

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter I is an introduction to introduce the general description of the research. This chapter consist of the research background, statement of problem, research objectives, research significances, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Research Background

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) has long been recognized as a foundational text in English literature, engaging with questions of creation, responsibility, and the boundaries of humanity. While early readings often emphasize Victor Frankenstein's transgressive ambition, contemporary literary studies increasingly shift attention toward the Creature as a constructed subject, shaped by social judgment, exclusion, and unequal relations of power.

In literary scholarship, *Frankenstein* has been widely examined through various critical perspectives, particularly in relation to Gothic conventions and Romantic concerns. According to Botting (1996), Gothic fiction often reflects cultural anxieties surrounding transgression, the unknown, and the limits of human knowledge. Similarly, Mellor (1989) argues that the novel critiques unchecked scientific ambition and its ethical consequences. These perspectives indicate that the text functions not only as a narrative of individual experience but also as a reflection of broader cultural and intellectual concerns.

From the moment of its creation, the Creature is denied recognition as a legitimate human subject. Victor's immediate reaction, horror and rejection, marks the beginning of the Creature's marginalization. Victor describes the being he has animated as a "catastrophe," refusing any ethical responsibility toward it (Shelley, 2018, p. 66). This rejection initiates the Creature's isolation and sets the narrative trajectory of its subsequent encounters with human society.

As the narrative progresses, the Creature demonstrates intellectual growth, emotional depth, and moral reflection. Living in isolation, it learns language, history, and human values by observing the De Lacey family. The Creature explicitly expresses its desire for social connection, stating that it was "benevolent

and good; misery made me a fiend” (Shelley, 2018, p. 127). This statement highlights the tension between the Creature’s internal consciousness and the external responses it receives from others.

Despite its capacity for empathy, the Creature is repeatedly subjected to violence and rejection by society. When attempting to interact with humans, it is judged primarily based on physical appearance rather than intention or character (Shelley, 2018, p. 175). These encounters illustrate how fear, visual perception, and social response shape the treatment of difference within the novel.

Several scholars have emphasized that the Creature’s experiences reflect broader issues of social exclusion and the construction of otherness. For instance, Baldick (1990) suggests that the Creature can be interpreted as a figure shaped by societal rejection rather than inherent monstrosity. In a similar vein, Smith (2022) highlights how Gothic narratives often depict marginalized figures whose identities are constructed through fear and exclusion. These perspectives support the view that the Creature’s identity is not fixed but is formed through social interaction and response.

In addition to literary analysis of character and narrative, theoretical perspectives from social and cultural studies offer useful frameworks for examining how individuals and identities are shaped within systems of knowledge and authority. Michel Foucault proposes that power operates through networks of knowledge, discourse, and institutional practices that classify and regulate individuals (Foucault, 1977, 1980). Rather than functioning solely through direct coercion, power circulates through norms, categories, and forms of expertise that influence how subjects are understood and governed. However, studies of *Frankenstein* have more frequently approached the novel through Romanticism, Gothic studies, psychoanalysis, or ethical philosophy, while Foucauldian analyses of power relations within the construction of the Creature remain relatively limited. This research therefore seeks to examine how the Creature’s position in the novel can be explored through the lens of power relations without presupposing interpretive conclusions.

Building on these observations, this research specifically addresses the limited attention given to the Creature's identity as a product of power relations and discursive practices conceptualized by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1977, 1980). While previous studies have explored themes of morality, scientific ambition, and Gothic aesthetics, the role of discourse and social mechanisms in shaping subjectivity remains underexplored. This indicates a gap in the literature, particularly in understanding how systems of knowledge and power contribute to the construction of identity within the narrative.

Similarly, unlike Victor, whose position and authority are socially recognized, the Creature is denied access to social acceptance, legal protection, and communal belonging. Its repeated demand for a companion reflects not merely a biological desire, but a deep longing for companionship and emotional connection. Victor's refusal reinforces the unequal relationship between creator and creation, leaving the Creature's needs unresolved (Shelley, 2018, p. 224).

Beyond its literary significance, *Frankenstein* remains highly relevant in contemporary literary studies because of its complex exploration of humanity, otherness, responsibility, and social rejection. Its enduring relevance lies in the way the novel raises important questions about how society defines normality, belonging, and moral responsibility toward those who are perceived as different. These enduring concerns continue to make *Frankenstein* a significant work for examining the social construction of identity and exclusion across different historical and cultural contexts.

Within these interpretations, the Creature's experiences of rejection, isolation, and emotional suffering deserve closer attention because they shape the development of the narrative. In *Frankenstein*, the Creature's suffering does not originate solely from the act of creation but from the social and discursive forces that define, observe, and reject it. This perspective highlights the importance of examining the Creature's experiences not merely as personal tragedy but as the product of broader social mechanisms.

