

Frankenstein; or, the trials of a posthuman subject

**An investigation of the Monster in Mary Shelley's
“Frankenstein” and his attempt at acquiring human subjectivity
in a posthuman state**

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Abstract

The question of the posthuman condition, more specifically posthuman subjectivity, is eminent in evolving beyond the androcentric conceptions of humanist thought. The posthuman condition is highly debated through the development of posthuman theories and has gained more academic recognition in the last couple of decades. This is mostly due to our technologically advanced society where the posthuman condition now exist in the form of AI, which will most likely continue to evolve into posthuman consciousness.

However there is a clear gap in posthuman research concerning not only the posthuman condition but also its role as a subject in society. One prominent example exists within the pages of one of the most well known British literary works of the 19th century, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley. Shelley's book and the characters within, tell a prominent story of the posthuman condition in a society where humanist thought is the only conception of subjectivity. The use of not only posthuman studies, but more specifically studies including subjectivity is needed, in order to see the relationship between the humanist and the posthuman subjects. This essay uses theories of posthuman subjectivity and subjectivity by Rosi Braidotti and Michel Foucault in order to examine the posthuman condition of "Frankenstein's monster" and the role of humanist vs. posthuman subjectivity between Victor Frankenstein and the monster. To conclude, this essay analyses the monster's struggle at acquiring subjectivity in a posthuman state and reveals why it is impossible for the humanist and posthuman subject to peacefully coexist.

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1. Introduction

Frankenstein was written over the span of two years. At the age of 20, Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus* anonymously after having written it since the young age of 18. The book itself had a preface written by her husband Percy Shelley, but also contained a dedication to her father and philosopher William Godwin. Shelley had not only talent herself, but was surrounded by just as talented and rather influential friends and family. This included her husband Percy Shelley, her father William Godwin, and Lord Byron and John Polidori, to name a few. These people contributed to Shelley's writing of Frankenstein since it began as a contest between herself, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Polidori as to show who could succeed in writing the best scary story out of the group. The story of Frankenstein has become well regenerated into other mediums than the original book by Shelley. Frankenstein's monster has lived on through modern literature, movies, comics and other mediums as an image for posthuman subject.

The aim of this essay is to explore the struggle of acquiring subjectivity in a posthuman state with the help of theories in posthuman subjectivity. I will also argue that the monster's struggle at acquiring subjectivity in a posthuman state reveals why it is impossible for the humanist and posthuman subject to peacefully coexist.

2. Previous Work

The posthuman is a concept originated from the fields of science fiction, contemporary art and psychology, which is defined as a person or entity existing in a state beyond being human. This state can be physically or mentally, such as a zombie existing as a physically posthuman body or a man-made AI evolving its comprehension beyond human capability in a posthuman state. The defining factor of the posthuman remains as a person or entity beyond being human, whether it has taken form as zombies, cyborgs, AI's, or other entities.

Previous research on *Frankenstein* has mostly focused on medical, technological and scientific studies as well as feminist and queer theory but also religious theories (mostly Christian). Feminist and queer theories do speak about subjectivity, but with regards to sexism, gender issues and other relevant aspects to their theories. I decided to focus mostly on the power relation and segregation between posthuman- and humanist subjectivity due to the main characters of Shelley's book. The monster representing the posthuman subject whilst Victor represents the humanist subject. As well as considering their relationship as creation vs. creator to be a factor which further enhances their respective roles as subjects.

The previous research section of this paper will focus on three main subjects of discussion in the form of articles, where each subject presents a different approach in their theories. The articles chosen are in the fields of Feminist theory, Christian Philosophical theory and queer theory.

In Feminist theory regarding *Frankenstein*, Ellen Moers was the first feminist critiquer to write a radical feminist analysis of the book. Moers wrote *Female Gothic; Monsters, Goblins, Freaks* where she argues that *Frankenstein* is a "birth myth" (Moers 92). According to Moers, Mary Shelley had drawn inspiration from her own life as a mother having lost more babies than survived by the age of 20. The image of a failed parental figure and birthing a dead baby is one that Moers argue to have inspired Mary Shelley in writing the story about Victor Frankenstein and his newborn monster. Moers presents the idea of procreation to be not only the subject of the book, but the very source of its horror.

