

The Projection of the Double in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the motif of the double in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. The double (double goer or alter ego) is the psychic counterpart of a person. Since it stands for psychological projection, it also reveals the darker side of one's psyche. The monster in Shelley's novel resembles the double of its protagonist Victor Frankenstein. What Victor cannot show and reflect in the reality has been transformed in the actions of the monster. The monster becomes Victor's disguised self because it mirrors the deepest psychic instincts of Victor Frankenstein. Likewise, the monster claims that it is Victor's Adam. Victor's disguised self has been transferred in every action and dialogue related to the Monster. The whole novel centers around this pivotal point. More than that, the novel implements the narrative structure known as mise en abyme, which imbeds one story within another one. This embedding instantiates the theme of structural double and series of reflections in the novel. The novel implements the paradigm of qualitative research and the concepts of the double as a theoretical lens to expose all these issues of the double in the novel.

Keywords: alter ego, ghostly counterpart, *mise en abyme*, monster, the double, overreaching

Introduction

This present paper explores the aspect of the double in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The double is the psychic counterpart of a person. Victor Frankenstein creates the monster though he wants to create a being that surpasses nature's creation. However, the creature is so horrible that he flees from it instead of nurturing it. The usurpation of Frankenstein results in devastation. The monster, in this regard, becomes the symbol of the darker side of the human being. It mirrors the psychic counterpart of Victor Frankenstein. The evil effects of the monster are the externalization of Frankenstein's psychic instincts. The relationship between Frankenstein and the monster demands a systematic examination and exploration.

Frankenstein is Shelly's first novel, which was published anonymously in 1818 A. D. The novel was written at the time of great social and political upheaval. It deals with the various aspects that are related to the industrial development of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is the reason; the novel has attracted many critics since its publication as it was assumed that the novel was written by a man. Later on, the eventual discovery that its author was Mary Shelley arose some consternation as blasphemous ideas

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could not have been written by a woman. However, when there was a canonical shift about the concept of the marginalized literature, the novel again received new interpretations, criticisms, and appreciation.

Shelley in the introduction to *Frankenstein* in 1813 says, “And now, once again, my hideous progeny go forth and prosper” (197). The phrase “go forth and prosper” might have been perfectly said as the novel has not only been reinterpreted and rewritten for the multiple stage productions, but also elicited wide-ranging interpretations that grew from small reach to large. R. Glynn Grylls identifies the novel as “a period piece, of no good date, . . . but not one of the living novels of the world” (320). Similarly, W. Harding also labels the novel as a second-rate work (45). In course of time, the novel then attracted readers with multifaceted visions that opened the diversity of interpretations which brought a paradigmatic shift in the reading of the novel. Robert D. Hume rightly says, “Because *Frankenstein* continues to be read as a horror story, serious critical discussion of it is rare. But it is both a skillfully constructed book and one of real psychological insight” (285). This shows that the novel has the power to intensify its horizon. Hume signifies that the novel is loaded with psychological themes. George Levine claims that the novel has become the vital metaphor for us where we have been being dominated by technology and science (3). It shows that the value of novel prospers in the scientific and technological context. Anne K. Mellor claims that the novel differentiates good science fiction from bad science (107). In this sense too, the novel has become a milestone in the study of science fiction. Devendra P. Varma adds, “*Frankenstein* carried horror into pseudo-scientific: a proof that Schauer- Romantik carefully sought their inspiration in a succession of unfamiliar themes capable of being given a ‘Gothic’ tone” (154). It shows how the novel blends the gothic traits with science.

The novel depicts the reality of romanticism. Harold Bloom indicates that “*Frankenstein* affords a unique introduction to the archetypal world of Romanticism” (613). The imaginative world the novel creates carries the reader beyond the level of the realistic world. The projection of the monster is not only limited to the Gothic imagination, rather it delineates the political dimensions of the monster’s metaphor. Barbara Claire Freeman claims “the etymology of ‘monster’ allows an elaboration of theory as a form of monstrosity and an exploration of sublimity as a form of, even a figure for, theory” (1999). The monster has been enlarged in the theory of monstrosity that enlarges meaning beyond the level of superficiality.

