapter is to bring cohesion to the ideas I have discussed and show how both novels also connect on a level beyond their thematic similarities primarily through a discussion on the how the Creature's revolt takes form in *Frankenstein*. I compare Meursault's thoughts in the final moments of *The Stranger* to the Creature's actions in the third volume of *Frankenstein*. In the conclusive chapter, I explain the importance of the tradition of the novel and how it has further allowed for this comparison to be made. I will also take a moment to bring into the conversation two old works of criticism from the literary traditions that this project is concerned with. These are M.H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) and William Barrett's *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (1958). I see the potential here to tie together the original intimations of Frye's comparison in 1968 and Hunt's observation in 2022. The goal is to read the qualities of each novel along these critical-theoretical literary lenses to demonstrate their similarities as mediums aiming at the same goal of artistic expression and hopefully reach a tangible conclusion about Mary Shelley's influence on Albert Camus. There is something more crucial to understand as we delve into this project. It is not necessarily one that hinges on the human propensity for direct political action; rather it is an intimation into the metaphysical form of revolt that gives way to the actualization of the individual. The characters in the novels took certain actions and paths which one is perhaps obligated to read as metaphors for revolt. However, the creation of these novels – especially under the duress that they were written – necessitates a consideration of the author's revolt. Given that Camus did see engaging in the production of art as a form of rebellion, it is all the more relevant to think about how the process of writing these novels adds a layer of meaning to the acts of revolt that these authors portrayed in their work.

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[15] See "'The Monster Is Never the Monster': Gothic Fiction and Otherness" (2020).

Chapter II: Worrisome Welcome – Context and Reactions

To better understand the effects of the reception of *Frankenstein*, we must take some time to look at the historical context. Moving past the Gothic Revival of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, past the Balladry Revival of Thomas Percy,[16] we quickly arrive at the turn of the century where the Acts of Union (1800-1) are drawn up and a French garrison in Valletta surrenders to British troops, signaling the end of the Siege of Malta. Soon enough the Napoleonic wars ensue, causing all matter of destabilization for the continent which lays the groundwork for the new condition of England as it nears 1815. A routed Bonaparte at Waterloo prompts Lord Byron to author the third canto of Childe Harold during that Summer of 1816.[17] Yet other forms of trouble brewed during this time for only a month later Littleport, Cambridgeshire, would stand to witness the Littleport and Ely riots, which were a culmination of civil unrest due to high food prices and even higher unemployment.[18] Similar events would follow during this year such as the Luddite group tearing through John Heathcoat's factory and the Spa Field riots at the end of the year. Clearly rapid industrialization, subsequent poverty due to unemployment, harsh working conditions, and lack of social/legal safety nets (produced by the repeal of income tax and the suspension of the *habeas corpus* the following year) led to unsteady social conditions.

Furthermore, the economic impact of the war debt following the Napoleonic wars combined with the poor harvest conditions of 1817 left farmers struggling and displaced, which led to the Pentrich uprising. At the same time, protests for parliamentary reform continued, especially in regard to proprietorial boroughs and other large portions of land incorporated by royal charter. These boroughs were politically concerning given that they tended to underrepresent a population and were used connivingly to gain influence in a pre-Reform (1832) House of Commons. It is not surprising that the British government feared the notion of reform as the example set by the French Revolution and the subsequent Reign of Terror fueled the fear that clashes between the radicals and conservatives would increase drastically.

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[16] See Henry A. Beers' *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century*. Gordian Press, Inc. New York. 1966.
[17] See David Ellis' *Byron in Geneva: That Summer of 1816*. 1st ed. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017.
[18] See C. Johnson's *An account of the Ely and Littleport Riots in 1816*. Littleport: Harris. 1893.

There is one more societal change that becomes noticeable as we near 1818: the matter of the Church of England. Since the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the Anglican Church strengthened its weakened spiritual and (arguably more important) political power by resorting to letting Methodists and other Nonconformists/ Dissenters into their organization. This would be the move of the Anglican Church once again in the nineteenth century when they let in the Evangelicals and permitted the Catholic Relief Act (1829). While it may be the case that the Anglican Church still sought to limit the rights and abilities to hold public office for non-Anglicans, I am highlighting that this waning of the Anglican Church's exclusive hegemony would be noticed in intellectual and literary circles. It should surprise no one that near the end of the eighteenth century, most of the British state and its churches are effectively "more deist than Christian, more a useful instrument of cultural, and therefore political, governance than a set of propositions and ideas believed to be true" (St. Clair 273). This century would be witness to "the abandonment of Christian belief by most of the country's intellectuals" (St. Clair 427). As I have discussed, there were plenty of reasons for the decline of the Church in England, so I am not going to imply that *Frankenstein* had much to do with it, but I would be remiss to leave this novel's affront to the central narrative of Christianity unacknowledged. Not only that, but part of the argument about the Creature's revolt necessitates a discussion on its evasion of what Camus calls Philosophical Suicide, or the idea that one should suspend one's rationality in favor of having a strong faith in what are essentially man-made ideas which for Camus includes organized religion. This in turn gives us the perfect segue to discuss the novel's reception.

