University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Dissertations & Theses, Department of English | English, Department of

3-1-2013

MONSTROSITY

Karen N. Wohlgemuth
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, knw@huskers.unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishdiss

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons

Wohlgemuth, Karen N., "MONSTROSITY" (2013). *Dissertations & Theses, Department of English.* Paper 71.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishdiss/71

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations & Theses, Department of English by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

MONSTROSITY

by

Karen N. Wohlgemuth

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Under the Supervision of Professor Stephen Behrendt

Major: English

Lincoln, NE

March 2013

MONSTROSITY

Karen N. Wohlgemuth, B.A.

University of Nebraska, 2013.

Advisor: Stephen Behrendt

The Early Gothic Period of English Literature was widely scrutinized for its sensationalism. This thesis explores the value of the genre by offering an alternative view of the monster typically portrayed. A close textual analysis of *The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk*, and *Frankenstein* prove that the real monster is society, and more importantly ourselves. While this thesis dissects the innate characteristics of humankind in the novels, the author hopes that the readers will recognize the same themes in contemporary society. As students of the learned world, we all can acknowledge that Gothic fiction can teach us more than we ever thought we could learn.

The late eighteenth century sparked expansion in the literary movements, including the creation of the Gothic novel. The first Gothic novel was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto,* published in 1764; it began the Early Gothic period that formally ended in 1837 with the start of the Victorian period. Shortly after its introduction the Gothic novel soon rose to even greater popularity with the production of chapbooks: a cheap and condensed version of Gothic novels. The genre was distinguished for focusing on various aspects of the sublime, and for establishing supernatural forces as a serious element of literature. Many of the Gothic novels also served didactic purposes by instructing readers on issues of morality, while some Gothic novels simply relished combining sheer gore with a more sinister look at humanity. Consistently, however, the Gothic novel incorporated romantic tales of good conquering evil. The genre sparked the natural curiosity of many and resulted in a loyal readership and a permanent place in pop culture. The Early Gothic novel's influence remains present in contemporary society with young adult and teen fiction keeping the literary movement alive.

Although the Gothic genre has dominated certain aspects of our culture, not everyone flocked to the new form of literature in its early years. The Gothic novel did not receive a favorable critical reception: critics found the genre amoral or even immoral, and wrote it off as simply sensational reading. Critics thought the public to be foolish to be taken in by such unrealistic beguilement, and women made up the majority of those readers, which added an element of sexism to the "literary" criticism. A novel need not be realistic to be worthy of studying it as a form of literature that can give insight into the varying perspectives on the human condition, though even critics today have not fully accepted the value that can be derived from Gothic fiction such as in the *Twilight* series. Critics have always had the tendency to dismiss what is favorably accepted in pop culture, because it is usually made for the purpose of

entertainment alone. Lady Louisa, an eighteenth century reader, wrote of Lewis' *The Monk* in a letter, "grave and wise people had passed over his book as a silly novel not worth thinking about" (Stuart). However, critics fail to see the value of understanding the machinery of a literature that causes such a resounding response from readers. In an eighteenth century memoir written by Mary Somerville she wrote of the genre:

> But at a later period I read novels, the "Old English Baron," the "Mysteries of Udolpho," the "Romance of the Forest," &c. I was very fond of ghost and witch stories, both of which were believed in by most of the common people and many of the better educated. I heard an old naval officer say that he never opened his eyes after he was in bed. I asked him why? and he replied, "For fear I should see something!" Now I did not actually believe in either ghosts or witches, but yet, when alone in the dead of the night, I have been seized with a dread of, I know not what (Somerville 65).

Readers were being affected powerfully by the literature, as responses like this one demonstrate. Readers were generally scared, not from the supernatural though, but from the societal issues. The genre was taking on issues that were definitely personal, and the novels invoked the innate fear in readers of themselves and of those around them.

One critic of the Early Gothic novel was Jane Austen. Austen wrote the Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* (1818) to comment upon the Gothic novel as a genre made strictly for pleasure alone. One of the arguments in *Northanger Abbey* suggests that the genre is particularly dangerous for impressionable female minds, resulting in the confusion of fiction with reality, riffing off of Samuel Johnson's well-known concerns about young readers, fearing the consequences of readers imitating improper behavior. When Catherine's imagination governs her actions, she, as well as readers, is reminded of the distinct difference between novels and real

life. Surely our country, fellow-citizens, and laws would never allow for a "monster" to run amok, right? Austen's novel suggests that there are too many safeguards for that sort of confusion to occur, while British education and faith make it seem almost unpatriotic to suggest anything to the contrary. It is a matter of logic: if the Gothic genre is chastised for implying that "monsters" committing crimes can actually exist, then why do the foundations of law and order in countries rely on prison systems as a form of punishment and rehabilitation for social deviance? Deviance goes back to the history of man, and often in the form of crimes that associate criminals with their own forms of monstrosity. The ability of monsters to alter their shapes and forms does not eclipse their crimes, especially when featured in Gothic novels that are, after all, derived from human thought and human experience that has encountered deviance at some time or another. Austen's novel makes the implied point that monsters do exist in reality, in various forms, but that people simply do not acknowledge them for what they truly are. The novel ends by satirically alluding to the Gothic genre as the root cause of all problems as a result of Catherine's unwarranted suspicions about the supernatural. As if Austen took a page out of a modern propaganda Cold War book, she implies that suspicious behavior is inevitably perceived as dangerous behavior. However, suspicion is a natural form of protection, and lends itself well as a defense shield without always being mangled with unwarranted false accusations, as she seems to suggest. Since monsters take on different attributes it is beneficial to be suspicious of even the most innocent sounding people in order to protect oneself from the continually altering forms of monsters. Austen's novel condemns the Gothic novel as a genre that cultivates indulgence, embarrassment, and self-delusion. However, Austen de-emphasizes the notion that monsters do exist in reality in all shapes and sizes, and that they can offer an intellectual vehicle for examining social and moral issues present in society. After writing

Northanger Abbey, Austen later added in her preface that when she wrote the novel the public opinion was different than it was by the time it was published, and that the readers should keep in mind this difference when reading it. Austen's preface implies that either her own or the public's impression of the Gothic genre may have changed to be more accepting of the genre, as the readership for such novels continued to grow from the time she wrote her parody until it was published. However, many critics refused to concede that the Gothic genre was worthy of any regard at all, despite its readership. Yet the genre remains popular into our own times, because it illustrates lessons on morality, social criticisms, and intellectual enlightenment that can still lead to psychological epiphanies, a satisfied curiosity, and an expanded awareness, among many other values.

The Early European Gothic novels have proved advantageous in focusing on the moral and social criticisms that provide insight into the human condition. The supernatural was used as a vehicle to demonstrate some of the strongest social critiques involving hypocrisy and injustice. The pivotal part of the original Gothic novel, however, was generally the battle of good versus evil. The good side frequently presented a hero or heroine that was harassed by evil, usually in the form of a male character striving to steal or compromise the heroine's virtue. The antagonist was usually a single character or small group, occasionally in the form of a monster that purposefully made the protagonist's situation more difficult with appropriately monstrous behavior. However, these monsters were usually victims of violence or oppression first that would later result in them becoming the oppressors. The monsters were merely facsimiles of a much greater evil that existed; the true monster was society. Several of the most prominent early Gothic novels revolve around societal problems, usually involving a group of people oppressing someone that would later seek revenge on others. The English sociological novels of the Early

Gothic period exhibit a style of narration intended to instruct readers about the human condition, combining social commentary with gothic machinery to present cultural subtexts that expose society as the actual antagonist. Societal oppression will be shown to be a major force in three of the period's most popular novels: *The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk,* and *Frankenstein.*

The first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), establishes the concept of social antagonism through the use of the supernatural. With the haunting of the castle by supernatural means (ghosts, giants, and unfortunate events) the antagonism would appear to default to these outside forces. However, the novel is only resolved by reconciling the atrocities the inhabitants of the castle have caused with the help of these outside forces, turning the apparitions into God-like beams of moral justice. Whereas the inhabitants of the castle prove to be a menace to themselves as well as to others with the various crimes and betrayals they commit, what follows is repentance once the outside forces have interceded. Walpole's novel builds the foundation of the genre, and successfully establishes the theme of social antagonism that is prevalent in the Early Gothic period of novels.