In *Custody Battles: Reproducing Knowledge about "Frankenstein,"* Ellen Rose, argues that the emergence of feminist theories of *Frankenstein* "was not publishable before the emergence of a constellation of political, social, cultural, and institutional conditions in the mid-1970s" (Rose 810).

In Moers' as well as Rose' opinion *Frankenstein* is a 'woman's book' despite its male protagonist and tells of Mary Shelley's grave anxieties about maternity.

However, there are also those who argue against these theories, such as Lars Lunsford in *The Devaluing of Life in Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN*. Lunsford argues

against Ellen Rose for using feminist theory, “because it relies on sexist generalizations of male ability” (Lunsford 174). The argumentation against the use of new theories, such as feminist theories, is something which Rose speaks of in the very introduction of her study. Rose explains her reasoning for choosing feminist theory by quoting the editors of the British journal *Literature and History* that texts are to be reassessed time and time again due to societal differences through time, thus our understanding and theories change and make their “own sense of the text for its own purposes” (qtd. in Rose 809).

Thus, Rose is not claiming Frankenstein to be an insufficient father or creator, but simply professing the idea that he can be seen as it through feminist theory. Lunsford in turn argues against Rose’s use of feminist theories in her article on *Frankenstein*. He believes that using feminist theory relies on sexist generalizations which undermines the character and automatically stereotypes him due to being male.

Rose argues that it is Frankenstein’s inability to be a creator/father which ultimately becomes his doom. While Lunsford thinks that it is Frankenstein’s “devaluing of life for the sake of social standing that leads to his downfall” which ultimately also leads to the monster “wreaking havoc throughout the novel” (Lunsford 174).

Regardless of which theoretical approach one undertakes in analysing *Frankenstein*, the problematization remains of the lack of research made with posthuman subjectivity in mind. The use of both Moers’ Rose’s or Lunsford’s chosen theories gain interesting results, but the results leaves one wanting more. As Rose concludes in her paper, “feminist criticism of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* should find masculinity singularly interesting” (Rose 829). Using feminist theory only to “find masculinity singularly interesting” is a missed opportunity due to the diversity of Shelley’s work and the settings as well as characters within. Since by not using theories regarding subjectivity, one disregards the identities within the literary work, their societal worth, ideologies and expectations.

Another approach to *Frankenstein* concerns theories surrounding religion, in this case Christian philosophy. There is one particular study on the consequences of defying God in the creation of new life. David S. Hogsette discusses, in an article called *Metaphysical Intersections in Frankenstein: Mary Shelley's Theistic Investigation of Scientific Materialism and Transgressive Autonomy*, what would occur if man created life without the need of a woman, and in defiance of God. He brings up a discussion of the ethical sense of who has the right to create life, in accordance with the Christian faith. Hogsette's research presents Mary Shelley's as well as his own view of Victor who "is not a humble inventor who shows respect for himself, his invention, or the Creator; rather, he is a presumptuous man who attempts to transcend invention and to create life as if he were God" (Hogsette 534).

The aim of Hogsette's article is to argue for why *Frankenstein* is heavily influenced by Christian beliefs as well as answering a more general question of Christian ethics. These ethics revolving around Victor and if he has the moral capacity to create life. Hogsette believes that Victor creating life, as if he is a God, is the reason for his failure. Especially due to his scientific approach to the subject of creating life as a 'God'. By researching Mary Shelley's journal notes, Hogsette also backs up his argument of Shelley using religious influences in *Frankenstein*. Hogsette comes to the conclusion that due to Shelley's religious beliefs and being surrounded by influential people, such as her father, her husband and other friends, Shelley's work thus naturally becomes both heavily influenced by religion as well as the book being overall questioning of God and his powers of creation.

Through the use of a Christian philosophical approach, one can find possible clarifications as to how characters in the book assert themselves as subjects to a higher power. As well as if they define themselves as subjects under a God or a society and its norms. Hogsette not only presents the possibility of Christian or other religious influences in analysing the characters, but also reasons behind an author's own beliefs and how those beliefs can influence their writing.

Hogsette's approach of using Christian philosophy and literature onto *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley is an interesting and well arguable approach. To examine religious references in the book, such as *Paradise Lost* and the overall

theme in the book as creator vs. creation, one could possibly find an enlightening approach in discussing the power relationship between Victor and the monster.

