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## **Speciesism in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein***

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## **Abstract**

This essay analyses how Mary Shelley challenges speciesist thinking popular at the time of the publication of *Frankenstein* (1818). Speciesism is a discriminatory belief that favours the human species over any species other than human, and that is manifested in how we perceive and treat nonhuman beings. Much literary criticism has touched upon Frankenstein's monster's otherness, mainly in relation to racism. However, this essay argues that the monster's otherness is linked to his nonhuman appearance and is therefore subjected to speciesism by being perceived and treated as a nonhuman animal. The essay also discusses Victor Frankenstein as the epitome of the Enlightenment scientist who engages in speciesist thinking and practises, the novel's criticism of speciesist practices such as vivisection, and the novel's promotion of vegetarianism. Shelley questions speciesism by blurring the species boundaries that separate human beings from nonhuman beings, which is why the human-animal binary will be an underlying theme throughout the essay.

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## Introduction

Powerful classes have often rationalized their exploitation of weaker beings by minimizing the latter's capacities for suffering or denying them entirely.

(Ryder 8)

Mary Shelley's classic Gothic novel *Frankenstein: or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is a novel that, at first glance, seems to focus on humanity. Accordingly, much literary criticism on the novel treats humanity as a major theme with sub-topics such as gender, class, revolution, intellect, race, colonialism, to mention a few. Frankenstein's monster tends to be discussed within the thematic frame of humanity because he problematizes what it means to be human. Martin Willis writes that "recent critics ... accept a priori the humanity of the creature (at least as far as his anatomy and consciousness are concerned)" (25). Few critics, however, seem to consider the more controversial subject of the monster as a nonhuman being as a major theme in *Frankenstein*. Thus, I would argue that the treatment and representation of nonhuman animals<sup>1</sup> have an important role in Shelley's novel, which is often overlooked.

Speciesism takes form in how we perceive nonhuman animals, and in how our actions affect, directly or indirectly, nonhuman animals. It is rooted in the belief that nonhuman animals are morally inferior to humans, and therefore exploitable. As a result, nonhuman animals might be seen as property, food, clothes, subjects for scientific research, and amusement. Speciesism is a form of oppression because nonhuman animals are exploited for human purposes, meaning that humankind takes advantage of weaker beings, and also because nonhuman animals do not have the power to liberate themselves from exploitation in the sense that they cannot voice their pain and suffering.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published at a time when Western ideology emphasised human superiority and dominance. The rise of scientific thinking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, referred to as the Enlightenment, stimulated the notion of human superiority over other species. The Enlightenment was an

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<sup>1</sup> The terms human animal and nonhuman animal will be used throughout the essay instead of the terms human and animal in order to avoid speciesist language since humans, per definition, are animals as well.

<sup>2</sup> Veganism means the exclusion of any nonhuman animal protein besides meat such as milk and eggs,

anthropocentric era that focused on the human as the most important being in the universe. As a result, nonhuman beings were perceived as inferior, and thus exploitable. The ideology of human superiority, known as anthropocentrism, not only placed humanity at the centre of the universe, but also above nature and all nonhuman species (Krebber 322; Bell 163). Tony Milligan defines anthropocentrism as “prejudicially favouring humans over anything whatsoever” (225), which points to speciesism as a derived form of anthropocentrism. When the human species is prejudicially favoured over nonhuman animals specifically, it is classified as speciesism.

The concept of the “other” is a social process of making a group inferior, inconsequential, or even monstrous, especially concerning racism and sexism. (Allen 2). Many twentieth- and twenty-first century critics have observed the monster’s otherness in Shelley’s novel in relation to racism. Graham Allen remarks that the process of othering also “involve[s] aspects of life and the world which are psychical, social ... [and] class-based” (2). What Allen overlooks in the process of othering is the aspect of species. Frankenstein’s monster is not human, but a new constructed species, although many readings point to his otherness in relation to strictly human attitudes. To other a group based on ethnicity or sex is equivalent to othering a group based on species, which means that the theme of otherness in *Frankenstein* can be analysed in the term of speciesism as an extended form of racism and sexism. Allen goes on to say that “[t]hose in positions of power ... attempt to other those aspects of society and human life which threaten the dominant social order” (2-3). In the matter of speciesism in *Frankenstein*, then, Victor Frankenstein strives to maintain his power over all nonhuman species, principally the monster, in order to exploit the other species for the benefit of humankind, including himself.