Anne Radcliffe is widely considered the female pioneer of the Gothic novel, and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) was her most popular novel. In an eighteenth century letter, Anna Seward describes Radcliffe in relation to *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* "yet are there a few pens which possess the power so to inspirit those fond fancies of the brain, as to render them gratifying to an imagination which demands more to please it than amorous story. Mrs Radcliffe's pen is of this number" (Seward). The novel begins by establishing a world of social, political, and institutional monstrosity that has enhanced the ease with which members slip into the role of a monster. Monsieur St. Aubert insists that Emily secure herself by having a well-informed mind to prevent such occurrences. The novel suggests that knowledge is linked with

morality, and as such the monsters that do exist are more than likely monsters or deviant simply because they do not have more compelling intellectual encounters to occupy their thought. Education therefore becomes directly involved in morality with the establishment of distinctions between right and wrong. Therefore, the monster's decision to oppress others is more than likely one result of improper childhood conditioning during their education. This link helps to distinguish the difference and motivation for those who choose to oppress. People are more inclined to expose others to their tyranny if they are not able to benefit from the rigorous challenge of an education, and turn instead to other modes of entertainment that are more in keeping with their monstrosity.

The setting of Radcliffe's novel is the quiet countryside in France where nature is in abundance. Emily's secluded upbringing in the countryside is connected to her status as an angel of innocence and pillar of justness. The novel suggests that one can appreciate nature as an emblem of virtuosity, and use it as a shield against the turpitude of mankind. The masses of people, however, reside in the city that contains mischief and corruption throughout. The dangerousness of the city lies in the concept that if one person shifts to subjugation of others, then the rest of society will conform to those acts as well in a domino effect. People tend to learn by following others, and an uninformed mind leaves them dependent on others for guidance, even if it is not proper guidance. People are more likely to be deviant when they feel as if they are a part of a group. Radcliffe implies that those individuals residing in the countryside are not victims to this corrupting mentality, because they are more independent thinkers engrossed in the beauty of nature. Thus when Emily reveals that Monsieur Barreaux's reason for living in the country is due to the intolerable weakness of mankind he was exposed to in the city, the locations where good and bad reside are differentiated. The countryside became a

refuge for those fleeing from the immorality that is contagious in cities. Those who are educated enough to distinguish acts of ill-manner from those of good flourished in the country as the most virtuous because nature nourished that virtue. Therefore Radcliffe offered characterizations of monsters in terms of those that tend to live in the city who are unknowledgeable, or who are easily persuaded.

People who lived in the city gradually became synonymous in the popular mind with the fallen who were too weak and ignorant to choose the most virtuous path. When people from the city were portrayed in the novel they were often described as shallow, material, and filled with bad habits such as gambling and prostitution. It was apparently more acceptable to have looser morals in the city, because other people who were also engaging in immoral activities regularly surrounded them. Thus when someone entered the city unaware of the sinfulness that existed it made him or her particularly susceptible to falling in with the depraved crowd. Monsieur Valancourt's experience in Paris away from his native countryside illustrates the dangerousness of taking a trip to the city unequipped and unprepared. Conformity is a key element in a functioning society; Valancourt discovered that if he did not join in their foul behavior he would be ostracized. Valancourt then became the prey of his fellow soldiers, who found him to be a censure to their activities with his nonparticipation by making them feel guilty or low for their criminal actions. His fellow soldiers strived to reduce him to their level to make themselves feel better, as if they were winning a conquest, and to gain a new member into their cult-like activities. People who are new to society tend to be more likely to succumb to their peers and to participate in their folly to avoid mistreatment, and to feel the warmth of fitting in. Valancourt struggled with being separated from Emily, and the peer pressure turned him to the vices of gambling in Paris shortly after he arrived. His fellow soldiers were able to lure outsiders into

their group with bullying tactics that encouraged others to join their behavior for a sense of belonging similar to that which occurs in gangs. The city then becomes a vortex of destruction that changes one's character, and can have severe ramifications for those who are not able to withstand it. Valancourt lost all of his fortune to the seduction of gambling, and only after some considerable effort was able to escape the treacherous grasp of those around him to return to the countryside that the city life had taught him to appreciate more fully. Most people, however, fall victim to the peer pressure that governs the populations of cities.

The notion that "If you are not with us, then you are against us" is a recurring theme throughout the novel that further illustrates the dangerous division between good and evil. Valancourt was able to conform, but the city has a certain way beyond ridicule to handle people who are unwilling to conform. The novel suggests that society, in addition to increasing the members of those who commit crimes, values loyalty for the criminals and deviants by focusing their tyranny on those who do not. Therefore, people who disagree with the behavior that characterizes the city, or monster, are considered to be the greatest threat. These domineering deviant groups tend to specialize in the oppression of those who do not value their lifestyle or "fit in" so to speak, and they work to make sure those threats are eliminated to continue their tyranny. Once fear of a threat spreads that could expose their immoral activities that fear becomes contagious, and extreme lengths are undergone to ensure eradication of the threat to prevent the expulsion of their way of life. For the "monstrous" element, this information can then be used as a tool to strike enemies by falsely stating they are no longer loyal, which is exactly what happens to Count Morano. Count Montoni dropped an anonymous letter off to the Senate stating that Count Morano had committed treason, which to this city would be the equivalent of ultimate betrayal in order to eliminate their existence. The senate's reaction to

immediately arrest Count Morano on mere suspicion from an anonymous letter is of course a proof of the member's own guilt. Count Morano was thrown into a secret prison where most people die from such treatment, which further illustrates how societies are easily persuaded into committing even more crimes by murdering innocent people without proper justification. Someone who is accused of a crime such as treason, even if the accusation is false, suffers from the society they were once a part of as if the mere possibility of having a traitor around is enough to warrant retribution. Count Morano became a threat to society when falsely accused by Count Montoni, and before checking the facts of the anonymous tip the senate immediately reprimanded him. An ideal society, one that follows the rule of law, would not have acted so swiftly, but would have verified the facts before throwing an innocent person in jail, possibly leading to his death. However, the cities where monsters reside are unforgiving with brash insolence. Therefore, the novel suggests that societies can ultimately turn on themselves for further oppression.

Count Montoni also fell victim to society after falsely accusing Count Morano. When Count Montoni was brought to trial as an accomplice to murder, the Senate did not release him even though the evidence was not sufficient enough to convict. Once a person is considered a criminal, then society can use that fallen status as an excuse to oppress another one of his or her own such as in the case of Count Montoni. An ideal society would ensure that proper justice would take its part in due course, and release Count Montoni until the proper amount of evidence to convict (or to acquit) should arise. However, Count Montoni is held without reason where it is said that he dies in confinement from poisoning. Cultures ought ideally to take care of their own people, and strive to make informed decisions when a man's life is at stake. Instead, once again people are acting too swiftly and unwisely in their socially monstrous ways. Count

Montoni can be seen as the antagonist throughout the novel by his actions in holding Emily captive, and in committing various crimes. However, Count Montoni learned the foul behavior he did engage in from growing up in the city, and in a form of tragic irony he later falls victim to it. Members of the society are not necessarily safeguarded from their own tyranny, in other words they tend to abuse their power in numbers and local positions to seek retribution on whomever they choose to continue their commitment to monstrosity.

The narrator addresses the audience at the end of the novel to instill more didactic lessons on the seduction of society. In the last sentences of the novel the narrator states that order has been restored in the uniting of Valancourt and Emily in their native countryside secure from the tumultuousness of the city. The narrator also makes one last distinction between the vicious city life and the moral embodiment of nature with all that is right in the world being represented in Valancourt and Emily's lifestyle. The difference between good and evil is reiterated for readers in a way that emphasizes the power of good that can prevail over the tyranny of monsters if there is room for patience. Lastly, the novel suggests with its last line that the author's purpose was to keep people from the sorrows of the city life, and to give hope to those who wish to escape from it. The novel implies that sin can be avoided by seeking refuge in nature where morals and intellects are strengthened. Society served as the oppressor against outsiders in addition to their own members, and consistently relied on impetuousness to function as a whole. However, good ultimately prevails against them, which serves the didactic purpose of illustrating that intellectual and social (or societal) morality is worth sustaining no matter the opposition. The narrator's last line reveals that part of the motivation for having a high level of social morality actively present in the text is to help readers recognize the danger of being unaware of the corrupted and corrupting society they may encounter. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* offers an early illustration of

the societal antagonism that exists as a theme throughout the genre, and it also shows the repeated idea that it can be conquered with moral fortitude.

Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) expands on the generic and thematic conventions Radcliffe employed to advance the theme of society as the monster. Lewis was greatly influenced by Anne Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and much like her success with that novel *The Monk* was his most recognized novel. Lewis focused on the Catholic religious institutions as the communal center of Spain in *The Monk*. The religious positions were thought to be the highest in Madrid, and Lewis exploits that belief to show the hypocrisy of the people holding those positions. Lewis begins, however, by honing in on the crowd of people who make the religion dominant in their culture. Ambrosio is established as having a higher position in the Capuchin church by being a perfect monk of virtue capable of drawing in big crowds for his sermon. Ambrosio is framed as the angelic beacon of virtue, which means that the only place left for him to go at the highest level is down. On the other hand, the people who come to hear him speak do not come for the obvious reasons of piety or to become rich in religious servitude, as one might suppose them to. Instead, the people from Madrid come to hear Ambrosio talk, so that they can satisfy their curiosities, carnal appetites, boredom, and loneliness. Certainly, the people's self-serving motivations for attending church is an interesting topic when it comes to understanding human culture; however, it also lends itself well to building the case of social hypocrisy as a distinctive trait in the antagonism at the novel's center. Understanding the machinery of the community can aid in the discovery of the monsters in the novel. The narrator places society under a microscope to examine its morality by revealing the spectator's ulterior motives. Lewis already begins to construct a distrustful community of people that are suspect as monsters.

Society as a whole is presented as an engulfing abyss of destruction searching to devour even the most sacred and virtuous people in Lewis' novel. Ambrosio, the honorable monk, is the pinnacle of society who quickly falls when his morals are put to the test by temptation. Ambrosio leads a reclusive life sheltered within the walls of the church from outside seductions. Therefore, he was more inclined to be virtuous, because he never had temptation cross his path. However, his chastity is tried when he starts making visits outside of the church where he is no longer sheltered by the holy walls. Ambrosio could have used that opportunity to prove his status as the beacon of virtue in sustaining the sway of his natural instincts when faced with the hardest trials. Instead, Ambrosio falls at the slightest temptations with his lies, rape, and murder. He sought the church to shield him from uncontrollable forces of human nature. Instead, his decision to shelter himself makes him worse off for he has not been conditioned to sustain such inner feelings as normal members of society are. Normally people encounter temptations so often that they learn to endure and overcome them without giving in. Besides, having been chaste for so long makes him especially vulnerable to seduction, and his reputation works as the perfect cover for his crimes. No one could suspect the honorable Ambrosio of such crimes, and that gives him more of a reason to repeat them knowing that he can get away with them. Even a church where there are constantly other people around, including the Holy Spirit that is supposed to encourage morality, does not faze Ambrosio from his lust. Lewis places Ambrosio under high scrutiny by illustrating the hypocrisy involved in having people worship a man for his virtuosity when he is not virtuous. It further illustrates how people admire others for qualities they do not have, but fail to question the truth of them that suggests the false ideals of such people, who cannot distinguish between appearances and reality.

Lewis not only focuses on the effects of hypocritical monstrosity in higher positions, such

as in Ambrosio's case, but also draws an unfavorable portrait of those housed in the lower and middle classes. He uses these portraits as instances of foreshadowing to predict the future victims in *The Monk*. When Lewis incorporates the gypsy he has her speak in verse, and it is such a departure from the narration that it easily draws in the reader's attention much like the crowds in the novel. The gypsy stands outside the church to foretell fortunes, and Leonella publicly demeans the gypsy by describing her as a homeless person who steals money from people by telling lies. Although they are all part of the same community the class divisions demonstrate how dysfunctional the members are by treating other members disproportionately. Leonella further insults the gypsy stating that she wishes to kill that whole lower class if it were in her power, of course, not realizing that would mean her class would be lowered. Leonella embodies the destructive nature of a community that functions on oppressing the lower levels of a social hierarchy. It is also important to note that while Leonella is the only person to publicly chide the gypsy, she is also a member of the middle class. The middle class is typically the class with the most social constraints to meet moral expectations, and part of Leonella's animosity comes from the freedom given to those of the lower class. A gypsy is allowed to dress as she pleases, and to continually scam people for money as a member of the lower class. People of a lower status are expected to partake in such activities, because they have no other means to survive. However, it is interesting that the gypsy's fortunes do come true, and Leonella pays the gypsy to read her fortune despite their differences in class. The gypsy returns Leonella's loathing by telling her misfortunes to the public in order to embarrass her in an attempt to show her intellectual superiority. The tension between the two characters illustrates the tensions between the two classes that leads to monstrous behavior. Lewis presents neither class in a favorable light as the characters are able to judge, and act by exploiting the power in their

statuses. Therefore, Lewis shows readers how every class or status is vulnerable to scrutiny, thus making the community as a whole more damaging.

As a community the members, especially the middle class, tend to turn on one another to oppress the lower classes out of an innate fear that they will lose their status for a lower one. That is the motivation behind Leonella's comment to the gypsy, to publicly assert her dominance. She does this in order to keep from being associated with the lower class, so people do not group her with them in the future. The reason why people, particularly Leonella, want to move up is for power, control, recognition, and because it usually consists of more freedoms. The middle class is like a transition class that is caught between the other two, and the members would rather have the freedoms of the higher class than the restrictions of the lower. They strive to become a member of the higher class and admire them, because it gives them something to work for, although what they are working for is power. However, looking at the perspective of a member from a higher class also sheds light on the community dynamic. Ambrosio, for instance, is well aware of his higher position in society. After giving his sermon, he is treated like a celebrity with women swooning after him. These crowds of women feed his conceit so much so that Ambrosio places his stardom higher than the religion that give him it. He mistakes the community's love for the ideal position they want to achieve as embodied in him for his actual self. In a sort of reverse oppression, their admiration, out of self-interest, allows for Ambrosio to feel falsely more important in society than he actually is. Ambrosio is then pushed to think more of himself from his originally humbled opinion, which makes him narcissistic by actually believing it. The community falsely gives him more power and freedom that lead to his ultimate destruction. He no longer has to actually act with moral fortitude, because his reputation is enough to carry the ideal notion of his being for people to worship. Ambrosio acknowledges this

by claiming that he has reached his peak with nothing left for him to do, which reiterates his motivations for turning towards corruption. As St. Aubert states in the *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that a vacant mind is more likely to err to relieve its idleness, so too is Ambrosio likely to err from the freedoms he thinks he has been given. However, even he acknowledges that he is human and that humans sin, so naturally he is bound to fail. Ambrosio realizes that as a human he is naturally disposed to sin, and this knowledge gives him false liberty in his mind to commit it. The difference is that Ambrosio does not know the threshold of when to stop as he has not been conditioned in society for such, and once he starts getting away with sinning he has no acquired incentive to stop so he becomes more destructive by committing the worst sins he can.

If all members of society are prone to destruction, then little hope is given to humankind. Some members can clearly see the destructive nature of the community, and they seek seclusion to escape from it. Ambrosio is one such man who, although he thinks highly of himself, also understands that he cannot protect himself against it. He ponders the life of a hermit crab in which members of the community seek solitude from the constant vices and follies of others in a religious cell. Other than for sermon, the church gives no opportunity to meet with other members, but instead allows for a member to escape for the majority of the time by confining him or herself under religious protection. Ambrosio realizes the necessity to protect oneself from destruction as being an ideal scenario, but unachievable. It is in human nature for man to take part in society as humans are relative to other humans. The human condition naturally thirsts for belonging and acceptance. For instance, a member of a community would only seek solitude to prevent the destructive nature of other members; however, if this person were the only member than there would be no reason to seek solitude. Therefore, all human existence is relative. Merely seeking solitude from other members would not offer peace, because instead the

member would spend his or her time stewing over the destructive nature of the community that caused that member to escape to begin with. Furthermore, when the member stopped stewing this person would miss the company of others for life is best when shared with another. One needs another not only to prove the fortitude of their existence, but also to share in the existence of everything else; for nature is not enough to sustain the continuance of solitude, because all existence only has meaning in its complex relation to another. Therefore if a member would leave the community for solitude it would not be long before they would return to the life of the community; for dealing constructively with a destructive community is better than the loss of all meaning and existence that comes with solitude. At least the community gives opportunities for both advancement and loss, which lead to motivations for existing at all. As an oppressor or the oppressed, one is more than likely experiencing that oppression with others, and so still feels a sense of belonging as a member of the community as a whole. Ambrosio's reflections illustrate that society is a vortex that is inescapable, so much so that if one tries to escape it their natural dispositions will urge them on to be a part of it again. That is why Ambrosio seeks the monastic life to allow him to live like a hermit crab for the majority of the time, while limiting the amount of interaction he has with other members of society by only seeing them at sermon. Ambrosio finds this to be the best way of life, because it keeps him from becoming disgusted with the vices and follies of the community while enjoying the good side of the community only on occasion. The good side of the community is, of course, visible when they are on their best behavior in the presence of high society and the Holy Spirit in church to encourage their notion that they will some day join those ranks. Lewis shows that no matter how bad society becomes, it will always inevitably have members, and although Ambrosio considers the monastic life the perfect scenario, readers quickly discern that it does not offer full protection against the monstrosity of

the community.