Overall there is a surprisingly small amount of research done on Frankenstein with my choice of topic in this essay “posthuman subjectivity” even though it plays a huge role in the book. The majority of posthuman oriented research on *Frankenstein* is inclined towards sci-fi or feminist- and queer studies.

In queer theory the monster is seen as a symbol or embodiment of a queer subject. In *Monsters, desire and the creative queer body*, Stacy Holman Jones and Anne Harris, depict the role of the monster in Frankenstein as “the creatively queer body” (Jones & Harris 525). They quote the terms “postsexualism” from the works of Michel Foucault, as well as “postgender” from Donna Haraway, in the sense of Frankenstein’s monster representing a postsexual being (525). The idea of a body as a monstrosity and the skin as a projection of others fear, presents itself by the authors of the article. As Judith Halberstam argues, “our layered bodies – bodies of many surfaces – while of beauty and value to those who co-construct us intersubjectively – become for others a landscape of gendered and sexual fear, vilification, and violence” (qtd. in Jones & Harris 525). Halberstam examines the body as a construction of identity, where each piece comes together to make a person, those who “co-construct,” can be any influencers in one’s life, parents, friends, lovers. If the heteronormative society were to see the patch-work of identities presented, they would find it repulsive, fragmented and fearful. Using Frankenstein as an example of the monstrous image some see in queer subjects, is quite intriguing. Both judged by their flesh and if the flesh does not correspond with the presupposed image or identity that societal standards want, then they are suddenly monstrous, horrendous, and inflict fear in the heteronormative society.

3. Theoretical Framework

The posthuman concept emerged after the ‘creative theories’ of the 1970s and 1980s leaving the posthuman to emerge in “a zombified landscape” (Braidotti 5) where the light of creativity had dulled and been replaced by another ‘post-’

theory. The posthuman emergence was a natural consequence evolving from the earlier anti-humanist uproar following Foucault's *The Order of Things*, amongst others. The androcentric conceptions of Humanism began to be regarded as outdated and the humanist subject no longer seen as relevant to our times. Thus the concept of the posthuman emerged, since the humanist human no longer functions as our society has moved on, and a new posthuman subject has emerged.

With posthuman subjectivity as the main theory I will introduce the general concepts of "posthuman" and "subject/subjectivity" separately. Michel Foucault's theory of subjectivity and anti-humanist arguments as well as Rosi Braidotti on the posthuman and posthuman subjectivity, amongst other sources, will be used in order to build up a framework in the essay. The reason for introducing these subjects separately at first is to show the posthuman subjectivities' emergence. Before the 1970's subjectivity had the perfect human subject as its focal point. The humanist idea of the perfect human was androcentric and Eurocentric as it was depicted as a beautiful, well-built, white, European male. The posthuman concept was at first mainly researched for its mental expectations as a posthuman "body" in society. Later on technoscientific studies were done but mostly focusing on the physical body and the functions of the posthuman concept rather than accounting for the consciousness of the posthuman and its possible role as a subject in society (see van der Laan & Laubichler). The idea of regeneration became the main interest of most posthuman articles, in medicine, technology and scientific studies. Thus I decided to introduce subjectivity and posthumanism separately at first, in order to present the origin of the posthuman concept and its evolution past humanist thought.

The meaning of the subject, and what makes one a subject, is something that has been thoroughly discussed. The subject is a political entity as a person who belongs to a community and its systems of government as well as a specific identity owned by the "self" (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 117). Foucault is an important theorist of subjectivity as Foucault's work *The Order of Things* critiqued the Humanist approach and began the scholarly progress of redefining

the human subject. The groundbreaking critique on Humanism, of questioning what defines a human subject, started a flood wave of new interpretations and theories of what attributes makes one human. The humanist subject is the notion of “human” being the core, the essence of all things. Foucault himself defined the subject as a social construction one which “is not natural but takes on different forms in different historical periods” (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 118). According to Danaher, Schirato & Webb, Foucault argued for an anthropological approach with the idea of subjectivity being a constant entity that does not change as a concept but rather in its use throughout human history.