Shelley’s *Frankenstein* has been the subject to discussion as it has attracted critics to approach the text with multiple layers of interpretations. Because of these reasons, the “minor novel” appeared as the “interesting novel”. However, the theme of the Double has not been studied yet in the novel. In this sense, the present study proves to be justifiable. Thus, this present article answers the following research questions: a) What are the aspects of the double that rule the thematic dimension of *Frankenstein*? How does the novel reflect the motif of the double in its narrative structure?

Methodology

The article applies the paradigm of the qualitative approach to research. According to Creswell this approach explores the issues and enables us to understand the social and human problems (4). In this sense, the present article sheds light on the aspects of double as the darker side of the human's psyche and the concept of monstrosity. The idea and concept of the double have become the theoretical lens to view the novel from a new perspective. The story, characters, dialogues, and symbols in the book have become the primary source to explore the theme of the double. Related criticism and reviews have been considered as the secondary source to analyze the theme of the double in the novel.

The Concept of the Double (Doppelgänger)

The word "the double" is the translated form of the German word "doppelgänger". A double is the ghostly and psychic counterpart of a person. It can be named as the double goer, double walker, alter ego or another person with a similar name. The term finds its significance when the German Romantic writer Jean Paul (1763-1825) relates to this idea in his novel *Siebenkäs*. In this novel, two friends can exchange their identities and appearances. Since then, the double recurs as a motif in literary works. It even sometimes foretells the doom of the main character. Describing its multiple aspects, Baryon Tensor Posadas writes:

Subsumed under its name is a constellation of interlinked images—everything from look alikes, psychological projections, evil twins, alter egos, genetic clones, perfect disguises, disembodied souls and shadows, and others—all of which involve the idea of an interplay between identity and difference. These repeated recurrences of the figure have led to its being variously understood as an illustration of psychoanalytic concepts like narcissism or the uncanny, as modernist expressions of the fragmentation of the subject engendered by the historical experience of rapid modernization and cultural transformation, or as an embodiment of a fantastic or monstrous alterity. (1)

The doppelgänger, in this sense, incorporates the multiple shades of interpretations related to psychic projection. The above description leads to the idea that the term has broadening growth than the time of its first usage. It has multiple implications in the modern context. The concept of the double also includes the parts of fragmentation, alienation, transgression, modernization, cultural transformation, and overreaching that have become the motifs of modern literature.

The doppelgänger has relations with the psychological aspects. In E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann", Sigmund Freud refers to it as an emblem of his theory of "Uncanny" (unhomelike). "The uncanny describes the experience wherein something encountered is simultaneously hauntingly beautiful and terrifying, that is, at once familiar and alien" (Posadas 7). When the familiar thing turns out to be unfamiliar, it creates uncanny. It gives a strange experience that the words cannot relate, but just makes one feels awe. Freud writes, "uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction

between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality” (85). One is moved when one entangles with the uncanny effect.

This concept bears the psychic projection. The double remains complementary and antithetical to the person with whom it is projected. It also represents the dark side of a person. The double knows the darker side of a person. Freud elucidates the concept as he says, “the ‘double’ has its reflections in mirrors, with shadows guardians spirits, with the belief in the soul and fear of death For the ‘double’ was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego . . . and probably the ‘immortal’ soul was the first ‘double’ of the body. This invention of doubling as a prosecution against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams” (82). The significance of the double is to reveal the other side of one’s personality. The voice of Freud crystallizes that even the literature can be the expressions of the double. It exposes the darker side of one’s psyche. The effects of the double return back to disturb the present.

The Double in *Frankenstein*

The Double (doppelgänger) remains a recurring motif in most of the Gothic novels. Being a Gothic novel, *Frankenstein* also incorporates many shades of the theme of the double. The double from the very beginning dominates the novel. The created monster is identified as Victor Frankenstein, its creator. Then, the theme of double mirrors the monster as the inward deformity and ugliness of its creator. If the double is the double goer, double walker, cloning, alter ego, then, it is certain that Victor Frankenstein and the monster are two parts of the same being. This aspect needs a logical justification.