Those members cloaked in religious attire hiding in their church cells are not free from scrutiny, destruction, or from falling to a lower class. Lorenzo discovers with his sister's fate that religious institutions are the biggest center for hypocrisy, especially in a society like Madrid where religion plays a central role. Religion is really an image or mask with the members wearing it pretending to play an ideal role when in fact they are among the most morbid and depraved members of the community as a whole. Ambrosio, for instance, cloaks himself as the epitome of moral fortitude while committing the worst of sins such as rape and murder. Whether these members set out intentionally to beguile other members, or whether it happened by way of circumstance, is moot. The point is that the hypocrisy exists, and that the community continues to encourage it by worshipping such members. The members of the church abuse their power as they see they have more than what was actually given them. However, although the middle and lower class worship the high class as embodied in the religious church, one must not forget their motivation for doing so. Their motivation for admiring the higher class is that they will be associated with, and will one day be a part of that class. They function solely out of self-interest, and as such they are also on the prowl for opportunities to advance their placement. Therefore, readers understand why Lorenzo, a member of the middle class, is so eager to bring the church down, and point out their hypocrisy. The self-destructive nature of the community is prevalent, because individuals consistently act for their own interests. Lorenzo points out that the high-class religious members are the most dangerous, because they hide so well behind the mask of virtue. Furthermore, the middle class is constrained by the chance that they might lose their status while the lower class enjoys freedoms with the notion they have nothing to lose since they are already at the bottom, leaving the higher class the most vulnerable as their freedoms are more

suspect, and unjustifiable. The higher class acts from their own interests the most, and has the power and influence to get away with their actions, making them more prone to crime and worse for committing the crimes out of want rather than necessity. This makes all the other members more ready to dethrone them. However, Lorenzo pointing out their hypocrisy by actually dethroning some of the community's most influential leaders would devastate the public, causing unwarranted pandemonium for all. Lorenzo starts his crusade by pushing Madame St. Ursula to publicly denounce the Prioress and other members of the church to announce that a religious law is still active that would make the aforementioned persons into murderers of Lorenzo's sister. The punishment by law for Lorenzo's sister becoming pregnant as a nun is to banish her to solitary confinement with no interaction until her death. To an extent this illustrates the power of the church not only to produce such laws, but to enforce them as well. Furthermore, the church is able to keep its practices from the public when actively using the law on a current member that further proves the abuse of their falsely given power; it is falsely given by the higher class, who mistake admiration for approval of more power. The community of Madrid will, of course, be outraged by the abuse of power coupled with the power they wish to gain by lack of their own. Lorenzo's crusade as a member of the middle class leads to the community's climax of destruction.

The community reaches its ultimate breakdown with Lorenzo and Madame St. Ursula's revelation that leads to pandemonium in Madrid. An opportunity opens for people to move up in class, and this opening results in those acting swiftly without acting responsibly. Lorenzo waits to share this revelation until the church parade when he knows the public will be present and outraged. Therefore, just as he expects, as soon as the Prioress and members are named they are not even given the opportunity to defend themselves. The crowd quickly turns to a mob

mentality before Madame St. Ursula has even finished giving her speech. Lorenzo hoped to gain his higher position in retribution for the loss of his sister without considering the full ramifications for creating such a public disturbance. He loses control over the crowds, and the mob publicly tortures and kills the Prioress as a result. The Prioress was not given a trial or opportunity to explain that Lorenzo's sister was alive, but was instead brutally killed based on a false accusation. Even after the Prioress was dead the crowd had to ensure their advancement by continuing to abuse her body until there was no visible body left, a completely symbolic act. They are physically extinguishing the members of the higher society to show their newfound dominance as the members of the high society now. However, all it really shows is that the higher class has merely changed people, not dynamics. The mob's violent behavior illustrates the freedom and power that they have seized in their higher status and that allows them to murder and cause destruction without anyone stopping them. They are able to get away with crimes that they were never able to get away with before as the middle class. Like Ambrosio's demise, once they get a feel for power and the crimes they are allowed to get away with, it encourages them to commit more crimes. Liberty gives way to license. That is why shortly after killing the Prioress they go after all the other nuns, and set the Convent of St. Clare on fire. Intoxicated with their new status, the mob kills more innocent people, and destroys anything in their way they can find that is associated with the previous powers. However, the mob does not fully understand their own destructive power, leaving many of them dead with the collapse of the convent after setting it ablaze. This suggests that no one is truly on top without sacrifice, and certainly destructive behavior can be self-inflicting. Violence merely leads to more violence. The whole scene embodies more of a battle showing a community at war against itself, leaving no one victorious. A community bent on a hierarchal system is bound for destruction when it leaves

all members to act on their own self-interests rather than in a genuine common good.

Perhaps no one in the community feels the sting of monstrosity more than Ambrosio. After the mob riot when he is found out for his crimes he experiences the consequences of his actions. As members of the higher society, the nuns were killed and thus excluded from the experience of living as a member of the lower class. Ambrosio, however, has to live through and endure much more than simply the degradation of being the lowest person in the community. As a prisoner he experiences torture and shame. The inquisitors of the church who provide the torture demonstrate the power they are allowed in using such methods for confession. They would continue their torture until he confessed to all crimes including sorcery, and those of which he was innocent followed by the threat of being burnt alive. The idea of a cruel death helps exert the inquisitor's dominance, and show how much they enjoy oppressing others. One might say that Ambrosio deserved such a fate, but his fate was merely a result of the community's reverse oppression to begin with by giving him a false sense of power. Furthermore, the placement of the torture inside holy walls is also a disturbing demonstration of the value they place on antagonism over sanctity. It is a sheer brute force, without reason. Ambrosio, once encouraged to be the oppressor, then becomes the oppressed. No longer able to confine himself in his cell or to control himself from crime in the community, Ambrosio is left in the hands of the inquisitor for his fate. Ambrosio would rather die or sell his soul to the devil than apologize to join the community again. Ambrosio's suffers a grim death after being duped by the devil instead of simply asking forgiveness; that reflects how low an opinion he has of the community. The support of forgiveness and consolation did not seem to extend to him in his new status. Ambrosio witnessed the full nature of the destructive powers a community can have.

The Mysteries of Udolpho demonstrated the monstrous nature of the city, and ended with the notion that morality can ultimately conquer the corruption of society. *The Monk* builds on Radcliffe's novel by intensifying the level of antagonism present and active in the community of Madrid. However, Lewis offers a grimmer portrait by showing the destructiveness at all levels of the community that ultimately leads to their ruin. Every person of the community is vulnerable to destruction, and most, even the innocent, fall victim to it. When critiquing Theodore's poems, the Marquis points out that they are all animals left open for attack. The Marquis suggests that as a writer one opens him or her up to the worst oppression no matter how good or bad the writing is, therefore one should keep their writing to themselves for protection against others or not write at all. This break in narration about authorship may shed light as to why Lewis' novel is so much grimmer than Radcliffe's. To a reader it seems at times as though Lewis is talking about his own experience with writing. He may have a more negative outlook of a hopeless society, because critics and people in the community judged his books when they themselves did not write, and therefore could know not how hard it is to produce great works. Lewis was widely criticized for his indulgence in the grotesque, and was widely condemned in reviews for it. Radcliffe, on the other hand, was embraced for her discourse on nature and love, which may have given way to a more favorable portrayal of society. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, however, seems to blend both love and hate.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* was her most successful novel, and it broadens the view from a city or community to the whole human race in placing it under the microscope of monstrosity. Shelley takes on a frame narrative in her novel that creates a new perspective for readers. Instead of merely being a fly on the wall who observes the action in the novel,

she allows for readers to feel that they are getting a first hand account of the events from the characters. When the characters are sharing their stories it is like readers are there listening to them for the first time, and this helps establish a sense of believability and trust with the characters in the novel. Shelley successfully makes readers feel responsible and connected as members of the human race. Therefore, when Victor refuses to share the secrets of life with Walton at the beginning of the novel readers feel deprived as well. Victor believes that humans are barred from greatness by nature, and infers that members of the human race are just supposed to accept their destructive nature, that trying to change the dynamic of nature is a fruitless effort that only leads to more destruction. Victor sets the tone of hopelessness for mankind, and elaborates on the dangerousness of knowledge to man. The danger he perceives, of course, is that if man would work to know of ways in which to improve society he would inevitably ostracize and damage himself without being able to implement those improvements. In short, by the end of the novel Victor pushes conformity on mankind, even if the society they conform to leads to their own destruction.