With regard to anthropological approaches, recent work (see Luhmann 2006) can trace the subject and its role throughout history. Subjectivity as a concept can be seen as early as ancient Graeco-Roman philosophy. Both define ‘the self’ as something that can be perfected, and that rationality and truth is only achieved while actively striving to perfect themselves. By trying to achieve perfection of one’s self, there needs to be a struggle to overcome, an imperfection to use as a stepping stone to greatness. In *Understanding Foucault*, Antiphon the Sophist is quoted by Foucault saying: “[h]e is not wise who has not tried the ugly and the bad; for then there is nothing he has conquered and nothing that would enable him to assert that he is virtuous” (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 199). The humanist man can not achieve perfection if he has not proved himself with having struggled for his name and societal worth. When saying perfection is a struggle to accomplishment, “everyone” is not included in this theory. When men such as Antiphon continuously use male pronouns such as “he” it reveals the humanist perfection and its segregated nature. “He” meaning only men and not only that but men who are “virtuous”. This exclusion view those in society who are not of higher class or gender, such as women, sexualities other than heterosexual, people of different ethnicity or culture, and people with mental or physical disabilities as lesser than human.

Next the meaning of posthumanism, which is defined as a human subject having transgressed beyond being “human”. Braidotti defines the posthuman as the entity that marked “the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism

and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives” (Braidotti 37). The fundamental premise of the posthuman perspective depends on the historical decline of Humanism, but “goes further in exploring alternatives” (37). This decline of humanism presents the opportunity of “the structural others” to emerge with their own postmodern humanistic subjectivity.

According to Braidotti there are three major strands of contemporary posthuman thought: moral philosophy, Scientific and Technological studies, and anti-humanist and posthuman subjectivity theories (Braidotti 38). Braidotti also questions the lack of attention to the concept of subjectivity in posthuman studies of scientific and technological nature. The theorists who conduct posthumanist studies with a scientific or technological approach are usually “reluctant to undertake a full study of their implications for a theory of subjectivity” (Braidotti 39). These theorists usually decide to tackle the physical and biological aspects of the posthuman rather than its ethical position in society. Due to this gap between science and humanities, Braidotti argues that “a new segregation of knowledge is produced” (40). Similarly, the challenge in finding a mutual coherence of the “posthuman subject” is also a topic of discussion in Braidotti’s book *The Posthuman*. Braidotti uses both sides of the discussion in attempts to detangle the mess of posthuman subjectivity and what arguments have been made for and against. In the first chapter of the book, Braidotti discusses the different views, both for and against humanism and the existence of the posthuman. By using Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* Braidotti presents the idea of the “perfect” human subject: a white European male, handsome and physically absolute.

Braidotti sees “man” as rational and conscious of their own superiority where the otherness is its negative counterpart. Those who are not considered as a perfect human subject are women, ethnicities other than white, sexualities other than heterosexual as well as people with mental and physical disabilities. Now these “others” are revolting in the eyes of the humanist. The posthumans emergence have, according to Braidotti, begun movements where the negative other are starting to show themselves and their own voice, in the form of movements against the societal norms created by humanist thought (Braidotti 37).

As both Foucault and Braidotti argue, the fall of “man” is inevitable, it is nothing but a construction ready to crumble and really become a part in history, not the future.

This “ideal human” in Humanism was used in order to position all other subjects in the shadow of its “perfection”. In doing so, those who were not human became “the other,” the negative and unnatural. The future of “the other” emerges in the modern subject, in Braidotti’s own words, “[t]he crisis of Humanism means that the structural others of the modern humanistic subject re-emerge with a vengeance in postmodernity” (37). The “death” of the human subject brings us to the posthuman subject, a subject past humanism and its ethical norms. The vengeance of being a non-human ideal, the “other,” the monstrosity of existing outside of the norm now emerges as movements, such as women’s rights movements or anti-racism and decolonization movements. All forms of rebellion can be seen as “the voices of the structural Others of modernity” (37).

Foucault also discusses that the death of the human subject would ensue, due to man being a recent invention “[a]nd one perhaps nearing its end . . . man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (Foucault 386). The creation of a new social nexus is in order, where new forms of social connections can be established between “human” and “non-human” subjectivities. The posthuman is not the end of humanity itself, but rather “it signals the end of a certain conception of the human” (Hayles 286).