The human-animal binary is an important factor in connection to speciesism because we define nonhuman animals in such a way as to emphasise that they are separate from humankind, and thus also to prove that humankind is superior to nonhuman animals. Hence the binary opposition of human and nonhuman serves to distance the human from the animal sphere in order to stress that “the human is somehow outside the realm of animal creation, [which] allows humans to feel distanced from, and thus superior to, nonhuman animal beings” (Petsche 104). With this in mind, the human-animal binary, and the resulting question of what it means to be human in connection to Victor Frankenstein and the monster, is a recurring subtext in this essay.

On the one hand the human-animal binary portrays Victor's sense of superiority and disgust in relation to the monster. On the other hand, it displays the blurred boundaries of what supposedly defines human beings and nonhuman beings because of the monster's humanness and Victor Frankenstein's inhumaneness. This is especially relevant in the chapters on vivisection and vegetarianism because they highlight the blurred boundaries between humans and nonhumans, deconstructing the borders between *us* and *them*.

This essay argues that Shelley's novel consciously challenges speciesist thinking popular at the time of the publication of *Frankenstein*. I will start with a background chapter, which will discuss the theory of speciesism, and the related concepts of human animal and nonhuman animal. The chapter will provide a historical discussion on anthropocentrism as an early form of speciesism in order to display the correlation between the two ideologies. Furthermore, the chapter will discuss the anthropocentric ideology's focus on a clear division between society and nature, and the corresponding associations between society and human animals, and nature and nonhuman animals. This section will also include a discussion of the relationship between human animals and nonhuman animals, vivisection, and vegetarianism, all of which will be treated in their historical context to demonstrate speciesist thinking.

In order to show how the text consciously challenges speciesist beliefs, I will then analyse how Victor Frankenstein functions as a representative figure of Enlightenment thinking. In contrast, I will analyse how Frankenstein's monster is perceived and treated as a nonhuman animal because he does not correspond to the image of a human being, and thus transgresses the boundaries of what it means to be human. Furthermore, I will investigate the society-nature divide in relation to the human-animal binary, and how these binary oppositions are linked to the monster's treatment. Finally, I will discuss how the text criticises the practise of vivisection, and promotes vegetarianism.

## Human Superiority and the Other Animal

Speciesism is a relatively recent term, coined in 1970 by psychologist Richard Ryder (Milligan 223), one and a half centuries after the publication of *Frankenstein*. Ryder did not define the term explicitly, however, but explained it as morally differentiating between humans and nonhuman animals (Dunayer 1). In Ryder's view, all sentient beings have moral status because they have interests, such as the interest to avoid suffering, which can be wronged. To morally differentiate between humans and nonhumans, then, implies that nonhuman interests are considered inferior to human interests, or even nonexistent. Accordingly, speciesism is very much connected to other discriminatory beliefs such as, for example, racism and sexism. Racism and sexism can be explained as discriminating against a group of people based on race or sex respectively. This discrimination is based on prejudiced beliefs that one group is superior to another because of specific characteristics and abilities associated with the 'inferior' group. However, regardless of race and sex, the group discriminated against, and the group inflicting the discrimination, are all part of the same species, the human species. Dunayer writes, "[l]ike other bigotries, speciesism is a failure to empathize with those outside one's group" (10). Speciesism, then, is a failure to empathise with those of another species than one's own.

Five years after Ryder first used the word speciesism in a pamphlet, philosopher Peter Singer defined the term in his book *Animal Liberation* as "a prejudice or attitude of bias towards the interest of members of one's own species and against those members of other species" (Singer 6). Speciesism is species-neutral, according to Singer, suggesting that speciesism may occur among all species. This means that a species other than human may for example perceive another nonhuman species as inferior. However, as Tony Milligan points out, humans, among all animals, almost exclusively engage in speciesist thinking (223-4). Because Singer's definition of speciesism is somewhat ambiguous, it has been elaborated on over the years. For example, animal rights movements today often use a more aggressive slogan, instead of the above-mentioned definitions, that is more specific in order to oppose speciesism. The statement "animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any way" that can be read on PETA's (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) website explicitly articulates the message behind Singer's definition.