Victor pushes conformity so forcefully, because he himself experienced the consequences of breaking the laws of nature. Victor, unhappy with the flawed world, decides to play God by creating a new species of man. He does this after the loss of his mother, and being shunned by other professors and students at college who do not share his scientific beliefs. He is treated as an outcast in the college community, and that treatment confirms his decision to create his own species of man that will appreciate him as their creator. Victor seeks status and appreciation in a competitive community that follows the hierarchical oppressive nature that was illustrated in the social classes of *The Monk*. Victor pursues the secret of life presumably to bring his mother back to life, but instead Victor illustrates that what he really wants is to control in a new species what

he cannot control in the real world. He seeks to control the destructive nature of mankind by re-channeling it. However, he ends up instead encouraging monstrosity by creating a "dangerous" monster that causes mass destruction. Furthermore, by doing what his colleagues had no belief in he is intentionally trying to make them feel inferior by proving them wrong. In fact, he is so controlling over his new species that he keeps it a secret from his colleagues, illustrating the internal struggle between society and man.

When Victor decides to create a new species of man he, of course, only means a normal looking species. Victor collects several human body parts to mesh as one new species of man, but the fact that the creature is made from human parts does not make him a human being. According to Victor the creature is not man, which shows how much Victor thinks of his own superiority. The creature is linked by nature to humankind, and yet Victor refuses to acknowledge his own relation to the creature once he is made. The partial reasoning behind this is the ugly appearance of the creature, but why does Victor create him so ugly? He created the creature as a reflection of himself in what he describes as the vampire of his image, and his spirit. It can be concluded that man's first attempt to create his own image was, ironically, a faithful one. Mankind is naturally destructive and hideous in moral nature; therefore, it follows logically that the first handmade man should be a reflection of that condition. Victor is horrified with the mirrored image he sees of himself in the creature as the embodiment of the monstrosity in man that is usually covered by the mask of human flesh. He is shocked by the abrasive and harsh version of himself that he is not used to confronting or dealing with. He casts the creature out into world knowing that the creature will not be accepted among mankind, much like himself, and he realizes that the answer to the monstrosity of mankind is not adding more people to it. Victor cannot even give the creature a name, because he seems more like a phantom of mankind

than an actual person. He was hoping to get relief in building a new species, but instead saw his own destruction.

After creating the creature one would think Victor would take care of it, and at least treat him decently as his creator. However, Victor is one of the worst oppressors of the creature throughout the novel. In rejecting the creature, giving him no name, and thrusting him into the world all alone, Victor illustrates how he abandoned his own child. Furthermore, when Justine is accused for murdering Victor's brother he refuses to come to her aid when he knows his creature is the true culprit. Perhaps he is shameful for building such a monster like himself; after all, Victor is ugly on the interior with a normal exterior, while his doppelganger in the creature is normal on the interior with an ugly exterior. However, Victor refuses to acknowledge his own responsibility in the death of his own brother by creating his murderer, and is willing to let Justine die without just cause. Instead, Victor is more concerned that people might think him mad for offering such an unbelievable tale of events as those that actually did occur. He promotes his own self-interest to protect his reputation over saving the life of a fellow human being. Victor's selfish motivations further demonstrate the destructive nature of man who purposely sabotages other people to save himself.

Victor, of course, is not the only member of the human race. Other members have that same monstrous behavior of saving themselves at all costs. To keep from being associated with such a crime as murder no one, excepting Elizabeth, comes forth to offer protection and a defense against the accusations towards Justine when they know her to be innocent. Their moral and ethical failure, much like Victor's, illustrates how the selfishness of man leads to monstrous acts. It is monstrous to not take action against a wrong, because it infers that one accepts and encourages that wrong with their silence. It demonstrates the destructive nature of a community

who are so willing to turn on other members to protect their own interests. As a member of such a public there are no incentives or protection from other members to save one's self, which builds on the theme of hopelessness.

Justine is the victim of a society that once cherished her. As a victim she is forced to lie by confessing to a crime she is completely innocent of to avoid the threats and torture she would undergo from other members. Justine experiences the same decision that Ambrosio had to face in *The Monk*. She chooses to confess guilt for a crime that she is innocent of even though it means her execution, because it is more desirable than living miserably among man. Justine even seems to welcome her death as an escape from the cruelty of her community by hoping for a peaceful afterlife. Certainly, if she had persisted in her innocence it would have led to her death anyway, because people associate guilt with accusation when the accused is of low status, so she was just making the process faster. Justine perishes for a crime she did not commit, and does so by the hands of a community she once trusted. Shelley seems to suggest a sort of communal purging of sins here. The community is naturally harmful, but when they are forced to confront their own actions they choose to make a sacrifice for their sins. But they do not make one of their own the sacrifice. Justine was exactly one of those sacrifices to purge the community, so they remain free to renew their harmful patterns once again in a cyclical manner. She is simply the scapegoat for their inability or unwillingness to accept who they are as human beings cloaked under the cape of justice. That is why they are so swift with the execution, because they have to take a momentary pause from their disparaging behavior to offer their sacrifice. Like victims of an addiction, they are impatient to move on to their normal behaviors, and purge themselves of guilt so they can continue on fulfilling their own self-interests of antagonism. Justice is, after all, more of a social mechanism to help members cope with their

own behavior that is sometimes restraining to natural impulses that they have learned to suppress under their masks of virtue, and those sacrifices under justice give members a cathartic way of dealing with those impulses and restraints.

Victor, interestingly enough, seems to blame the community for their swift decision to kill Justine. Victor fails to accept his own part in letting an innocent woman perish for the crime his creation had committed. He distances himself from the community for their actions, and yet he is a member of it who commits far worse actions than any of the whole. He embodies the societal mentality of always needing an enemy to justify one's own behavior. He makes the community responsible for the results of his actions to make him feel better about himself. Victor is seeking a scapegoat to deal with his own interior struggle of impulses, restraints, and guilt. He displaces his guilt, blaming the creature without blaming himself for creating him. Instead, Victor actually encourages the creature's behavior by not publicly coming forth to admit his guilt. Victor could have proved Justine's innocence with his own guilt if he wanted to, but he chooses to act on his own behalf to protect his reputation, thus encouraging the creature to commit more heinous crimes.

Other people who know Victor seem to think he is grieving over the loss of his brother and Justine. However, Victor is really dealing with the interior struggle of accepting himself as an oppressor in an even more oppressive society. It is, after all, his doppelganger that is wreaking havoc on all those he loves, which is his own way of sabotaging his family to become the oppressor. Victor passively allows his creation to kill everyone around him, and fails to control his own destructive impulses that are embodied in the creature's behavior. Therefore, Victor is trying to accept his own part in the death of the two, while following his self-interest of trying to battle the creature one on one instead of actually grieving or ending the continuance of

loss. Furthermore, this behavior suggests that no single person has control over the community and so should accept its destructive nature since no one has the power to change it. Even Victor's father suggests that a man is unfit for society if he dwells in his grief, because it discourages his ability to be useful and prevents the enjoyment of belonging. In short, his father is telling him to accept the ways of man, and move on from the things he cannot change.