The posthuman can be understood as the transgressive human a human entity who exist beyond a human state an “entity which is no longer an animal but not yet fully a machine, is the icon of the posthuman condition” (Braidotti 74). Braidotti defines the posthuman from a anti-humanist perspective as a “condition” where ‘us’ as “knowing subjects” are aware of our society and its repressing power (Braidotti 11). Braidotti also argues that subjectivity is a vital part of the transformative post human state as “we need to devise new social, ethical, and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing” (Braidotti 12).

Posthuman subjects derive from human invention and take form in cyborgs, AI’s, zombies or future humanity. These posthuman subjects leave a lingering

fear for humanist thought since the “human” is ‘replaced’ by something that represent “otherness”. Katherine Hayles points out that “[i]ncreasingly the question is not whether we will become posthuman, for posthumanity is already here. Rather, the question is what kind of posthumans we will be” (Hayles 261).

4. The Problematization of the Posthuman State

The monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* raises questions regarding the posthuman trial and error of acquiring subjectivity in a posthuman state. These questions can be examined with the help of Braidotti’s concepts from her book *The Posthuman*. Where Braidotti presents the humanist ideal and their perception of the posthuman state.

4.1 The Birth of “The Monster” as a Posthuman subject

Firstly, analysing the ‘birth’ of the monster is important in order to show the monster’s position as a posthuman subject in the rest of the book. The birth of the monster is one of the most intriguing parts of the book when speaking of posthuman subjectivity. Victor’s deception of the perfect human subject and his disdain for posthumanism can be seen clearly when the monster comes to life. The scene is first set during the monster’s awakening.

I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated the limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom which infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to from? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! - Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was lustrous black and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriences only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley 58)

Victor re-tells the monster’s awakening and how he felt seeing his vision of a perfect man crumble before his eyes “[h]is limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!” (Shelley 58)”. When the

monster awoke with “yellow eyes and dull skin” (58) the illusion shattered “the beauty of the dream vanished” (58) and from then on throughout the rest of the book, ‘the monster’ remains nameless.

Not giving the monster a name robs him of human subjectivity since without a name he not only remains nameless, but also remains outside human society in a posthuman state. The monster’s “unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes” (102) which is the second factor for why he is robbed of a chance at human subjectivity. The monster’s physical appearance counters the humanist vision of the perfect human subject. Victor admits to his creation being “too horrible for human eyes” and thus forces the monster into a posthuman state due to his appearance not living up to humanist standards. Victor seemingly believes in the perfect human subject, as he indicates by mentioning how a “human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or transitory desire to disturb his tranquility” (56). As Rosi Braidotti presented in her book *The Posthuman* the humanist perception of the perfected “man” is “[h]e: the classical ideal of ‘Man’ formulated first by Protagoras as ‘the measure of all things’” as well as human perfection to be the pursuit of “individual and collective perfectibility” (Braidotti 13). The humanist perfection is seen as a difficult journey of discovery toward becoming a perfect subject (13), something Victor believes to be his discovery of animating the dead.

The creation of the monster itself not only shows the monster as a failed human subject, but also shows Victor’s view as the creator. Victor’s original goal was to search for the answer to his question: “did the principles of life proceed?” and apply it in hopes of bringing humans back to life (Shelley 52). Which in itself is a rather posthuman inquiry, as Braidotti points out fields such as science or technology “raises crucial ethical and conceptual questions about the status of the human” but tend to disregard subjectivity (Braidotti 39). Victor did not account for his creation’s subjectivity even though he “began the creation of a human being” (Shelley 54) Victor didn’t account for that “being” having a personality and a mind of its own.

The terror portrayed at the sight of the monster is a depiction of the humanist view of perfection meeting a posthuman subject. It is human-esque, or at least it derives from humanity but it is not the perfect human subject. Victor gave the monster “beautiful” attributes, in hopes of creating a beautiful human being, with long black hair, beautiful proportions and pearly white teeth (Shelley 58). The monster’s appearance did not correspond with society’s view of the perfect human (seen exemplified by Braidotti as Leonardo da Vinci’s “Vitruvian Man”(Braidotti 13-14)). Thus everything Victor had picked out as ‘perfect’ suddenly became distorted “now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley 58).