The modern concept of speciesism is a derived form of anthropocentrism, a term which needs clarification. Anthropocentrism is a:

philosophical viewpoint arguing that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world. This is a basic belief embedded in many Western religions and philosophies. Anthropocentrism regards humans as separate from and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value while other entities (including [nonhuman] animals, plants, mineral resources, and so on) are resources that may justifiably be exploited for the benefit of humankind. (“Anthropocentrism”)

As mentioned above, anthropocentrism is a broad concept that endorses human superiority. In contrast to speciesism, anthropocentrism is not as specific. The latter does not necessarily differentiate between nonhuman animals and plants because both are, in the anthropocentric ideology, part of nature, and thus inferior to humankind. Speciesism, then, is more specific because it advocates one species’ superiority over another species exclusively. In his introduction to *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments*, Rob Boddice states that “[a]nthropocentrism is expressed [inter alia] as a charge of human chauvinism” (1). What is more, Richie Nimmo claims that the most basic anthropocentric view on the differences between human animals and nonhuman animals is that humans are considered subjects, and nonhumans objects (60-61). With this in mind, anthropocentrism and speciesism are interrelated in the sense that both ideologies are based on the belief that humans are the most important beings in the universe, and thus superior to any living organism, including nonhuman animals.

Speciesist thinking draws on a conceptual distinction between human animals and nonhuman animals, a distinction that is amplified through the use of language. According to Joan Dunayer, “[u]sage [of language] that excludes humans from animalkind maintains a moral divide between humans and other animals” (“Preface on Language” xi-xii). Because the term ‘animal’ refers to all animals, human and nonhuman, it would be imprecise to speak of ‘humans’ and ‘animals’; for clarification, it is therefore preferable to use the terms ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans,’ with the subtext that both humans and nonhumans are animals (Dunayer “Preface on Language” xi-xiii). In addition, Martha Bellows points to the fact that the differentiation between the terms human and animal has been part of a continuous discourse among philosophers

throughout time so as to clearly separate the human from the nonhuman (3). These concepts, however, need further elaboration.

There are several theories concerning the distinction between human animals and nonhuman animals. Ryder claims that nonhuman animals are those “sentient creatures who are not of the human species” (2). This statement provides a vague idea of what is implied when referring to nonhuman animals, but what needs to be explained is what makes a being human or nonhuman. According to Milligan, “the catalogued requirements for being biologically human may reduce to at most two entries: firstly, our parents must also have been human; and secondly, we must have a high level of bodily resemblance to other humans” (233). If these requirements proposed by Milligan can be used to categorise the human species, they can also be used in order to catalogue nonhuman animals. This suggestion would imply that the nonhuman animal’s parents must be of the same nonhuman species, and that the nonhuman animal bodily resembles that same species. Milligan’s statement becomes problematic when the species in question is new and constructed as opposed to a species that is part of the evolutionary chain. Because Frankenstein’s monster is of a species that is new and constructed, he does not have biological parents, and does not bear a bodily resemblance to any other species.

Historically, the distinction between humans and nonhumans was defined in terms of reason, language, and the belief in an immortal soul. René Descartes advocated the above-mentioned distinction (DeGrazia 4). According to Gary Steiner, Descartes believed that nonhuman animals were analogous to machines because they supposedly lacked reason, language, and immortal souls (132). Nevertheless, Descartes did not exclude the human body from his theory. He believed that both humans and nonhumans were machines with the exception that humans had immortal souls which made them sentient and rational, separating them from nonhuman animals. Descartes claimed that the human body is different from animal machines because humankind’s “soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently ... it is not bound to die with” (qtd. in Steiner 138). Descartes did not ignore the similar bodily functions between humans and nonhumans. However, because nonhumans were supposedly soulless he compared them to clockwork mechanisms that did not feel pain or enjoyment; nonhuman animals’ actions and reactions were due “to the disposition of their organs. In the same way a clock, consisting of wheels and springs, can count the

hours and measure time” (qtd. in Steiner 139). Descartes indicated that the nonhuman reactions to pain were merely mechanical, and had nothing to do with sentience.