Percy Shelley of course spoke very highly of *Frankenstein*, calling it "one of the most original and complete productions of the day" (213)[19]. Shelley recognizes the profundity of emotion that gives the novel its merit. Some critics like John Croker were less pleased by the work, claiming that reader's

> taste [and] judgement alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is – [*Frankenstein*] inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated – it fatigues the feelings without interesting the understanding; it gratuitously harasses the heart, and wantonly adds to the store, already too great, of painful sensations. (218-219)

One *Edinburgh Magazine* reviewer aptly observed that the novel "is formed on the Godwinian manner, and has all the faults, but many likewise of the beauties of that model. In dark and gloomy views of nature and of man, bordering too closely on impiety [...] it possesses a similar power of fascination [...] relieved in like manner by the gentler features of domestic and simple feelings" (231). There is undeniably a shadow of William Godwin overseeing some of the crucial moments of longing and pain by the Creature that echo some of his works – a feature of the text that I will draw attention to in due time. The last figure whose reaction I would like to highlight is Sir Walter Scott's, who regarded *Frankenstein* as a work of "original genius" that demonstrated the author's (whom he assumed to be Percy Shelley) "happy power of expression"

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[19] The following four reactions were extracted from J. Paul Hunter's editorial work for the Norton Critical Edition of *Frankenstein*. The page citations are from that edition.

(231). Scott marveled at the “species” of *Frankenstein* as it managed to use the supernatural in a way that is not dependent on hyperbolic fantasy like that of German fiction. Scott notes,

> A more philosophical and refined use of the supernatural in works of fiction, is proper to that class in which the laws of nature are represented as altered, not for the purpose of pampering the imagination with wonders, but in order to shew the probable effect which the supposed miracles would produce on those who witnessed them. In this case, the pleasure ordinarily derived from the marvellous incidents is secondary to that which we extract from observing how mortals like ourselves would be affected. (220)

These initial reactions to *Frankenstein* are but a few that I believe encapsulate the thoughts of those in editorial and literary circles. Clearly, there is a breadth of controversy, from outright praise, to questioning its ideological origins and apprehensions about what the novel’s themes imply. However, the more important and impactful reaction that I would like to discuss centers on the reaction by the masses and the ruling class.

In order to differentiate the objective of his study, William St. Clair in his work, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, explains that the main tradition of literary and cultural history had for a long time been one where texts within a certain context were placed one after the other in a timeline and the ones that best described the essence of the historical situation that gave rise to them were deemed the best to represent that age. Academic developments during his time focused on putting different texts in conversation with one another as if they were debating the ideas that they put forth and drew from other sources of support rather than just relying on what was literally written. What validated this approach was the practice of conducting some sort of critical analysis that need not be specific to the time of the book. This allowed the critic to uncover some hidden meaning or even apply certain non-literary theories to a reading of a text to better explain the appeal of that text, all while leaving it situated within its specific historical context (2-3). I am in a sense returning to this practice, though not entirely. While St. Clair’s goals do not strictly align with my aims for this project, they do provide important insights into the conditions of the literate public that would in some way or another hold reception for *Frankenstein*.

For example, one front of the cultural landscape during the Romantic period pertained to public reaction to the previously limited education of the working class. This reaction was of course one of exponential growth in the reading public and the incorporation of literature into school curriculum (St. Clair 10-11). The sudden availability of printed material that was not exclusively sanctioned by the state and church presented a new concern for the ruling class. It no longer appeared to be the case that public interest in reading was for the express purpose of having a better understanding of religion or morality or knowledge. Why should the ruling class be concerned? I have already cited St. Clair's suggestion of a large, politically powerful, constituency that sought to discourage reading among the less-well educated (11). This means that it was favorable to keep the working class underserved in education in order to facilitate complacency, a fact proven due to fears over the uncertain consequences of this cultural development being expressed by the ruling class. They feared the reading of novels and poetry and other genres that offered escapism at best, and the articulation of new emotions and validation of new ideas at worst (12-13). There is a logos during this time that centers around cultivating the conditions of civil unrest that have been manifesting in Britain since the turn of the century.

Finally, we arrive at the publication of *Frankenstein* in 1818. On this, St. Clair comments the following:

> [l]ike all the books written by members of the Godwin and Shelley families, *Frankenstein* had a political and ethical purpose. In accordance with the Godwinian theory of progress, *Frankenstein* would, they hoped, help to change

> the perceptions, the knowledge, the understanding, and therefore the behaviour, of those who read or otherwise encountered it. The reading of the book would, they hoped, contribute, in its small way, to the general intellectual and moral improvement of society in its slow, much interrupted progress towards perfection. (358)

This clearly shows that there was a primary motivation to influence any and all who read this novel. The goal was to extract an intimation of the potential to reexamine the conditions of one's existence and use that evaluation as a metric for improving oneself and their society; this is of course a reflection of Godwin's own Dissenting Protestant upbringing. However, due to copyright and publication restrictions thanks to Richard Bentley and his industry cronies, it would take decades before the working class and the less educated public would have a true chance to be receptive to *Frankenstein*. Now, nearing the end of the nineteenth century, there would be an explosion in reading by those who were too poor to afford books during their original time of publication. Those who could afford to read *Frankenstein* back in the early nineteenth century and who scorned it would now have to confront the wider circulation of the ideas they unreasonably feared and so vehemently opposed.

Before I move onto Patrick Brantlinger's explanation of the implications for what I have just discussed, I want to highlight one final idea by St. Clair. His note on the novel is that during the time where the more widely available version of it was as an adapted theatre production, a vastly different interpretation of the original work than what Shelley initially intended, became popularized. It was the idea that *Frankenstein* simply embodied the fears of those reluctant or resistant to change. Such was the "reasoning" that "[i]f you free the slaves, reform parliament, give votes to the working class or independence to the Irish, you will create a Frankenstein monster which will destroy you" (St. Clair 372). This is a purposefully asinine dejection of the actual complex commentary that the novel aimed to make, though it was an early reading of the novel and one that would become widely accepted throughout the century, even during the decades that it was not in circulation. This was clearly an attempt to maintain some sort of illusion to distract from the imminent societal turbulence that this novel encouraged. It appears to me that the discourse surrounding *Frankenstein* has an inherent propensity to be subject to unsubstantiated interpretations that distort and obfuscate the goal of the Shelleys be it intentional or not. And it is easy to see why this blatant misinterpretation would be favorable for the ruling class, for what else could come when the masses began to think about what makes them human and what it means to be human?