Frankenstein, the natural scientist, animates the parts of a dead body to create a beautiful being that can surpass the creation of nature or god. It is a cold and dreary night in November. His aspires to create a wonderful being because he wants to go beyond the level of nature’s creation. But, his dream shatters when the animated creature looks so ugly that he cannot bear it. He runs away from his laboratory. He wants to forget his hideous creation. He sleeps but awakens with a terrible fear. The effect of uncanny dominates him. Something in his imagination appears as the real thing. He is in confusion. His body shows the sign of fear because his “limb became convulse” (Shelley 39). This agitation is reminiscent of the sign that he shows at the time of creating the monster because “a convulsive motion agitated its limb” (Shelley 39). This is the first of multiple signals of the monster as Frankenstein’s the double because the monster creates the uncanny effect. Besides, it remains as the ghostly counterpart and genetic clones of Frankenstein, and even more than that it foreshadows the doom of the main character. These are the basic assumptions to claim that the monster is the double of Frankenstein.

As the story progresses, the monster becomes revengeful because his creator does not nurture it. The monster kills Frankenstein’s brother. As the story unfolds this reality, Victor Frankenstein refers: “I considered the being whom I had cost among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect the purpose of horror, such as the deed which he

had now done, early in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from his grave, and forced to destroy all that was too dear to me” (Shelley 57). Frankenstein identifies himself with the monster so that he can say “my own vampire” and “my own spirit”. Do not these references signify the monster as the double of Frankenstein? The monster, being the double of Frankenstein, represents and reflects the darker side of its creator’s psyche and forbidden desires. By creating the monster, the civilized being like Frankenstein releases the violent and inner monstrous self that is full of primitive desires. The savage monstrous self that lurks in the psyche of a civilized being reveals the repressed desires. This shows the divided self of Frankenstein that contains self-destructive passion.

Frankenstein’s judgment and the use of language repeatedly conjoin him with the monster as his double. The monster reveals “process of attraction and repulsion that is duplicitous: they reflect back, in the manner of mirror or doubles that they are, on the position that excludes them. Their flaws offer strange projections and magnifications” (Botting 13). After the execution of Justin, Frankenstein suggests the idea that the monster is his duplicate that provides attraction and repulsion. He states, “I wandered like an evil spirit for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description horrible, and more much more, . . . was yet behind” (Shelley 69). The emotion of Frankenstein that is loaded in these lines resembles the alienated and isolated situation that the monster exposes when is hated and spurned by his creator, “Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? . . . I remembered Adam’s supplication to his creator, but where has mine? He had abandoned me, and in the bitterness of my heart, I cursed him” (Shelley 105-6). The monster also does not want to separate from his creator. It wants to be a part of its creator. In this regard, both Frankenstein and the monster claim that they are correlated.

The monster, when rejected by society and his creator, becomes more violent and starts to kill the kith and kin of Frankenstein. In each murder, Frankenstein utters as “the fiend that lurked in my heart” (Shelley 72). He even claims that he has committed the murders that have been, in reality, done by the monster because he remarks he is “not indeed, but in effect was the true murderer” (Shelley 72). These are the clear indications that the monster is his mirror, alter ego, the other side, and the double goer. Frankenstein does not concern with his creation and flees from it because his aspirations shatter because of its deformity and ugliness. After that, their confrontations are very few although the monster pervasively present in his life. It is because they are the two parts of the same coin. The result becomes so coincidental that the monster proves to be his agent by killing those from whom Frankenstein wants to remain far while having to seek the secret of his life. So, from this side too, the Monster becomes the revelation of his regressive instincts, fear of women, family and friends. The gynophobia becomes powerful when the monster threatens Frankenstein while he destroys female counterpart for the monster. The monster challenges, “I shall be with you on your wedding night” (Shelley 140). This is a clear threat to Elizabeth, Frankenstein’s fiancée, whom the monster murders later on. What a sequence!

They both destroy each other's female companions. It shows that what Frankenstein does is repeated by the monster. It is because of the ties that the monster is the double of Frankenstein. In this point, the monster represents the externalization of Frankenstein's violent impulses about sex.

The Double in Narrative Structure

The focal point to reveal about the theme of the double in this novel is its typical narrative structure. This typical narrative structure is regarded as *mise en abyme*. It is the enfolding and enclosure of one story within another one. This embedding includes the layers of stories. This series of *mise en abyme* constitutes "the structural double and series of reflections" (Kestner 71). More embedding gives reflections. It is prominent in bringing about the theme of the double.