In relation to this, Singer points out that reason and language have continued to serve as distinguishing factors between humans and nonhumans when the focus should be on the interests of nonhuman animals (7-8). Singer explains ‘interests’ as something innate in all beings whether human or nonhuman. As an illustration, he compares the ‘interests’ of a mouse and a stone; it is in the interest of a mouse not to be kicked because this would entail suffering for the mouse; however, a stone does not have interests, and to kick a stone would not entail any pain for the stone (8). Singer states that “[t]he capacity for suffering and enjoyment is ... sufficient for us to say that a being has interests—at an absolute minimum, an interest in not being kicked ... because it will suffer if it is” (8). In other words, it is in the interest of all sentient beings to avoid suffering. Therefore, discourses of speciesism should not be concerned with whether nonhuman animals possess reason or language, but whether they can suffer or experience happiness.

As mentioned, Frankenstein’s monster is of a new and undefined species that is different from the human one. According to Bellows, there is no term to define Frankenstein’s monster, because he is a combination of machine, animal, and human (24). Thus Bellows classifies Frankenstein’s monster as a “machine-like creation” (12) who has the same inferior moral status as nonhuman animals, but who does not belong to any known species. David DeGrazia argues that the discourses of the moral status of nonhuman animals in relation to evolution are irrelevant (24). To illustrate, he proposes a hypothetical future scenario in which “extraterrestrial beings who are more intelligent, sensitive, and cultured than [humans]” (24-5) were to be encountered. To disregard their interests or moral status on the basis of them not being part of the human species “would invite the charge of bigotry, not unlike racism and sexism” (25). To disregard the extraterrestrial beings’ interests and moral status would result in the same treatment as nonhuman animals are, and have been subjected to. Thus, the important aspect of speciesism is the focus on the treatment of nonhuman beings regardless of the species, defined or undefined. Put differently, what is important in the case of Frankenstein’s monster is not what species he belongs to, but rather that he does not belong to the human species.

In order to understand speciesism and its discourses it is necessary to discuss the concept within its historical context, under the term of anthropocentrism. The anthropocentric ideology of the Enlightenment in the latter part of the eighteenth century has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, and its hierarchical structure. According to Victoria Johnson, the hierarchical structure, or “the great chain of being ... placed divine beings at the top of a cosmic hierarchy, with humans placed beneath them, animals beneath humans, and lower still plants, parasites, and fungi at the very bottom” (206). During the Enlightenment, ideas were promoted “concerning God, reason, nature, and humanity” (“Enlightenment”). As can be seen, the hierarchical structure, the focus on deity, rationality, and the human condition imply an exclusion of nonhuman animals and their moral status. Because the Enlightenment focused on reason and the human condition, nonhuman animals were devalued since they supposedly lacked reason, were not of the preferred human species, and were associated with nature as opposed to rational beings.

The anthropocentric Enlightenment encouraged a pronounced divide between society and nature, and between humans and nonhumans. According to André Krebber, the Enlightenment era interpreted nature “as a mere mechanism,” and thus “[h]uman bonds with nature were rejected” (322). Krebber points to the rejection of any association with nature, in the sense that the common notion at the time switched from a close relationship with nature to a preference to identify within the frame of society instead, resulting in the rejection of nature in order to dominate and exploit it (324). Accordingly, that which was associated with nature, such as nonhuman animals, but also inanimate living organisms in nature, were seen as exploitable in order to serve human interests. Additionally, Boddice claims that anthropocentrism “is in tension with nature, the environment, and non-human animals” (1). The Enlightenment and its advocacy of anthropocentric ideology, then, can be said to have encouraged a certain divide between that which was associated with nature such as nonhuman animals, and that which was regarded as part of society, namely human animals.