Brantlinger also observes this propensity for the ruling class to fear the message of *Frankenstein*. In “The Reading Monster” (1998), Brantlinger showcases how well before *Frankenstein*, critics were prone to react to Gothic fiction as metaphors for the events of the French Revolution and its consequences (49). So, it does not appear that *Frankenstein* may have had much of a chance to escape the Gothic mantle given the presentation of its subject matter. It was clear that the interpretation aligned with the notion that a society created this mass monstrosity that would result in its destruction. Now it appears that the concern is not merely that the public is engaging in the same activity, reading, but now there is an underlying fear that the public will once again gather and this time in greater force than was repelled in some of the previous instances of riot. In essence, it did not particularly matter what sort of political message may be attempted to be conveyed in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century fiction; there would inevitably be fears over the role of the public in democracy or education (50). Surely there must have been a substantial arrogance due to the massacre at “Peterloo” in 1819 and the subsequent passing of the Six Acts at the end of that year. For it is a mistaken belief that the ruling body can legislate away the temperament of the oppressed. We see here that the ruling class has a propensity to cultivate unrest, which is the kindling of revolt. The clearest analog in *Frankenstein* is shown when the crowd chases the Creature away and forces its retreat into the hovel.

This immediate reception that ascribed an inherently political meaning to *Frankenstein* is one of many perspectives, yet the fact that it happened to be the reaction to the text in its time, with other perspectives like psychoanalysis or feminist theory arising later, shows how the text evolves far beyond its initial appearance. Brantlinger agrees with Chris Baldick's comment that the myriad interpretations that *Frankenstein* lends itself to are part and parcel of its transcendence in discourse academic or otherwise. Because of this, Brantlinger observes the existence of the actual novel *Frankenstein* and its potential for multifaceted interpretation to be the "ultimate monstrosity" (60), which is not too dissimilar to the opinions of the reactionaries of Shelley's time. For a brief time, it would be the notion of germinating ideas that was seen as monstrous, until that shifted onto the actual people receptive to them. Part of Brantlinger's analysis of anti-Enlightenment readings of *Frankenstein* shows how it aligns to the reality that critics and thinkers of the time chose to maintain. Just as they are aware that reading and reason are tools to bring about systemic change, they choose to read the Monster as a figure emboldened by its acquisition of language. One last reference Brantlinger makes is to Paul O'Flinn's reading of *Frankenstein* that takes a Marxist approach and considers more closely the context of the Luddite uprising in the years prior to the novel's publication. This is of course not the only reading of oppression ascribed to *Frankenstein*, but it does show how the novel can take the shape of any given context due to its mostly universal themes. There will always be a capital interest that depends on oppression of the masses in order to further itself. And as history has proven, when the public gains awareness, often through literature, it becomes empowered to fight for its better interests. There is undoubtedly a clear relation between the social and political conditions during which *Frankenstein* arose, and the irony of the reaction to the reaction is not lost on me. So, as I have shown, even prior to the turn of the 19th century tensions have been mounting and especially so with the publication of *Frankenstein*. So much so that its effects continue to be felt among the "monstrous" masses once they manage to have access to the text.

Finally, the awareness that the Shelleys long hoped to instill has arrived. The reception of *Frankenstein* as a text that stirs fears not through supernatural imagery, but through its ideological challenge is an affirmation of the Percy Shelley's prefatory assertion that the novel is note merely "a series of supernatural terrors" and that it is indeed "exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres and enchantment" (5). *Frankenstein* presents a formidable challenge to *any* ideation, be it pro-, post-, or anti- Enlightenment, Christian, Parliamentary rule, etc. Naturally, the reaction to something that challenges the establishment is to deem the producer of that affront an aberration that will destroy everything the establishment values. The attribution of problems or societal ills to one single body and holding it in contempt to the point of demonizing it is nothing new and in fact will continue to be a trend in the nineteenth century and beyond. I would now like to take a closer look at the significance of the factors that contribute to this perception of monstrosity.

Chapter III: The Monster's Revolt – What makes one Human

For a portion of this chapter, I am interested in discussing the perceptions of monstrosity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, specifically surrounding the time of each novel's publication. My overarching argument is essentially this: people become convinced that they are monsters for feeling and expressing a dissatisfaction with the unjust systems under which they are subjugated. This dissatisfaction creates a yearning for systemic change that increases in fervor the more they endure the injustice. The locus of *Frankenstein*'s meaning is inextricably bound to the context of the French Revolution and its consequences. In the exact same way, the locus of meaning for *The Stranger* comes from its context of resistance during the Nazi occupation of France. In this way, we can see both texts as bound by ideas later expounded on by Camus. The idea that revolutions are bloody and serve only as an imposition of a new ideology is contrasted with Camus' promotion of resistance to oppressive force.

Peter Brooks has already explained how narratives have made it possible to ascribe meaning to a body in fiction. From the contexts of Rousseau to the French Revolution, "the process of assigning meaning to the individual's body leaves the domain of the individual to become a pressing concern for the state – for those who are trying to define and to institute the new order" (87). Once again, we return to the state of conflict between the individual and the society in which they operate. It is the condition of one's existence, which if it so happens to deviate from what is considered acceptable, that becomes a challenge for those in power to contain. But the condition of the individual is undeniably human.