4.2 The Monstress and Posthuman Rights

The monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is heavily inspired from several different sources, one of which is John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s depiction of the characters and their relationships helps the monster to relate to his own demise as Victor Frankenstein’s creation. Especially the relationships between God and Adam as a creation becomes the building stones for the monster’s understanding of concepts such as morals and societal expectations. In the monster’s attempts at creating subjectivity for himself, these relationships between a creator and its creation had a strong influence on the monster’s creation of his morals throughout *Frankenstein*.

In the monster’s search for somewhere to belong, he comes across a family in a cabin. This family is unbeknownst of his presence, but by watching them through a peephole he acquires language and general knowledge about humans. He also learns to read by getting hold of some of their books when they are not home. One of these books are *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, which gives the creature hope in his own situation. The monster quotes *Paradise Lost* heavily throughout the book, showing himself in the position of Adam, “I ought to be thy Adam” (Shelley 103) as he feels like an outcast by his creator. By applying the concept of creation vs creator from *Paradise Lost* onto his own situation, the monster having “applied much personally to my

own feelings and condition” (131) finds himself in the shoes of Adam. The symbolism of Frankenstein as ‘God’ the creator and the monster as ‘Adam’ is apparent. Human subjectivity could then in turn represent the paradise which the monster has been cast out of due to exposing his posthuman nature.

In this discovery of *Paradise Lost* and its concepts, the monster realises that his female counterpart “Eve” does not exist. He is the lone creation of his creator and thus he confronts Frankenstein, demanding him to create his ‘Eve’.

I swear to you, by the earth which I inhabit, and by you who made me, that with the companion you bestow I will quit the neighbourhood of man, and dwell, as it may chance, in the most savage of places. My evil passions will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy! my life will flow quietly away, and in my dying moments I shall not curse my maker. (Shelley 149)

This creates an interesting setting in the book, where the creation of another posthuman brings the question of the posthuman state and its rights to human affection such as love and family. When the monster speaks of “I will quit the neighbourhood of man” he speaks of society and the human subject. The monster reasons that if he cannot be part of human society, the creation of another posthuman subject can lessen the misery of no longer being completely alone. As well as “most savage of places” possibly meaning the monster's existence outside of society as a ‘non-human’ and thus savage.

When speaking of ecological posthumanism, Braidotti mentions Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (Mies and Shiva 2013) who does not speak on specifically post- concepts, but agrees on fundamental concepts of ‘universal’ rights and “the reassertion of the need for new universal values in the sense of interconnectedness” these including “identity, dignity, knowledge, affection, joy and care” (Braidotti 49). These universal values or rights, brings forward the posthuman question of, is the posthuman allowed the same rights and values as humans? According to Braidotti the posthuman predicament forces us to “think harder about the status of the human” as well as remind us of the importance in reshaping the subject accordingly with our time (Braidotti 118).

This leaves us with the role of the monster and the possibility of a ‘monstress’ and if the monster as a posthuman subject has the ethical validity to demand human rights in a posthuman state. Are posthuman subjects allowed the human right of love, joy, family and especially subjectivity?

The role of the monster’s wish for a female counterpart in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* can, according to Braidotti be seen as the symbol of what the posthuman should not be. Braidotti says that the “[p]osthuman does not mean to be indifferent to the humans, or to be de-humanized” but rather it entails a new way of merging ethical values with the sense of a healthy growing community (190). The monster wants compensation for his ill treatment he demands the creation of an artificial family. He does this out of self pity and by doing so, the monster ultimately devalues himself. He does not want to live alone as a sole species, but agrees with the humanist view of him being an abomination, thus dehumanizing himself and his existence.

Braidotti argues that humanism is exclusive of everyone who is not strong, white, caucasian and male. As mentioned earlier Braidotti uses the “Vitruvian Man” as an image of the perfect human subject. If Victor would create a female counterpart for the monster, who is to say that she would be his equal? The monster clearly states that due to the two of them being the sole creatures of their species, she has no choice but to love and support him since he is “alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me” (Shelley 146). This thought process is interesting as this is the same basis of which Victor created his monster, but his purpose was fame and not love. Victor thought of his creation as a scientific breakthrough, which could not deny himself to be anything but his creation completely disregarding the monster’s subjectivity or rights. Same goes for the female monster as she would be created to appease the male monster, completely disregarding her subjectivity and rights.