Elizabeth handles the death of Justine similarly to Victor by blaming mankind for her death. She refers to men as monsters thirsting for blood, and looks down upon them for carrying out the justice that was relative to them. Elizabeth even feels superior to man by stating those who commit murder are deprived persons unfit for society, and she could never commit murder herself. However, she is endorsing murder by not doing everything in her power to prevent it, she becomes an accomplice and thus committing murder herself in a sense. She appears to be more moved by the loss of Justine than by that of her own cousin, perhaps, because Justine's death is dragged out by a trial that makes her guilt increase with the slow process that magnifies her own lack of action. She realizes after Justine's death that the world is miserable, filled with vices and injustices. Although she spoke once at the trial in Justine's defense, the only one to do so, that was the only action she took; one that she knew everyone would find biased as a friend of Justine. Certainly, she did not offer her own life as a martyr, protest, or continue the search for clues that would aid in Justine's defense. Instead, Elizabeth gives a speech that falls on deaf ears due to her bias towards Justine, and she accepts the fate of the accused as the price of continuing her conformity to mankind. Thus she accepts the murder and evil nature of mankind with her complacency.

When Victor confronts the creature for the first time, the creature's initial response is to make peace with Victor; however, Victor responds with hatred. The creature is forgiving, and

has not been conditioned by society to spurn anyone who easily comes in the way of his or her self-interests. Having been conditioned by his experience, though, the creature describes all men as hateful, and hate is a natural impulse to oppress others in order to feel better about him or herself. The creature describes this quality in man to Victor, but feels no compassion for him as a member of mankind. Human existence is then presented as miserable with a false sense of belonging. He points out that Victor, his own creator, is trying to kill him, and this revelation illustrates the vicious nature of humankind. The creature is searching for peace in a world of hopelessness, and he is soon to discover that no peace will ever come to him in the world of man. Lady Charlotte, a nineteenth century reader of the novel, wrote in her diary, "I chanced to take up Frankenstein, and a thought struck me, which I wish Lady [--] would improve upon. I imagine a wife for the monster. Let some man of art, hearing of his crimes, compose a wife to punish him" (Bury 234). Lady Charlotte suggests that the creature could be Victor's way of punishing himself for his sins. Perhaps that is why Victor continues his abusive and unfeeling behavior towards him. Victor's oppressive behavior towards the creature demonstrates his conditioned mentality of consistently seeking an enemy that he can conquer to boost his self-centered ego. Victor treats the creature like an abortion by trying to kill and abandon him throughout the novel. His unsuccessful attempts are what encourage him to continue; he cannot handle the creature getting the best of him. Victor is consistently treating the creature poorly when he has done nothing wrong to deserve it, which goes back to the notion that life is not fair and that the human condition is inherently tragic. The creature believes he should only be treated poorly if he has done something wrong to warrant it, but in reality it apparently is in human nature to treat others disproportionately. As it is shown with Justine, the victims are chosen arbitrarily, with all mankind experiencing oppression at sometime or another. The creature longs for the happiness

he sees in others, but does not comprehend that it is an illusion. He is merely bearing witness to the masks of conformity, for if one did not appease other members of the community they would be reflecting the community's negative behavior that would lead to the sort of rioting and collapse of the community seen in *The Monk*. The answer to such reflection seems to be the enactment of more violence, which is shown when Victor threatens to fight the creature. That Victor considers the creature to be his enemy goes with the idea that all men are enemies to other men and to themselves in a consequential society.

Perhaps the creature would not have killed so freely if he had found one decent human being who could treat him with kindness; however, the creature is treated poor by all with the exception of the blind De Lacey, who cannot see him and judge him by his appearance. A community is certainly vicious if it contains no one who is kind. Everyone seems to judge the creature by his appearance, which shows how quick they are to make enemies over which they can exert their dominance. This human quality cannot be helped or resolved, because it is biologically a part of human behavior that is reinforced through social conditioning. The creature, for example, is not a monster at first like the rest of the human race. Instead, he learns to become a monster by taking after the humans who treat him as such. He is forced to seek refuge alone in the mountains for protection, but like Ambrosio he naturally yearns for belonging. Human existence, therefore, is hopeless for the creature, because if his creator rejects him, who is the one person naturally disposed to love him, then all men are lost. The creature realizes that every person he meets tries to harm him, and he would rather be alone than endure the hypocrisy of men who long to be loved without loving others; nature is the only outlet for compassion. Since the one person fully responsible for showing compassion to the creature refuses to reconcile with him, the creature is left with no alternative but to make human life as

miserable as his own has been made. Essentially, the creature takes on the destructive characteristics of mankind to get revenge for his mistreatment, even while knowing this will make him as bad morally as the rest of mankind has already proven to be.

In the creature's narrative, he tells of his first encounter with a human being. The man, of course based on exterior alone, shrieks, and runs faster than his legs will allow on first sight of the creature. In this instance, the man comes to the realization that he cannot dominate and oppress such a physical presence as the creature alone, so his natural instinct is to take flight. The man does not, of course, leave without hurting the feelings of the creature by showing his repulsion for him, despite his being made from human parts capable of feelings. On the other hand, the creature disturbed the man simply for food and shelter. He attempts to fulfill his own needs, but reacts differently when faced with an unfamiliar species. The community is generally conditioned either to oppress or to flee from other members who pose a threat to fulfilling their self-interests. Therefore, since the man could not exert dominance over the creature for his food and shelter he was forced to flee. However, the creature, when faced with a new species, does not immediately resort to either oppression or flight. Instead, he remains always on the defense from the attacks of mankind.

On the creature's second encounter with man readers visualize even more disturbing humanistic qualities. Influenced by his survival instincts the creature enters a village where food is visibly to be had. Once again, the community's first impression is to flee from the dominating presence of the creature at first sight whom they know they cannot control on their own. However, this time the creature is not just dealing with one man, but an entire village. It does not take long for the villagers to start physically attacking the creature with stones and weapons to show their control over that territory. The creature is forced to flee to the forests to escape the

verbal and physical abuse of the villagers whom he did not harm in any way. The creature has to live alone in a hovel to avoid the oppression of man. The creature is hurt by his encounter, and readers start to feel compassion for the creature, as he appears to be more humanlike than the animal the characters in the novel believe him to be. The human qualities of the creature help illuminate the animalistic qualities of man.

Despite the unnecessarily foul treatment of his first two encounters with man, he proceeds with kindness on his third encounter. The creature finds the wholesome De Lacey family, and witnesses how much labor is required to sustain a three-person family. The De Lacey family struggles physically due to their financial losses with having to gather food and build fires to stay warm. No one in the neighborhood seems to help them try to survive, leaving them to suffer alone, showing the mentality of every man for himself. After the creature starts doing their outdoor tasks for them the family considers him to be a good spirit, and praises the invisible person helping them out. This mysterious behavior puzzles them, because in their experience people do not help other people out, because they are always acting for themselves. That is why the invisible person, the creature, helping them is so rare that they begin to think it is no human at all, but the supernatural. Of course by now the creature knows better than to do something simply out of the goodness of his heart. The creature takes on the self-serving qualities of man by helping the family in order to learn from them. Watching the family, the creature learns how to shelter himself, feed himself, and even learns how to communicate. The creature takes from the family everything that could help him survive on his own.

Through the De Lacey family the creature experiences what it is like to live among man, and he longs for that sense of belonging, even if it is false. However, reflecting on his own situation gives him the resolve that he probably never will experience that feeling. After finally

witnessing his own reflection in a pool of water the creature becomes disgusted with himself. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy the creature starts to believe he is the monster that everybody else believes him to be, based on his physical appearance. He cannot understand why he was given such ugly features when he is a good person inside, and he starts to realize that since he will never be a normal man he will instead turn into a far worse monster than anyone might imagine. The creature's decision to act against those who reject him is mirrored in Victor's choice to create life for acceptance. The difference is that no one could believe Victor would create life, whereas the creature is simply filling everyone's expectation of his monstrosity. The creature refers to his features as a deformity, because other people he encounters treat them as such. The creature's deformity actually illustrates his inability to conform to the natural destructiveness of society, both physically and mentally. The creature cannot at first grasp the viciousness of man, and even goes so far as to compare himself to the Native Americans who were bullied for their differences with the American settlers. The creature has to adapt to societal conventions to ever have a chance of fitting among them. Unfortunately, no matter what the creature does, the community will always treat him like a monster no matter what he looks like.