In like manner, the divide between society and nature served as a boundary between civility and natural or ‘animal’ impulses. According to Ryder, “[s]ome viewed the whole process of civilization as a concealment of humankind’s animal impulses” (223). Ryder’s statement suggests that civilisation or society was associated with humankind, which is still the case today. Put differently, Enlightenment thinking sought

to “‘remove’ [humans] from nature and the ‘savage’ [nonhuman]” (Johnson and Murton 122). The creation of a pronounced divide between society and nature facilitated humankind’s separation from impulses that were regarded as wrong within the conventional frame of society. Suggestively, these impulses were associated with animalism and nature because they were natural and primitive. Ryder goes on to say that “although the naturalness of nonhuman animals was sometimes despised, any unnaturalness on [the part of humans] was regarded with even greater horror” (224). Also, he notes that an association between human and nonhuman was conceived as unnatural (224). Thus, a distinct divide between society and nature was favourable in order to explicitly separate humans from nonhumans and animality, but also to suppress natural and animalistic impulses. What is more, Sabrina Tonutti argues that “humans were seen as completed by culture, and it is this capacity that would emancipate them from the constraints of nature” (186). Tonutti points to culture, meaning tradition and the fine arts, as a defining marker between humans and nonhumans.

The established boundary between society and nature resulted in an equally defined boundary between humans and nonhumans, which decreased the moral status of nonhuman animals. Ryder confirms that “[t]he drawing of a firm line between humankind and [nonhuman animals] helped to satisfy many scruples” (228). He suggests that by differentiating between human animals and nonhuman animals, cruelty toward the latter becomes justifiable. This is because it would be morally inconvenient to identify with nonhuman animals, and as a possible result, sympathise with them. Nevertheless, humankind’s speciesism generated guilt, which was inconvenient, so in order to lessen the guilt it was argued that humans and nonhuman beings were completely disparate, and thus morality could not transcend the species borders (Ryder 225). As a result, most nonhuman animals were perceived as food, private property, or burdens that did not have any rights (Singer 202, 205; Ryder 226).

Given these points from the discussion above, nonhuman animals were practical targets in the practice of vivisection during the Enlightenment. Vivisection is a scientific practice that involves experimenting on live animals for the purpose of scientific research. The term ‘vivisection’ derives from the Latin words ‘vīvus’ meaning ‘living’ and ‘sectio’ meaning ‘cutting’ (“vivisection”), and the English compound ‘vivisection’ is traceable back to the eighteenth century (Maehle and Tröhler 14). Vivisection is defined as “the action or practice of performing dissection, or other painful experiment

[sic], upon living animals as a method of physiological or pathological study” (“vivisection”). Thus, any experiment involving surgical procedures, or the applying of chemicals, or any other action practiced on nonhuman animals for humankind’s benefit can be defined as vivisection. Accordingly, Ryder observes that scientists allege that vivisection on nonhuman animals is practiced for the benefit of humankind (9). It is important to mention that effective anaesthesia was not available until around 1850 (Maehle and Tröhler 15), almost half a decade after the publication of *Frankenstein*, which means that before this time nonhuman animals were fully conscious when subjected to the painful practice of vivisection.

Vivisection has its roots in ancient Greek and Rome, but it increased in popularity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries after Descartes published his influential work *Discours de la Méthode* (1637) and his concept of animal machines (Rupke 1; Maehle and Tröhler 15). Descartes advocated that scientists should not be concerned with the moral aspect of vivisection, because nonhuman animals were mere organic machines, and could thus not feel pain: “what would appear to be pain are [sic] nothing but purely mechanical responses on the part of creatures with no experiential or perceptual capabilities, and consequently no capacity whatsoever to feel pain” (Steiner 132-3, 139). By asserting the concept of animal machines, moral doubts about the cruelty of vivisection were, to some extent, satisfied. In fact, only a few experimentalists commented on the torture they inflicted on nonhuman animals (Maehle and Tröhler 24). It was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that moral doubts developed “into a major ... public controversy (Rupke 1), in other words decades after the publication of *Frankenstein*. Moreover, with the rise of scientific thinking that increased alongside with the practice of vivisection, many scientists in their pursuit for knowledge saw the practice of vivisection as a means to achieve career ambitions, and to be acknowledged as esteemed scientists in society, but more importantly as a means to control nature (Rupke 9; Ryder 229).