In Volume II of *Frankenstein*, during the Creature's narration of its time away from Victor, the reader can see the clear-cut attempts on behalf of the Creature to achieve a certain closeness with other people. The Creature recognizes the importance of being able to communicate the same way the DeLaceys do, and interestingly it remarks how it felt delight in learning the "ideas appropriated to each of [those] sounds" once it could pronounce them (Shelley 77). This acquisition of language turns into a capacity for sympathy as the Creature is able to recognize sorrow in Felix and cheerfulness in Agatha. Then, there is a crucial moment in the Creature's learning. The Creature tells Victor,

> [the] book from which Felix instructed Safie was Volney's *Ruins of Empires*. I should not have understood the purport of this book, had not Felix, in reading it, given very minute explanations. […] Through this work I obtained a cursory knowledge of history, and a view of the several empires at present existing in the world; it gave me an insight into the manners, governments, and religions of the different nations of the earth. (82)

This awareness of history is significant because it widens the perspective of the Creature from its immediate geography and experience. Suddenly it has larger understanding of time and causality, of different cultures and political systems. This newfound awareness also generates an almost paradoxical feeling in the Creature, as it questions how mankind can be so magnificent and virtuous, yet evil and vicious (83). And it admits that it does not fully understand why man, if he has within him the capacity to continue to be virtuous and a potential to reach godlike greatness, he resorts to violence and debasement. This, of course, the Creature will eventually come to understand.

Brooks also touches on this idea that language and its ability to create a reference point for the natural world also creates a reference point for what can be called a "Monster." The reader can see this idea elucidated when the Creature gains awareness of its unnatural appearance, asking "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). The Creature expresses a recognition of its bodily constitution and that it is the reason for its deference. Brooks writes,

> [on] a basic level, it is nothing but body: that which exists to be looked at, pointed to, and nothing more. You can't do anything with a monster except look at it. […] In *Frankenstein*, language is marked by the body, by the process of embodiment. We have not so much a mark on the body as the mark of the body: the capacity of language to create a body, one that in turn calls into question the language we use to classify and control bodies. In the plot of the novel, that body cannot be touched by any of the human bodies; apparently indestructible, it can be eliminated only when the Monster himself chooses to burn himself up. (220)

Brooks' claim that the Monster is not complete by mere bodily composition and that it requires the acquisition of language in order to classify itself and its reputation is accurate. For it is others who must "otherize" the Creature before it can declare itself monstrous. By highlighting this, Brooks is touching on another important point, later expounded on by Jack Halberstam. The significance of the Creature's acquisition of language and its alienation at the hands of others is a direct analogue to the plight of the reading nation in the nineteenth century. It is representative of the calls for parliamentary reform, the protests turned riots, and the reflections on the effects of the French Revolution. The oppressed public and the individuals that make up the nation become conflicted as they must struggle between expressing their dissatisfaction while being labeled "monstrous" for wanting reform and a sensible governance.

Sartre believed that man determines his own destiny by the choices he makes, anchored in reality, as opposed to idealized life. There is arguably a solid way to interpret the central philosophical concern of the Existentialists in *Frankenstein*. Victor is indubitably a man that has determined his own destiny by choosing to reject his creation. This voluntary rejection cannot be a product of a life idealized. He rejected his material reality and created his own and now that material reality rejects him. Victor and the Creature want different things, and there are certain goals that are unattainable. Victor cannot control the Creature so he rejects all forms of human connection after it murders Elizabeth. The Creature cannot form human connections so it rejects its creator. Victor however remains praised by the others who interact with him and the Creature is disdained by everyone who interacts with it.

Victor's first encounter with the Creature after his initial abandonment gives him cause to assume the Creature wants to kill him. The Creature however is interested in an opportunity to sit down with Victor and explain its circumstances. The Creature exclaims, "Be calm! I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it" (Shelley 68). Pimonte points out that this initial protest provides a familiar existentialist air since the Creature recognizes the anguish of existence, the difficulty of living without a sense of purpose or meaning, which is exacerbated by the finitude of human life (142). The Creature then finds itself in an all too human position, that of attempting to find meaning in a meaningless world, without the comfort of a deity or creator to hail and worship, since its creator has rejected it. This ontological position as well as the Creature's second decree anticipate the existentialist belief that despite all of the aforementioned, life is still worth living. The Creature is capable of making a value judgement that enables its ability to choose to live, especially in the face of the absurd, as a mode of rebellion. The fact that it chooses to live is an existentialist motif reinforced by the Creature identifying with Satan in *Paradise Lost* who is at this time read as a rebel by the Romantics.

Further, the Creature realizes Victor, primed for violence, may not be so easily moved and inquires the following,

> "How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? 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? they spurn and hate me. The

> desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow-beings. If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness." (Shelley 68-69)

We are reminded by Annalee Newitz that this of course is only Captain Walton's version of Victor's version of the Creature's narrative, and must consider this when examining this particular passage that shows a certain hatred for the lives the Creature previously declared worth defending. These pleas to Victor which are reminiscent of the longings of Godwin's character Caleb Williams, show how strong philosophical musings are presented in the novel, scarce as they may be. The Creature does not hate humans for being living beings – for it recognizes itself to be human too – rather it hates their attitude towards it for its condition of existing. This, Newitz points out, is a way of "otherizing" a being from society (142). The Creature is asking Victor for validation as a person, which would begin its ability to heal from the rejection by other people. I have made reference to Sartre's "other" as the actuality of the Creature's existence; the entirety of is existence is not as a Monster, rather as an Other person. This other person is ostracized for its condition, which it knows to be no different than the people that reject it. Even the reader has a different perception of what the Creature could actually be trying to express about itself. Newitz notes that it is possible that Victor may have altered what the Creature actually said in order to show its heinous disdain for humanity. Victor's representation, and therefore society's representation, of an Other person is more harmful, more often than not (142). The Creature also knows that the reason for its ostracism is due almost entirely to its appearance. It lives, eats, breathes, and speaks like others, yet it looks unlike them.