In the novel, scientific authority plays a central role in shaping how life, responsibility, and legitimacy are understood. Victor's success in creating life

grants him a privileged position, while the Creature is denied moral recognition and social acceptance from the very beginning. This unequal relationship raises important questions about who has the authority to define humanity and responsibility within the narrative.

The Creature's physical appearance also plays a significant role in shaping how others respond to it. Despite its emotional sensitivity and moral awareness, its outward form consistently provokes fear and violence from those it encounters. As a result, the Creature is judged primarily based on appearance rather than intention or behavior, reinforcing its exclusion from human society. Importantly, although the novel was written in the early nineteenth century, it portrays social mechanisms that regulate belonging, authority, and exclusion. The Creature's experience reflects how individuals can be marginalized not only through personal cruelty, but also through socially accepted norms and judgments that determine who is considered legitimate or fully human. This observations highlights the need to further examine how social interaction and scientific discourse function as mechanisms that shape the Creature's subjectivity. By applying a Foucauldian framework, this research seeks to analyze how power operates through language, social norms, and institutional authority in defining what is considered "normal" and "other." Such an approach contributes to a deeper understanding of how identity is constructed through processes of exclusion and regulation within literary texts.

The Creature's lack of a proper name further reflects its ambiguous position within human society. Throughout the novel, it is referred to only as "the creature," "the monster," or "the being," which reinforces its social invisibility and marginal status. This absence of naming limits its ability to claim identity and recognition as a member of the human community. Despite its ability to speak, reason, and express emotions, the Creature continues to be treated as fundamentally different and unacceptable.

These narrative elements highlight a central problem in the novel: the tension between the Creature's human-like consciousness and the persistent rejection it faces from society. The gap between what the Creature is capable of

becoming and how it is treated raises important questions about responsibility, social judgment, and the formation of identity. This unresolved tension provides a strong basis for further critical investigation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background explained above, this research is formulated to address the following problems:

1. How is the Creature's identity constructed through the social interactions in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*?
2. How do the scientific discourse and social exclusion function as mechanisms of power that shape the Creature's subjectivity in the novel?

These questions are designed to investigate not merely the psychological condition of the Creature, but the social and discursive processes that position it as "monstrous." By focusing on power relations embedded in scientific authority and social norms, this study seeks to reveal how monstrosity is produced through discourse rather than originating from inherent moral corruption.

1.3 Research Objective

Based on the formulation of the problems above, this study aims to:

1. Explore how the Creature's identity is constructed through the social interactions in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.
2. Analyze how the scientific discourse and social exclusion operate as mechanisms of power that shape the Creature's subjectivity in the novel.

1.4 Research Significances

This research has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this research contributes to literary studies by applying Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge to the analysis of character construction in Gothic fiction. It extends Foucauldian discourse analysis into the study of nineteenth-century literary texts, showing how literary narratives participate in broader systems of social regulation, normalization, and exclusion. This study also strengthens interdisciplinary approaches between literary criticism and social theory,

particularly in understanding how fictional narratives reflect historical mechanisms of power.

Practically, this research provides students and scholars of literature with an alternative reading of *Frankenstein* that moves beyond moral or psychological interpretations of the Creature. By emphasizing social and institutional forces, this study encourages readers to reflect on contemporary issues of marginalization, surveillance, and social exclusion. It may also serve as a reference for future research that applies critical theory to classic literary works, especially in examining how narratives shape perceptions of normality and otherness.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid potential misunderstandings, this section presents definitions of the key terms used in this research, namely:

1. The Creature

The Creature refers to the being created by Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein*. Although often labeled as a “monster,” the Creature demonstrates intellectual, emotional, and moral capacities throughout the narrative. As noted by Mellor (1989), the Creature can be understood as a constructed subject whose identity is shaped through social rejection and human response rather than inherent monstrosity.

2. Power Relations

Power relations refer to the dynamic and relational ways in which power operates between individuals and within social structures. Rather than being possessed by a single authority, power circulates through interactions, institutions, and systems of knowledge. According to Michel Foucault (1980), power is exercised through networks that shape behavior, define norms, and regulate individuals within society.

3. The Gaze

The gaze refers to a form of observation through which individuals are seen, judged, and controlled within a system of power. In Foucauldian theory, the gaze is closely associated with surveillance and the internalization of social norms. Michel Foucault (1977) explains that the

gaze functions as a mechanism of discipline, influencing how subjects perceive themselves and behave under constant observation.

4. Discourse

Discourse refers to systems of language, knowledge, and practices that shape how reality is understood and communicated. It determines what can be said, who can speak, and how subjects are categorized within a society. According to Michel Foucault (1980), discourse operates as a form of power that produces knowledge and constructs subjectivity.

5. Subject Formation

Subject Formation refers to the process through which individuals are formed as subjects within systems of power, discourse, and social interaction. It emphasizes that identity is not inherent but produced through external forces such as language, norms, and institutional practices. As argued by Michel Foucault (1977), individuals become subjects through processes of classification, regulation, and normalization.