As mentioned above, nonhuman animals were seen as burdens, private property, and especially food. James Gregory remarks that moral concerns about the suffering of nonhuman animals, due to their cruel treatment in meat markets and by many butchers in relation to meat production, were expressed during the eighteenth century (88). Voiced anxieties were “stimulated by the growth of towns, agricultural developments, increasing dominance over wild [nonhuman] animals and urban isolation from animal

farming” (Gregory 88). Because urbanisation was rapidly increasing, people did not have the possibility to produce their own food in the crowded towns, and one main food source was meat. Thus animal farming increased in order to provide people with food, which can be seen as a precursor to today’s meat industry. Ryder observes that “[t]he exaggeration of the need of meat...has been a feature of Western cultures for several centuries” (9). Correspondingly, “vegetarians [in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries] sought to expand the human-centered moral circle that excluded animals from serious consideration” (Adams 152).

Vegetarianism can be defined as a diet which excludes meat, or more precisely the flesh of any nonhuman animal. Vegetarianism is also, according to Singer “a form of boycott” (162). Singer points out that the boycott is often rooted in moral concerns about the suffering of nonhuman animals, and the disapproval of “slaughtering [nonhuman] animals in order to satisfy the trivial desires of [our] palates” (162). Vegetarianism, then, implies a diet that does not consist of nonhuman beings, and which can be associated with a more peaceful way of life than diets including meat. The word vegetarianism is not derived from the word vegetables as in a plant-based diet, but from “the Latin *vegetus* meaning ‘full of life’” (Moran 16). Vegetarianism, and even more so veganism,<sup>2</sup> is “a way of living which avoids exploitation, whether it is of our fellow [humans], the [nonhuman] animal population, or the soil upon which we rely for our very existence” (Moran 19). Victoria Moran points to the idea of a “cosmic unity in which the ultimate ethic of compassion ... benefits all concerned” (45). Hence, Moran argues for a cosmic unity as opposed to the previous mentioned cosmic hierarchy, and that a meat-free diet is beneficial for all beings, whether human or nonhuman.

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<sup>2</sup> Veganism means the exclusion of any nonhuman animal protein besides meat such as milk and eggs, but also honey. Veganism also means the exclusion of any nonhuman animal ‘product’ such as leather, fur, down, feathers, and animal tested cosmetic and pharmaceutical products, etc.

## **Victor Frankenstein as a Representative Figure of Anthropocentric Ideology**

Victor Frankenstein is portrayed as a representative figure of the Enlightenment, and its anthropocentric ideology, a fact which many critics have remarked upon. Jackson Petsche, for example, writes that Victor Frankenstein is the epitome of the Enlightenment scientist (101), and Lisa Catron and Edgar Newman note that he is a figure of Enlightenment ideology chiefly because he resolutely applies himself to his science studies in his incessant pursuit for knowledge (205). In relation to this, the emphasis that Victor places on the importance of enlightenment can be observed throughout his narrative. To begin with, one can discern a certain despondency in relation to his lack of knowledge as he is introduced to the field of natural science at the university in Ingolstadt. This is expressed when he laments his childhood as a time of ignorance of scientific knowledge: “My father was not scientific, and I was left to struggle with a child’s blindness, added to a student’s thirst for knowledge” (Shelley 32). To Victor, lack of knowledge is equivalent to blindness, which, in retrospect, he construes as a form of hardship. It is indicated that his childhood ignorance amplifies his eagerness to acquire knowledge later in life.

In addition, Victor states that wealth is not important to him; he only seeks glory through knowledge and science, an attitude which properly reflects Enlightenment aspirations: “Wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” (32). Seemingly, Victor’s ambition derives from a desire to overcome death, which portrays a significant interest in human life. However, Lars Lunsford questions Victor’s genuine interest in human life: “Victor Frankenstein doesn’t value life in the absolute” (174) because he believes Victor’s real interest to be rooted in societal recognition. Lunsford states that Victor values reputation over life itself, and he continues to say that “[Victor] wants to join the new class of learned men that has replaced the landed gentry as the upper society in Europe” (174). Honour and reputation are important attributes to Victor; he seeks to continue the family characteristics of respect and integrity. More importantly, he desperately desires respect, integrity, reputation, and honour for himself, and also a position among the leading upper class of learned men in society.