This dawning realization of what precisely separates the Creature from others is almost immediately apparent when it first runs into the De Lacey family. “I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers— their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool!” (Shelley 78). If anything this is further proof of its humanity. It is literally terrified of its own appearance just like other people are. Once again Pimonte provides insight into the significance of this event. The Creature’s self-awareness is informed by other people’s perception of what a human is according to conceptualizations of “normality,” “beauty,” and even “morality” (144), all of which the Creature’s identity seems to contradict. Understanding this shows how a person comes to know themselves and their position, in other words their self-perception, and is able to react according to the disparity between the self and society. This reaction is usually fear, as it is not unusual to have an adverse reaction to an “other,” much less can it be expected to be unafraid of being the “other” in a society.

These reflections and expressions of the population are reminiscent of Camus’ concept of Historical Rebellion which he explains in *The Rebel*. For Camus, Historical Rebellion occurs as one of the reactions to the confrontation with the Absurd. When a desire for a better world, or according to Camus, nostalgia even, comes to be seen as indispensable for one’s continued existence, there is a propensity to turn to violence and “consummate the revolution” (Camus *Rebel* 105). This fervor with which the masses of the eighteenth-century – and the nineteenth century – has only one logical conclusion. For Camus, a move toward revolution is a “desperate and bloody effort to affirm the dignity of man in defiance of the things that deny its existence” (105). Now, while I am arguing that the Creature is in several ways representative of the dissatisfied masses, and the definition for revolution seems to align with the Creature’s motivations and actions; for it does seek to affirm its dignity to those who deny its existence; this is not applicable to the idea of revolt it as it operates in the novel. This is because, as Camus goes on to explain, “rebellion is only the movement that leads from individual experience into the realm of ideas” (106). Meaning that the Creature does not seek to completely overturn the ways of man and bend the world to its will. It simply understands the ideas found in the Bible and Milton and tries to find compatibility with its own individual experience of alienation and rejection by its creator.

This brings religion to mind, for in the nineteenth century, the mere suggestion that man could undertake the role of creator, which was then exercised in the plot of *Frankenstein*, was grounds to be considered an affront to Christianity. The Creature too appears to almost make the human mistake of falling into what Camus calls “Philosophical Suicide” (Camus *Sisyphus* 28). In the Creature’s first encounter with Victor after two years of alienation, it has hopes that Victor will bestow benevolence on its being. One of the first things it tells Victor is “I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due” (Shelley 68). While this is an example of a confrontation, I want to go further and interpret this as one that shows the confrontation with the Absurd. The Absurd of course being the confrontation between an ideal reality clashing with a material reality. Meursault sees it in the several interactions he has with individuals who believe their actions to be the exercise of agency when there is none. The Creature seeks acceptance from its creator to which the creator responds “Begone.” This is where the Creature almost commits Philosophical Suicide because there was a moment of desire where the Creature believed it could appeal to its creator as a way to skirt the Absurd. When man recognizes the Absurd, yet chooses to embrace the promises of Christianity or religion in general as a method of easing the tension of the confrontation, he is committing Philosophical Suicide. The same way Jaspers, Chestov, Kierkegaard, and Husserl all tried to forego one of the conditions for the confrontation between man and the universe in order to cope with the reality of the Absurd, the Creature's attempt to surrender itself to Victor is representative of the same. This surrender to Victor ends when the Creature sees Victor decide that he will not create another being to exist as the Creature's companion.

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As I have mentioned before, the ruling class sees a problem with the public becoming aware of the injustices wrought upon them in the name of capital. For this reason, the ruling class have had to villainize the public in order to maintain a permanent underclass. In Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), we are introduced to the idea that Monstrosity is a metaphor for the conversion of something political into something more intimate. This union after conversion results in a "symbol for the transformation of identity […] through the mechanism of failed repression" (9). Monstrosity is then defined for the time as the perception of some kind of social or political problem that is believed to threaten the status quo and in order to keep people from instigating the problem it must be classified as horrifying and dangerous. Of course, the problem is not really a problem at all, it is simply a shift in culture and a renewed awareness or desire on behalf of the masses, which is often a move to better their material conditions, that triggers a panic in those in power and leads them to the sort of slippery slope arguments of Burke and the like.

In *The Stranger*, the reader can see towards the end of the novel that Meursault is being tried much more harshly than his circumstances might demand. Rather than simply being tried for the murder of the Arab man, to which he had already confessed, there is an authoritative body that seeks to bend Meursault to its will and force him to show feelings of guilt and condemning him for being unable to do so. The prosecutors in the second part of the novel begin to interrogate Meursault on his reaction to the death of his mother, going so far as to bring witnesses from the nursing home where she resided to testify to Meursault's disposition during his visit. Once again, the seeming problem for Meursault is that his extreme indifference creates a barrier that isolates him from feeling things that are common in the rest of society. During one of the hearings he thinks to himself, "I would have liked to have tried explaining to him cordially, almost affectionately, that I had never been able to truly feel remorse for anything" (Camus *The Stranger* 100). This is a clear-cut case given that Meursault has already confessed and could be sentenced quickly and without much spectacle. Yet, this authoritative body believes that a man who is indifferent to the status quo is more of a danger to society rather than a nuisance. This is why the prosecutors must go further to villainize Meursault, specifically by talking about his soul. Meursault tells us, "[the prosecuter] said that he peered into [my soul] and that he had found nothing, gentlemen of the jury. He said the truth was that I didn't have a soul and that nothing human, not one of the moral principles that govern men's hearts, was within my reach" (101). It is evident of the Foucauldian notion that judgement of the individual moves from a focus on one's body to an emphasis on one's soul. Because Meursault is able to see the arbitrariness of the system and its frail ecosystem that depends on the belief that it is strong and concrete to continue existing, the authoritative body must try to find ways to make Meursault guilty on more egregious charges. The prosecutor continues, "[…] the emptiness of a man's heart becomes, as we find it has in this man, an abyss threatening to swallow up society" (101).