Not only that, but the monster also promises to die out, quietly and without a fight for his existence for “my life will flow quietly away, and in my dying moments I shall not curse my maker” (Shelley 149). The image given in this sentence spoke strongly to the relationship between the human and the

posthuman. The posthuman deriving or rather having been evolved from the human now gives up on becoming a part in the humanist society and instead wants to crumble and die out. This contrast is evident if one compares the view of the posthuman in *Frankenstein* and the posthuman today. A posthuman subject can not survive a world where society only consists of and accepts human subjectivity. Considering the fact that *Frankenstein* was written over 200 years before the concept of posthuman came to, the fate of *Frankenstein's* monster as a posthuman subject is doomed to fail within the book.

4.3 The Death of 'Man' and the rise of the Posthuman Era

Lastly, the final part of my analysis which is in regards to Victor *Frankenstein's* death, as well as the insinuated death of the monster. The creation of the monster and its 'torments' makes Victor sick, he is only getting worse and worse throughout the book until he finally dies, with his monstrous creation looming over his dead body. As the narrator of the book stands before the monster for the first time, the monster recounts his misery and anger. Now when the monster's creator and father figure is dead he does no longer know where he belongs in the world, nor what his purpose is.

For while I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires. They were forever ardent and graving; still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? . . . I, the miserable and abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. Even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice (Shelley 224)

The monster's despair of being rejected by his creator and society "[w]as there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me?" (224). He sees the injustice in their hatred towards him as he was forced into a world where he wouldn't be accepted, and then be rejected by his creator for existing.

As I mentioned earlier, the symbolism of the monster's anger towards Victor and all of human kind can be seen as the tension between the

posthuman and the humanist “human”. The humanist subject rejects the idea of the posthuman concept, since the posthuman represents, as Braidotti puts it “the others” who are “the sexualized, racialized and naturalized others . . . reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies” (Braidotti 15).

We as readers are left with the likelihood of the monster’s death. The dehumanization of the monster has built up his anger and feelings of disdain towards humanity, to the point he rationalises that his death is the only solution to his pain and suffering as a posthuman subject. The monster speaks of how he was not sated by the destruction of his creator “[f]or while I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires” (Shelley 224). I believe his intentions were more philosophical than literal for he did of course ruin Victor by killing everyone he cared for, but the monster was also hoping for his own desires to be fulfilled. The monster wanted to kill the prejudice towards his posthuman state and Victor represented humanity. The monster wished for nothing more than for his existence to be accepted: “I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned” (224).

In Braidotti’s book, she presents the humanist view of “Otherness” being “defined as its [human subjectivity] negative and specular counterpart” (Braidotti 15). The monster speaks of how he has been treated by humanity “I, the miserable and abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on” (Shelley 224). This depiction also tells of the posthuman state as a ‘otherness’ where those who do not ‘belong’ in humanist society, are seen as abominations.

The book ends shortly after the monster exclaims: “[b]ut soon, . . . I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt . . . My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell” (225).

With the death of Victor Frankenstein as well as the monster, the book ends with a sense of finality. Yet as the posthuman subject that he is the monster lives on outside the boundaries of Mary Shelley’s book. Since “Frankenstein’s monster” has been incorporated into several movies, tv-shows, books, comics, games and other mediums where he will continue to live on forever as the image of the posthuman horror. Defying the limitations of

human death and decay, the monster defines the humanist view of posthuman subject and continues to thrive hundreds of years later, where the monster might have found a home, as a fellow posthuman subject.

5. Conclusion

By applying Rosi Braidotti's theory of the posthuman condition, I was allowed access posthumanism at its core in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* where the concept of the posthuman did not yet exist. The excerpts I chose of the monster's struggle of finding his identity and his exclusion from society were in order to emphasise the problematization between the posthuman and the humanist subject. The hopes of a peaceful coexistence for posthuman- and humanist subjects is found impossible in Frankenstein's world where "there can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight in which one must fall" (103).