Whether Victor's interests in life and immortality are genuine, or stem from the wish for societal acknowledgement, the importance of his research is seemingly centered around the human species: "It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn ... whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man" (29). Although Victor seeks to learn the unknown ways of the world, he indicates that the human species is separate from nature, and that nonhuman animals are part of nature, or the inner spirit of nature. He mentions the soul of humankind exclusively, either disregarding the fact that nonhuman animals also have souls, or implying that this fact is not worth mentioning, because of the importance and significance attributed to humankind. In connection to this, Martha Bellows writes, "Victor Frankenstein ... has all of the typical ideas about the rarity and dominance inherent in humans" (1). The ideas of rarity and dominance that Victor attributes to humankind can be linked to the fact that his research involves heaven as much as earth. Such a reading suggests that Victor might believe humankind to be as close to heaven as to earth. He might feel that he needs to understand heaven in order to understand the mysterious soul of humankind, indicating that humans are part of heaven, and thus godlike.

Correspondingly, Victor not only identifies with a deity, he decidedly proclaims himself as a God when he assumes the role as creator. More importantly, he seeks to become the creator of another species for all the wrong reasons: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (47). Victor does not seek the position as creator for the benefit of the new species, or of humankind for that matter; his objective is to be in control, and to have power over other beings, an aim which correlates with his ideas of dominance inherent in humans. Also, he strongly believes that the new species would consecrate him as creator. In other words, Victor seeks to be praised. As mentioned, he desires recognition, and by creating a new species that he believes will praise him as humankind praises God, he implies that he will be acknowledged automatically, and thus be idolised in society, and by the new species. Read in this way, Victor represents anthropocentric ideals of human significance, superiority, and aspirations, whether realistic or unrealistic.

Apart from the fact that Victor defines himself as creator, or God, he further portrays ideas of moral superiority which he recognises as a human trait. This is

illustrated when Victor's nephew William is murdered, two years after Frankenstein's monster comes to life. Victor draws conclusions about who the murderer might be by claiming that "[n]othing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child" (70). As the above indicates, human beings are not seen as capable of cruelty. Victor idealises the human species, disregarding human history and the human capability of violence. As he further contemplates William's murder, he asserts that he "was firmly convinced in [his] own mind that Justine, and indeed every human being, was guiltless of this murder" (73-4). Seemingly, Victor rejects the reality of inter-human murder. This, then, illustrates Victor's notion of the human species as flawless and peaceful, incapable of murder, which points to the fact that Victor idealises humankind. Victor's perception exemplifies anthropocentric conceptions about the human species as extremely good. The belief that humankind is flawless and extremely good is just as unrealistic as the notion that nonhuman animals are insentient machines.

As mentioned, Victor reflects a certain self-identification with God, an identification that he extends to others, which is observed in his description of the perfect human being as close to godlike. When he introduces his adopted sister Elizabeth Lavenza to his narrative, he portrays her as the most divine human being based on her features:

She appeared of a different stock. The four others were dark-eyed, hardy little vagrants; this child was thin, and very fair. Her hair was the brightest living gold, and despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features. (26)

Victor explains that when his mother visits the poor family Lavenza, Elizabeth is distinguished from her four siblings based on her divine looks. He describes her golden hair that forms a sort of halo around her head, and equates her to a celestial being. In this way, Victor implicitly informs the reader of what features he perceives to be the image of the perfect human being, which is in sharp contrast to the features he later attributes to the monster. Moreover, Victor, in the preceding passage, indicates that he is thinking in terms of species differentiation, and by rendering Elizabeth's appearance sublime he situates her as a heavenly being in relation to the cosmic hierarchical order.