This idea comes to a head when the prosecutor suggests (because it is the only more egregious thing that he can suggest given that there was already a confession provided without issue) that Meursault is effectively responsible for killing his mother by virtue of feeling no sorrow at her death, a murder which somehow legitimizes the occurrence of a parricide that is to be tried in court the day after Meursault's trial – a murder then for which he too is implied to be responsible. This absurd set of accusations seems to seal Meursault's fate in the eyes of the legal system. Herein lies a similarity to *Frankenstein*. For one, Meursault denies the services of the clergy that would supposedly save his soul. He rejects them because he recognizes that he would be committing Philosophical Suicide should he accept another one of man's truths before his death. The other is, if one agrees with the supposition that the person responsible for the Creature's murders in *Frankenstein* is Victor, then the Creature is condemned for murders it committed under the duress of its creator's rejection. Yet another plot-based similarity between both novels worth highlighting is the trial of Justine in *Frankenstein*.

When charges are brought against Justine for the murder of young William, there is little for her to use in her defense. Justine tries to use a character defense by invoking testimony from Elizabeth and others who know her to be the kind, gentle person that she is. But in the end, Victor tells Elizabeth, "it is decided as you may have expected; all judges had rather that ten innocent should suffer, than that one guilty should escape. But she has confessed" (Shelley 57). So, in spite of the circumstantial evidence – her possession of William's locket – not necessarily being sufficient to convict her, and all of the defenses of Justine's character, the pressure of the accusation on Justine of something so egregious makes it easier on the judges and the public to accept a narrative that does not have any other possible avenue of explanation, a fact only the reader and Victor know to be untrue. Justine tells Elizabeth of her confession,

> "I did confess; but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than all my other sins. […] Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and

> menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. What could I do? In an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly miserable." (58)

This plot-based similarity to *The Stranger* is significant because it hearkens to the situations and measures that a society might deem suitable to take to safeguard the structures it has put in place as a scaffolding of law and order. Meursault's trial effectively shows the rejection of his society, not necessarily for the murder, for he is a white Algerian who has murdered an Arab, a crime which can be ruled relatively favorably to the Algerian's side as this murder is arguably part of the function of colonialism and is thus not particularly out of the ordinary.[20] In *Frankenstein*, the Creature murders out of anger and resentment, not because it is inherently evil. Meursault murders out of indifference, not because he is a monster.

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[20] Arguably, Camus never intended for the themes of *The Stranger* to center on race, but rather he wanted the emphasis to be on an absurdist perception of the legal system on which societies operate.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

Dorothy Van Ghent asserts in *The English Novel: Form and Function* (1953), that the reason the novel can provide readers with distinct insights is because it is not focused on convincing its reader that what is known is in fact true, but rather because it clues them into the possibility of something beyond the material being true (3-4). The novel is remarkable for its ability to use what we do know to then bring forth or reveal hidden truths that were in a sense always present yet impeded by the limitations of sensory experience. Van Ghent also makes another connection about the process of the novel as contrasted with history. She writes,

> The procedure of the novel is to individualize. As with other art forms, what it has to say that is of collective value is said by inference from individual concrete things. History, on the other hand, proceeds by generalization. It treats people as groups; and when individuals appear they appear as catalysts of large collective actions or as representatives of groups, their significance being that of the group forces, the collection, the sum. This is a difference of convention, and on the conventions of an art depends its special expressiveness. (4)

This distinction between the process of the novel and the process of History makes two things clear: that (1) the novel is hyper-focused on a microcosm to make a revelation about or evaluate a certain macrocosm, and (2) the macrocosm of History makes it easier to understand the microcosms, or individuals, that came together to form a particular historical movement or moment. It is not only that history has potentially given rise to a certain novel, but that the novel too is a reaction to historical events. Therefore, the reaction to the novel then too becomes a part of history ad infinitum. I have to an extent demonstrated this to be the case with *Frankenstein* and *The Stranger* by showing how these novels represent the villainization of individuals who are dissatisfied with their social conditions in their respective historical contexts.

It is then that we advanced from the materiality of the novel and its creation and circulation to the way its contents function. For Van Ghent, it is not sufficient that fiction be a telling of events, because while it may be important that fiction maintain a cohesive set of events, it is primarily for the purposes of demonstrating causality in the lives of the characters, which the reader can then identify in their own lives. What is more important, then, is that the events narrated in the novel are reflected in the mind of the reader to provide a recognizable "principle that makes the traits in an event cohere," and subsequently "the principle that controls the relationship between events" in order to be able to form ideas about what we have read (5-6). Narratives, like the ones in *Frankenstein*, contextualize how one should react to the events that are recognized, be it from Walton, Victor, or the Creature's perspective. This is also the case in *The Stranger* as the court must create a narrative further condemning Meursault that does not threaten their current understanding of the social order.

What, then, is the value of ideas in novels as opposed to those in philosophical treatises or scientific manuscripts? Van Ghent acknowledges that the technical and abstractive language used in philosophy and the sciences make readers receptive to ideas and can therefore be a barrier to recognition for the value of ideas expressed in novels. Some readers assume that the novel's "imagery of speech" lacks the ability to convey anything meaningful. I agree with Van Ghent's evaluation of these criticisms because it is essentially a return to the importance of understanding form and function. The locus of her argument may be best explained when she writes, "The novel is able to express the most profound ideas, but, because of the nature of this medium, these will lie implicitly in the conjunction of the events that are bodied forth. The ideas in a novel are largely for the reader's inference, his inference of the principles by which the happenings in the book are related to each other" (6). The fact is that the novel requires a "chronicling" of sorts in order to present events in a logical sequence from which the reader can siphon an answer. And the way in which this is achieved is oddly scientific, no? Inquiry, hypothesis, research, analysis, results. Exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, resolution. The best ideas found in novels are those gleaned off a portion of events, which can then be grouped with other portions of events in the novel to create an overarching argument about (likely current) social-cultural or political issues.