The structural embedding reveals the projection of the double in the novel. This inclusion of narratives reveals Frankenstein's longing and desire for others. Mary Shelley uses three narratives in this novel to expose how the theme of the double dominates the novel. The first narrative is the series of letters from Robert Walton, an Arctic explorer, to his sister Margaret who lives in England. This is the outer frame. Frankenstein meets Walton and they become friends. Then Frankenstein narrates his story about his family, his thirst for knowledge, his scientific invention as well as the mental anguish that he has faced after the murder of innocent people by the monster. The narrative of chapters one to nine covers this part. Then from chapters ten to sixteen, the monster tells his story to his creator, Frankenstein. Frankenstein relates this to Walton. This is the embedding of one story within another one. Then, from chapter seventeenth to twenty-four, then again Frankenstein holds the narrative. Finally, Walton concludes the story. This chain helps to understand the narratives: "Walton's narrative—Frankenstein's—narrative—monster's narrative—Walton's Narrative." These layers and sequence of narratives in the novel show how the three protagonists namely Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the monster are conjoined and related to each other. This is also another proof that shows their doubleness and otherness in the novel. One becomes the doppelganger of the other. This relationship helps to explore their unfulfilled desire, love, alienation, their passion for knowledge and egoism.

Frankenstein and his monster are not only related to each other, rather Walton too is another aspect of Frankenstein. Frankenstein's father rejects his son's interest in science and innovation, yet Frankenstein goes forward and fulfills his desire. Similarly, Walton also rebels against his father to go to the sea. Likewise, Walton crosses the limits of home and moves for the knowledge to seek the world of action and achievement like Frankenstein. Walton speaks the voice of Frankenstein when one hears his passion for knowledge. Walton says, "My life might have been passed in ease and luxury, but I preferred glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path. Oh! That some encouraging voice would answer in the affirmation, my courage and my resolution is firm; but my hope fluctuate, and my spirits are often depressed" (Shelley 23). These lines show Walton's ambition and passion.

He rejects the life of glory to quench his thirst for knowledge. The same thirst is exposed in the voice of Frankenstein that clarifies they both are doubles. Frankenstein says, “Wealth was an inferior object, but when glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death” (Shelley 23). The ambition and thirst of Victor and Walton resemble each other. They possess the desire to overreach human limitation. This is another fundamental aspect that reflects they are the doubles. That’s why, Mary Shelley embeds the narratives of Frankenstein in Victor’s letters in the concluding part of the novel. This shows that the novel is structurally motivated to project the theme of the double.

Conclusion

Frankenstein dominantly reveals the theme of the double. In the novel, the monster is the double of the protagonist Victor Frankenstein. Likewise, Walton and Frankenstein are also related to each other. Their desires, aspiration and thirst for knowledge conjoin them in the deep level of psychology. If the double is an alter ego, the monster represents the unfulfilled desire and aggressive instincts of Frankenstein. The monster reflects the darker side of Frankenstein’s psyche. The desires that Frankenstein cannot fulfill in the reality find their outlet through the monster. The monster in the novel mirrors the repressed psychic instincts of Frankenstein. It is the psychological counterpart of the protagonist. Frankenstein’s devastating will fuel the creation of the monster. The monster represents the externalization of the repressed instincts showing that terror and horror are not in the jungles and in alien things; rather it lurks in our psyche. Well-educated and rational men like Frankenstein also transgress and overreach the human limits with a desire by creating the creature that surpasses the natural cycle. But the attempts prove horrible and unbearable. The investigation of Frankenstein to create the monster usurps the natural function of both woman and nature. *Mise en abyme*, the embedding of story within the story also proves how integral and inseparable is the creature to Frankenstein and Frankenstein to Walton. Likewise, the monster becomes the representation of the forbidden desires and an expression of the darker side of Frankenstein’s psyche. Besides, it also acts out the evil nature of supposedly civilized humans and the society where they live. The civilized humans and the society change a noble savage to a monster. This monstrosity reveals that if we are heading towards doom, then the doom is that of our choosing. The concept of monstrosity and moral isolation can become another theoretical lens to explore the further aspects in the novel in the days to come.

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