In the creature's lessons with the De Lacey family through Safie he begins to understand the dynamic of human existence. He learns that mankind has been vicious from the start of the human race, killing people for dominance over trade, territory, money and power. Man gloried himself in wars where he was praised for killing the enemy; there has always been an enemy in man. However, there were also good moments for mankind too, but this apparent goodness was a false perception. It is an innate quality of human beings to yearn to be on top, which means someone has to be at the bottom. Humans are naturally oppressive people that are capable of wearing masks that hide their impulses to harm others even if unconsciously. Even the most

benevolent actions of man actually occurred only where there also existed some form of evil, such as self-interest. The most dangerous form of evil is when it is cloaked with virtue, for that sort of evil illustrates man's internal struggle between good and evil. The evilness of human existence being hidden behind good leads to false notions of belonging, and to a sense of well being that results in the expansion of destruction all around. The creature fails to comprehend that God might create such a man to be a sinner when, given the opportunity to choose between sin and goodness, man continues choosing sin. The creature feels disgusted with the human race for causing his or her own repeated forms of destruction. Laws and government are supposed to protect against such inhumanity, but are filled with shortcomings that make them seem more like an obligatory purge than any form of real justice. If the justice system worked as it was intended, then it would not be needed because everyone would learn from another offender's mistakes. However, the prisons continue to be filled with people who break the law. Man chooses not to learn from their fellow beings, but instead persists in submitting to their uncontrolled primal urges. The creature cannot understand the self-damaging behavior of humans, which strengthens his animosity toward their race.

The creature's failure to comprehend the failings of man illustrates that he is indeed of a different species; one not based on the destruction of others. The creature of course realizes that he is not a normal being because of his physical deformities, but perceives that he is in fact much stronger and heartier than man. Perhaps his physical superiority, despite the ugliness, is what makes him such a threat to mankind. He has not only the power to dominate man, but also the restraint to keep from doing it. He was also different in having no possessions to make his existence relative. The creature can only comprehend that he was made to be entirely different than man, but still relies on them for relativeness. Of course, this begs the question of why

Victor created the monster to begin with. Victor certainly did not create him as a general enemy of man, or to finally be able to oppress someone else in a society that he was consistently being oppressed in. After all, Victor was the only family the creature had, which was not a family at all. Most babies are born into a loving home to be nurtured as they grow up, but the creature was born a man into a world of hate. Not only was the creature rejected, neglected and discriminated against, he was also the only one of his kind, and therefore truly alone in the world. The creature even goes so far as to compare himself with Adam, but even Adam had Eve. He had come into the world hated, and to be treated only as a monster. The creature is then forced to compare himself to Satan for his envy of man to feel a part of something, and he was made to feel inferior to the race of man instead. Through their own doing man brings out the Satan in the creature and encourages his deviant behavior by ostracizing him. However, even Satan had companions, whereas the creature is completely alone. The creature strengthens the notions of himself as an oppressed victim when he reads Victor's journal of the day he was brought to life. Victor was horrified with his own creation when it came to life, but did he not conceive that he was building such a horrible-looking creature during the process? Victor knew that he was creating an inferior person to protect himself in case the creature was not normal, which would allow him to reject it more easily as a beast. Victor could have used his mother's body in an attempt to revive her, but chooses instead to make a disproportionately meshed version of a man. Victor does this for the reasoning that he wanted to create a more powerful version of himself that could oppress his oppressors, either symbolically or physically. He was bullied at Ingolstadt, and wished to compensate for the physical presence he lacked. Yet, Victor fails to foresee that his own creation would lead to his ruin.

There comes a point at which the creature reaches his threshold for tolerating such a

species as mankind. After helping and caring for the De Lacey family the creature tries for acceptance among their family, and is bitterly disappointed. Felix physically abuses him, while the women either flee or faint. The family treat him like a monster, submitting to their natural but almost involuntary urges for violence. However, this rejection distinguishes the superiority of the creature whose first instinct is not to resort to violence, but to restrain himself from retaliation against their abuse. The creature peacefully accepts their denial of him, hurt as he may be by it. As Fred Botting describes in *Reflections of Excess*, "From this position, within and yet outside human orders, he is able to expose the inhumanity of human codes and values since they are the very things that define him as a monster" (Botting 444). The creature had allowed himself to hope for belonging with the De Lacey family if he showed them that he was their invisible hand helping them out, but their immediate rejection of him results in the crushing and alienating hopelessness he feels for all mankind. If every person was bound to subject him to evil, then certainly he had no qualms about treating them poorly in return. The creature takes on the human mentality that all those who are different must be enemies, and he begins to think of the entire human race as his enemy. The creature surrenders his innately good nature for the competitive and violent behavior that will ensure his revenge for the abuses he endures.

The creature, of course, gives up any compassion for mankind after he attempts to save the girl from drowning. Instead of being praised for attempting to revive the girl he is shot at. His act of kindness results once again in physical injury. Man consistently resolves to violence in order to solve their problems, shooting first and asking questions later (if at all), while the creature prefers to at least be given the opportunity to explain himself first. Unable to separate the reality of the creature's basic goodness from his ugly appearance, people immediately judge him as a monster, and as such they think he deserves to die. The creature, then, quite logically

takes vigilante justice for his abuses by coming after the creator who made him such a vile looking being. It is Victor's cosmetic choices, according to the creature, that lead to everyone spurning him. The community's continual abuses toward the creature are only enhanced by his foul appearance, until they become unthinking and habitual. Furthermore, they might still reject him, simply because it is in their nature to be oppressive to what differs from and therefore threatens them. In fact, the creature might feel much like Victor as an outsider for his impulses toward trying to change the social dynamic. Victor wanted to create life from death to assert his dominance, while the creature would wish to make man less predictably destructive. Neither way of life works out, because man must conform to society to feel a sense of belonging that cannot be achieved by ostracizing oneself as a result of promoting radical changes in society. Perhaps if the creature had experienced even one moment of kindness it would have prevented the killings that he would later commit, but he choose to take revenge on man by killing them for attempting to kill him, fighting fire with fire, in a sense. The creature compares himself to a slave, and refuses to submit to violence without seeking retribution. He becomes the vicious being that is visible in every man who gives in to his impulses for revenge.

The creature reasons that if no man will show kindness to him, perhaps a female companion made by Victor might. After all, the creature is the only member of his species, and he believes that if there were another member he could feel some sort of connection with her and she with him. The creature, of course, promises that he will never see man again if Victor were to grant his wish. Victor, of course, believes that a female creature would be one other person Victor can have control over to make himself feel better and more authoritative. However, Victor quickly realizes that he has neither control nor power to oppress the first creature he created; therefore he has no reason to create another. Furthermore, since the creature is

oppressing Victor by killing those he is close to, by creating another creature Victor opens himself up to more persecution. After many unsuccessful pleas for compassion the creature realizes that even the most ardent of speeches will not produce a change in either Victor or the species of man; man always thinks of himself first. Victor frames his response for denying the creature in terms of his horror and hatred for the creature's being. Even though he had himself created the creature, Victor considers him to be of a different species, and therefore he feels more obligated toward his own destructive species of man. Nevertheless, Victor starts to build the female companion for the creature, but he destroys her before she is even half-finished. Victor cruelly gives the creature the false hope of having a companion, which is worse than if Victor had just said no to begin with. Despite Victor considering the creature to be of a different species, when he destroys the nearly completed female companion, he reflects that it feels as though he was destroying human flesh. Although Victor meets and satisfies his urges for destruction he also experiences guilt, and chooses not to admit that he is both the creator and murderer of a species much like his own. Not long after Victor hears the gurgling sounds of the female companion drowning in the water he cannot handle his guilt, so he starts looking around to make sure no one was watching. Victor always returns to his self-interests. He is not concerned with the murder he just committed, or the angrier creature that's determined to commit more murders of his loved ones. Instead, Victor is concerned that someone might be watching that would betray him to his fellow humans who could oppress him for his actions rather than admire him for them. He does not want to be found guilty by associating himself with the murder of another species, because that would make Victor a criminal. The community, which typically enacts and enjoys oppression, could very well kill Victor to purge of their shared societal sins or banish him so that he has to experience what the creature had to endure.

Ironically, Victor in fact ostracizes himself by complying with his insistent, deviant, and anti-social passions.