It is only after one understands the form of the novel and how it functions to bring forth ideas that one can assemble the different ideas or portions of ideas and decisively judge the value of the novel as a whole. Van Ghent drives her argument when she explains that,

> […] we judge a novel also by the cogency and illuminative quality of the view of life that it affords, the idea embodied in its cosmology. Our only adequate preparation for judging a novel evaluatively is through the analytical testing of its unity, of its characterizing qualities, and of its meaningfulness--its ability to make us more aware of the meaning of our lives. All these tests test the value of the novel only for us, and value for us is all the value that matters. But if the particular novel has been integral and characterful and meaningful for other individuals and other generations as well, however different its appearance to them, the book automatically extends our lives in amplitude and variousness. (7)

It is the novel's ability to form a consistent viewpoint through its events and characters that ultimately makes it a worthwhile piece of art if executed properly. It is an aesthetic achievement capable of granting what so many argue is nonexistent. The novel generates an awareness of the reality beyond one's material reality and from awareness, one can create a valuation of their unique ontological position – and from value, meaning. I have maintained this line of thinking throughout the project, but I also want to interpret what Van Ghent might also be getting at in the final sentence quoted above. It is interesting that she says a book can be meaningful to individuals and generations despite a "different appearance to them." Given what we have surveyed from her argument, I am under the impression that it is possible she is hinting at the possibility for texts to reappear, not just possessing the same themes or ideas, rather, because they spring from a similar social-cultural or political moment, which then evokes the same ideas of the previous iteration of the text.

One of the questions I feel I have left unaddressed as part of this study pertains to my choice to analyze *Frankenstein* through an existentialist lens. How does this novel about stitching dead body parts together and reanimating them as one articulate being fit into the existentialist fiction genre as it is readily understood? I believe that a way to answer this lies in looking at the tradition of realism. In order to better situate the novel in the realist tradition and examine its key realist traits, it is necessary, then, to turn to the realist macrocosm in search of an answer. Some of the most prominent literary critics have made different arguments about what constitutes realism in the English novel. In his study of the English novel centered around George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad, *The Great Tradition* (1954), F. R. Leavis makes the following observation: Leavis writes,

> Jane Austen, in fact, is the inaugurator of the great tradition of the English novel – and by ‘great tradition’ I mean the tradition to which what is great in English fiction belongs. The great novelists in that tradition are all very much concerned with ‘form’; they are all very original technically, having turned their genius to the working out of their own appropriate methods and procedures. But the peculiar quality of their preoccupation with ‘form’ may be brought out by a contrasting reference to Flaubert. (17)

For Leavis, there is a clear demarcation where the tradition of the English novel begins. There is also a clear literary marker that makes the demarcation of this tradition significant. The novelist’s concern with the form their work undertakes is the key to the greatness of their fiction. It is a claim that every novelist’s design is by no means accidental or arbitrary. This deliberate effort to arrange a set of ideas and encourage the reader to briefly suspend their disbelief in order to fully understand the stakes of the literary work is the demand made from their conscious originality. But however much their originality makes demands of a cohesive form, that in itself is not an original obsession as we have already see with Van Ghent. Leavis shows how the concern with form is something elucidated by those who are possessed by no such formalities. Leavis explains how

> D.H. Lawrence adduces Flaubert as figuring to the world the 'will of the writer to be greater than and undisputed lord over the stuff he writes.' This attitude in art, as Lawrence points out, is indicative of an attitude in life – or towards life. Flaubert, he comments, 'stood away from life as from leprosy.' For the later Aesthetic writers, who, in general, represent in a weak kind of way the attitude that Flaubert maintained with a perverse heroism, 'form' and 'style' are ends to be sought for themselves, and the chief preoccupation is with elaborating a beautiful style to apply to the chosen subject. (17)

Thus, the only way to balance an obsession with form is to also seek a style of writing which highlights the beauty of a subject. Though Gustave Flaubert is nowhere near the primary concern of this project, he is an undeniable force in matters of literary realism. The search for beauty is undeniably an existentialist concern as Camus explained in *The Rebel* "[Humanity's] most instinctive act of rebellion, while it affirms the value and the dignity common to all men, obstinately claims, so as to satisfy its hunger for unity, an integral part of the reality whose name is beauty. […] Beauty, no doubt, does not make revolutions. But a day will come when revolutions will have need of beauty" (276). When the author engages in the process of bringing cohesion to the subjects of life which concern them, they are involved in a delicate process of capturing and preserving the beauty within.

In the transcribed series of lectures published as *Romanticism Reconsidered* (1962), Frye and Abrams both presented at a conference titled "A Reconsideration of Romanticism." Frye presented his critical piece "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism." One idea he explains is that it is erroneous to look at Romanticism as one single idea, when it is clear that the movement during its historical moment has plenty of contradictions evident in its cultural products – it was its own thesis.[21] So, to avoid hyper fixating on the contradictions, one could look at the imagery that connects ideas in literature. I would like to take this notion slightly further and include narratives. For Frye, "[…]it may be possible for two poets to be related by common qualities of imagery [or narrative] even when they do not agree on a single thesis in religion, politics, or the theory of art itself" (3). What stands out to me from this claim should be readily apparent. Here we can see that around five years before *A Study of English Romanticism*, Frye was already of a comparative mind and may have very well been thinking of this idea when he suggested *Frankenstein* was a precursor to *The Stranger*.