The use of Braidotti's posthuman theories on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* also shows the compatibility of subjectivity in posthuman research. Rosi Braidotti argues heavily in her book of the importance of using subjectivity in posthuman theory for it "cuts to the core of classical visions of subjectivity and works towards an expanded vision of vitalist, transversal relational subjects" (104). The posthuman subject helps us understand what humanity is evolving into and aspire to define what truly makes us human beings. The use of a posthuman theory in this essay is due to the posthuman subjectivity being a well arguable approach in *Frankenstein*. As the monster is the embodiment of a posthuman subject, especially since he is in a constant battle of acquiring subjectivity in a society where the concept of 'the posthuman' does not exist. Since his posthumanist existence is so alien in this book, the posthuman state is exaggerated and becomes evident to the reader. This enables one to conduct an essay of posthuman subjectivity where Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* becomes a rich source of posthuman struggles.

Much like Foucault, Braidotti, Hayles and many other scholars, all argue that the humanist concept must or has already fallen. Foucault speaks of

the fall of man as “erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (Foucault 386). Whereas Braidotti speaks of the historical downfall “of andro-centric and Eurocentric Humanism” (Braidotti 195). As well as Hayles pointing out that the existence of the posthuman does not mean “the end of humanity instead it signals the end of a certain conception of the human” (Hayles 286).

So in order for the posthuman to take its place in society, humanism and its androcentric concepts must become a part of history. Since the ‘perfect human subject’ of humanism is outdated in modern society where ‘man’ is no longer the measure of all things.

There is an immense need for defining the posthuman subject as the current definition is too broad as a posthuman can be anything from a rotting zombie to a well engineered AI. There is a need for a mutual coherence as to what a posthuman is, as most definitions are different depending on the source.

I believe that *Frankenstein* represents the struggle of the posthuman condition. Where Victor and the rest of the humanist society, consistently repel the idea of posthumanity and its inclusive spectrum. All human beings are seen as equals in today’s posthuman community, something that I believe would have saved the monster from his ultimate fate. The book itself presents the idea of the posthuman through Victor’s re-telling of his story. Where the monster is first seen as his hopes and dream of becoming a famous scientist but quickly turns into Victor’s slow spiral into death. The monster’s appearance and presence in his life leaves him unable to rest and unable to continue with his life. Much like the presence of the posthuman in the humanist society, where it’s presence horrifies or even angers their existence as if the humanist idea is to be replaced by the posthuman. Just as Halberstam was quoted when speaking of the creation of queer bodies, where at first one can see their “beauty and value” but after seeing them through humanist eyes “become . . . a landscape of gendered and sexual fear, vilification, and violence” (qtd. in Jones & Harris 525). This conception can be seen in Victor as he first regards “his creation” as a positive opportunity at fame and self-perfection, but as he lays his humanist eyes onto the monster; his humanist subjectivity is shocked

by the posthuman condition. He thus wants to destroy the monster throughout the rest of the book, but shows instances of doubt and compassion for his creation. As the monster mentions after proposing the creation of a female monster, that “I now see compassion in your [Victor’s] eyes” (Shelley 149).

The death of Victor also marked the end of the monster, at least within the frames of Shelley’s book. As a concept, *Frankenstein’s monster* live on as a posthuman concept in modern literature, media and technology. The monster’s posthuman condition has been reinvented and even regenerated as clones, which Braidotti mentions with the example of “Dolly the sheep” (Braidotti 74). The monster thus outlived Victor as the posthuman subject, since Victor’s task at destroying his creation “was mine, but I have failed”. The posthuman condition as seen in *Frankenstein* is an indication as to where our own society is perhaps heading, which is into the posthuman era.

There is a prominent need for further developments of posthuman theories with subjectivity in mind. Instead of falling back into old humanist institutions and androcentric standards, the posthuman state encourages us to form new concepts that correspond with the modern complexities of our time. Applying subjectivity enables us to analyse and understand contemporary issues such as conflicting norms and values, communication, communities, social belonging and political governance. A mere analytical approach to the posthuman is not enough, we have to include subjectivity, for it is the individual’s sense of subjectivity which makes us unique as creativity, imagination, feelings, desires, hopes and aspirations all take part in our understanding of cultures, morals and individuality.

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