After Victor destroys the creature's female companion he is so sickened with his destructive behavior that he cannot stand the sight of other beings. His father encourages him to enjoy society, but Victor cannot do it when he comes to the realization that he is the real monster in the community. Victor was born into, and conditioned by, society to be destructive to everyone, including himself. Having grown into a social monster himself, it was not surprising that when creating new life he would create a monster as well, thus ironically duplicating the biblical notion that God made man in his own image and likeness. However, even when his species has abandoned and condemned him, he still longs to be a part of even the most repulsive of mankind. As long as Victor is among his species, he thinks he will not feel alone. He cannot escape his fellow creatures, though he hides from them to prevent them discovering his betrayal in creating another species. Victor clearly does not respect the community he belongs to, and he comes to understand their social dynamic through his own search for destruction. He is slowly distancing himself from his own fellow beings, which illustrates his interior alienation from himself.

Victor finally approaches the magistrate to confess, and to ask for help in defeating the creature. Interestingly enough, when Victor pleads with the magistrate he blames the creature for all the killings, and does not acknowledge his own guilt in the matter. Victor continues to blame others for the results of his action, instead of accepting responsibility. Victor behaves this way out of selfish egotism intended to make him seem superior in front of the magistrate. It has already been established, however, with the De Lacey family that people do not help other people in their community. The magistrate simply does not care, unless the creature is brought

forth for him to oppress. Wasting countless hours chasing a superior being is too much work, while the chance of failing in the search would leave the magistrate feeling as inferior as Victor, even though the magistrate even refers to the creature as a mere animal. Although Victor tries to intimidate the magistrate into action, the magistrate does not threaten violence like Victor does. The magistrate knows he is superior to Victor within the community, and he purposely treats him like a madman to make him feel his inferior status. The repercussions for the magistrate's refusal are, of course, more loss of life, and more destruction for mankind. Victor's failure with the magistrate helps readers to begin to see more of a mimetic effect with the creature. Victor starts seeking solitude, and begins to reject his own species for their failure to take action. Victor illustrates the terrible consequences of a false compassion, one of the typical learned cruelties of living among man. No one cared enough to want to help Victor, so he abandons them to follow his solitary pursuit of killing the creature. Victor experiences the despair of being isolated among his own race when he could have easily experienced both compassion and community.

Walton's crew experiences defeat at seas with the threat of men dying and being lost in the middle of nowhere. As if the sea were a human being, they set out to conquer it by surviving its wrath, and setting forth to show the dominating superiority of man over nature. Nature is even thought of by the crew as an enemy, and as such they must defeat it. However, when the crew realizes that they are no force against nature they want to flee; the societally conditioned impulses are to always to dominate or flee. Their instinct to flee is particularly bothersome to Victor who tried fleeing from the creature, but found himself pursued and persecuted wherever he went by him. Victor still cannot let go of his competitive nature to dominate the creature, and is willing to make himself a martyr to satisfy his selfishly competitive instincts. Victor calls the crew cowards in order to oppress the crew and show his superiority. However, the crewmen turn

their animosity from the sea towards Victor, and choose to go home despite his entreaties. They know they can overcome Victor but cannot overpower the forces of nature.

During Victor's crusade to kill the creature he witnesses his own physical inferiority. He is not able to kill the creature, because he cannot physically endure the extreme outdoor conditions like the creature can. Walton's crewmen were smart enough to flee, but Victor makes himself a martyr when he concludes that society is too hostile and too destructive for him to return to. Even so, Victor never stops feeling an instinctive obligation towards his fellow species. He claims that the reason he pursues the creature is to save humankind from outside destruction (the creature). Yet, Victor is fully aware that the creature is only coming after him, and that he feels personally spurned by humankind himself. Even on his deathbed, Victor believes the creature to be selfishly evil when he was only acting that way, because Victor refused to do his duties to care for him. The creature simply returns what has been forced upon him. Victor also believes that the female companion would have become the same sort of evil force as the creature. Victor refuses to complete the female creature, because he cannot stand bringing another oppressive being into the world. If readers consider the inner destructive part of Victor to be embodied in the creature, then they can appreciate that those impulses to kill cannot ever be entirely suppressed or controlled. Those urges only go away when that person dies, as the creature does following Victor's death.

At Victor's death the creature comprehends who and what he had to become to beat Victor. The creature had to kill people and pursue his passion for self-interests by oppressing others to finally gain victory. But it is a hollow victory. The creature is remorseful for killing people and for having to turn into the monster that is mankind in order to defeat them. He even pities Victor for only being a product of the society that he stayed loyal to even despite their

abuses toward him. However, the creature is still superior to man, because he feels remorse; he has a social conscience. On his deathbed, Victor never felt sorry for his treatment toward the creature, never expressed human compassion. The vengeful creature understood who and what he had become in losing his control to restrain himself while encouraging his desire for the demise of Victor. The creature lost all appreciation for good in the world, and became the evil monster Victor made him to be, all as a result of personal and societal conditioning. Even as he lost his compassion, though, the creature never felt satisfied with killing others. However, the creature is not the real "monster" in this story. The creature killed out of circumstance and revenge. Mankind kills because it is in their nature to do so. The creature sacrifices himself after defeating Victor when he knows that no man existing will ever accept him, and since man is naturally destructive (and therefore self-destructive) they will always eventually kill themselves. Mankind had a responsibility to take care of its members, and to promote their species by helping others. The creature's tale serves as an example to all, as Shelley intended with her frame narrative, to scare people into caring by recognizing their own responsibility in preventing destructive behavior. As Botting suggests, "Unlike Frankenstein, who tries to subject his creation to his will, Mary Shelley makes no such tyrannical gesture: she bids her textual monster farewell and hopes it might go forth and prosper" (Botting 436). With Shelley's work the message is clear: we too must go forth and prosper.

The Early Gothic genre in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gained huge popularity with the advent of chapbooks, and other means of mass circulation. Gothic novels were chastised by many, including Jane Austen, who believed the books to be purely sensational. However, value can in fact come from the genre. A consistent theme of good versus evil prevailed through the genre, which consistently depicted society as a monstrosity of evil. In *The*

Castle of Otranto the foundations of this theme were laid with the evil being found in the people living in the castle instead of in the supernatural forces that haunted them. In the *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Radcliffe demonstrated that the city was the monster that bred and housed vice and temptations to pressure innocents into submission. *The Monk* expanded this theme even further by illustrating how the viciousness of an entire community resulted in the deaths of both the innocent and guilty. Lewis presented a destructive vortex in which the desire for human companionship compelled people to continue living in submission amid the hopelessness of the community. Hopelessness and societal antagonism were the center too, for Shelley's novel *Frankenstein.* Shelley made all readers fear themselves, and be responsible for their own actions in contemporary society. The value and lesson obtained from the Gothic genre is that we, as members of society, have a responsibility to promote the well being of all those around us. The genre further illustrates the destructive effects of taking no action, and the dangerousness of providing for oneself at the expense of others. Do we not continue to see people killing, bullying, and resorting to violence for answers? Do we not continue to seek enemies that we can defeat to feel better about ourselves? Do we not encourage and accept the injustices in the world by our inaction? The themes prevalent in this 200-year-old genre still resound in our contemporary society. Fiction or no fiction, the genre successfully critiques the dynamic of human nature, and points out the hypocrisy of much of our existence. The novels challenge our beliefs, and give new perspective on the human condition. Such social value is surely worthy of studying, and provides a lesson for all.

Work Cited

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. United States: Public Domain Books, 2006. Kindle AZW File.

Botting, Fred. "Reflections of Excess; Frankenstein, the French Revolution, and Monstrosity." *Frankenstein* 2000: 435-49. *Iliad*. Web. 31 Oct. 2012.

Bury, Lady Charlotte. Diary. February, 1820. *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Electronic; Love Library). Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

Lewis, Mathew Gregory. *The Monk*. United States: Public Domain Books, 2012. Kindle AZW File.

Radcliffe, Ann. *Mysteries of Udolpho*. United States: Public Domain Books, 2012. Kindle AZW File.

Seward, Anna. Letter to Christopher Smyth. 3 Aug. 1794. *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Electronic; Love Library). Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. United States: Public Domain Books, 2012. Kindle AZW File.

Somerville, Mary. Memoir. 1780-1872. *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Electronic; Love Library). Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

Stuart, Lady Louisa. Letter to Caroline Dawson. September, 1800. *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Electronic; Love Library). Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto.* United States: Public Domain Books, 2012. Kindle AZW File.