Some ideas in Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* I have found to remain relevant not only in one's study of Romanticism, but now, that we can look at the modern artistic potentialities of Romantic Literature. For example, Abrams' ideas on pragmatic theories hold a particular relevance to the novels we have discussed. This is because as I have pointed out earlier, the Shelleys fundamentally believed that their work should move people to act and behave in ways that would improve the society of the readers. However, another responsibility of the pragmatic orientation is that it maintains an order between "the artist and the character of the work to the nature, the needs and the springs of pleasure in the audience" (Frye 20). And as we have discussed, it is not necessarily the case that *Frankenstein* delighted the audiences that initially experienced it.

I highlight the pragmatic viewpoint because I believe it to connect most directly with another section in *The Mirror and The Lamp*, headed "Romantic Analogues of the Art and Mind." Here Abrams explains that metaphors of expression in Romantic Literature are produced when a poet's internal complexity "overflows" into the external or real-world (48). This is expressly important because even though a work like *Frankenstein* may contain elements that prevent it from fully actualizing the needs of its audiences – not just in its time but now across time and space – it is perhaps due to the unilateral nature of writing, but its also because in the end the novel's subject matter is also individualistic. Abrams writes, "[no] less characteristic of romantic theory is a set of alternative analogies implying that poetry is an interaction, the joint effect of inner and outer, mind and object, passion and the perceptions of sense" (51). While it may be true that novel interacts with the multiplicity of external stimuli that the author internalizes to then create the work which then becomes transmitted by an audience so they may interact with it, in the end the audience is going to evaluate the effects of that poetic interaction and feel not what the world they have been shown means but what it should mean. There the audience now benefits from the poet's light not of Enlightenment but of warmth.

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[21] To appease the Hegelians.

Abrams' ideas tie-in fittingly with later ideas some existentialist critics had about art. Namely, William Barrett's *Irrational Man,* which touches on the importance of art from an existentialist perspective. For one, Barrett points out that when it comes to modern art, we are the subject, from which a historian-like detachment is difficult (Barrett 42). In essence the art that people are exposed to has the potential to continually elicit a reevaluation of one's position relative to the art piece and its difficult to be objective about one's feelings in a way that would explain the cause of such feelings. Barrett continues, "[irritation] usually arises when something touches a sore spot in ourselves, which most of the time we would like desperately to hide; rarely if ever does the fault lie totally with the provoking object" (43). It is an uncomfortable position to be in when one realizes that the totality of their human condition is suddenly laid bare before them. *Frankenstein* and *The Stranger* are such novels where the irritation one feels is not necessarily at the shocking murder scenes or the strange situations that affect the way the characters interact. It is the words themselves that describe exactly the anxieties, pressures, and dilemmas of one's soul. And many do try to resist these revelatory experiences, so to speak. Barrett notes, "[the] world that we are shown in the work of the modern painters and writers is opaque and dense. Their vision is not inspired primarily by intellectual premises; it is a spontaneous revelation of the kind of which perhaps only art is capable: it shows is where we stand, whether or not we choose to understand it" (56). The world inhabited by the characters in *Frankenstein* and *The Stranger* is exactly our world. With its dangerous journeys to places unseen by human eyes, to the municipal courthouses where every person in the city can witness your demise at the hands of a sophist. Yet, people would rather not know that. They would rather think that everything is known and that justice exists, illusions which are broken by these texts. For Barrett, this spontaneity from the artist, the poet, the writer, proves the ultimate humanity to be found in art because it is not one conceived out of a system of logic or scientific program, it is what the art testifies to.

It is not sufficient to simply know that, rather, one must do something with that knowledge. It must let forth the development of a new kind of person. But as Barrett points out,

> There is a painful irony in the new image of a man that is emerging, however fragmentarily, from the art of our time. An observer from another planet might well be stuck by the disparity between the enormous power which our age has concentrated in its external life and inner poverty which our art seeks to expose to view. […] What cannot man do! He has greater power now than Prometheus or Icarus or any of those daring mythical heroes who were later to succumb to the disaster of pride. But if an observer from Mars were to turn his attention from these external appurtenances of power to the shape of man as revealed in our novels, plays, painting, and sculpture, he would find there a creature full of holes and gaps, faceless, riddled with doubts and negations, starkly finite. (64-65)

This irony which Barrett observes, I find to be, if anything, the modern existential equivalent of that same Romantic Irony that Frye found in the literature he studied. Barrett gives us the ability to see the Romantic Irony applied beyond the page and see what it means for beings in the world. No level of scientific or intellectual achievement can surpass the deeply flawed lattice of the human psyche. The suffering of the characters in *Frankenstein* and *The Stranger* is a precise depiction of this sort of reality.

As the politics, economics, and social tensions of our time continue to tighten, there is to be a large portion of the population that recognizes that certain functions of a society are becoming less effective at handling the struggles of the population. These novels remind us that there is a human component to our existence that has the same capacity to ruin our society just as much as it can remedy it. It is the Creature's realization in that hovel that can be felt across the nation. When unjust legislature is proposed and passed. When schoolchildren and their literacy is attacked through legislature and violence. When individuals and families are cast into abject poverty with every passing day. It is Meursault sitting at trial with no remorse for the atrocities he commits on another person when society organizes to redefine the charges of a crime. When doctors are arrested for performing medical procedures. When people are brutalized and arrested for exercising their right to protest. When party leaders are expelled from their seats for standing with the crowds that demand systemic reform. That is when it becomes clear what makes a Monster.

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