According to Victor's perception of the anthropocentric hierarchical order of the world, nonhuman beings are positioned beneath humans, a perception that becomes palpable after the creation of the monster. Victor does not consider nonhuman animals significant beings, and refrains from any association with them, even when the function of the association is to emphasise human superiority: "Alas! why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders them more necessary beings" (95). Victor explicitly articulates his belief of human superiority over nonhumans, and his discontent at humankind's tendency to compare themselves to nonhumans in order to claim their superiority, meaning that humankind identify themselves in terms of their opposite, which is the 'brute.' Seemingly, Victor not only perceives nonhumans to be inferior to humankind, but entirely superfluous and worthless, and thus not comparable to the human species. Furthermore, Victor refers to nonhuman animals as 'brutes.' Based on definitions of 'brute,' Victor's word choice puts emphasis on his conception of nonhuman beings as beastly and senseless. He recognises that defining humans in terms of their opposition to the beast highlights their similarities. This is one important reason why he does not wish to be associated with nonhuman animals.

In like manner, Victor's insensitivity regarding nonhuman animals can be observed in the exclusion of nonhuman animals in his language, in connection with his research. As touched upon in the discussion above, he does not mention nonhuman beings because his study and project are for the benefit of humankind exclusively, which he accentuates continuously. Maureen Noelle McLane writes, "benevolence extends only to the limits of one's own species being" (983), meaning that Victor's alleged altruism solely concerns humankind, and does not extend to other species. In addition, Bellows confirms that Victor does not mention nonhuman animals "because he does not care about them" (7), and she goes on to say that "[h]is sole concern is confined to the human realm signifying the importance he gives to humans" (7). Bellows points to Victor's anthropocentric conceptualisation of humans as separate from nonhuman animals, and of the intrinsic superior value attributed to humankind. More importantly, she specifically states that Victor has no concern for nonhuman animals, which is an important aspect of Victor's indifference as scientist, or experimentalist in the practice of vivisection.

Victor believes that a perfect human being should be unemotional in the pursuit

of knowledge, because indifference prevents strong emotions that are inconvenient in the practice of vivisection: “A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity. I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule” (Shelley 49). Victor regards possible emotions that might surface in the pursuit of knowledge as a disturbance, or a hindrance, which should be repressed in order to succeed as a scientist. Catron and Newman argue that the scientific and rational Victor shares the Enlightenment ideology in the conceptualisation that passion or strong emotions must be controlled by reason (205). Moreover, Singer points out that the indifference that scientists in the field of vivisection display is not due to sadism, “but the institutionalized mentality of speciesism that makes it possible for these experimenters to do these things without serious consideration of the interests of the animals they are using” (42). Put differently, the indifference that Victor displays can be said to be a result of speciesist mentality of valuing humans over nonhumans in order to practice vivisection without moral concern.

Furthermore, Victor believes weakness or cowardice to be an obstacle in the quest for enlightenment because these traits become problematic when subjecting nonhuman animals to the pain of vivisection. Victor specifically states that cowardice is a despicable characteristic; he observes, “with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our enquiries” (44). Victor seems to imply that cowardice is a defective quality because it limits the furtherance of science, and that one must set aside any uncomfortable emotions that might be experienced in seeking scientific answers. The quality of weakness can be said to be analogous with kindness, or benevolence, in relation to the treatment of nonhuman animals. On this subject, Boddice writes that acts of kindness to nonhuman animals were interpreted as acts of compassion or leniency in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that cruelty to nonhuman animals was a display of power (83). In line with this, to show compassion for nonhuman animals, for example in the practice of vivisection, would in Victor’s opinion interfere with his quest for enlightenment, and power. This is because it would probably be emotionally difficult to perform painful experiments on nonhuman animals when, at the same time feeling compassion for them, which could then be perceived as a weakness.

Besides the fact that Victor is emotionally disconnected from nonhuman animals, he portrays himself as the true victim as well, which reflects his human self-centredness. Firstly, Victor makes a conscious choice of creating a being of a new species to enhance his own position and value in society, without considering the consequences this might entail for the monster. Secondly, he abandons the monster, leaving the latter to fend for himself in a world where humankind is praised, and all species other than human are devalued. Victor imposes a great deal of pain and suffering upon the monster, which he seems oblivious to. Instead of expressing sympathy for the misery he has caused the monster, Victor feels sorry for himself: “[T]he monster would depart forever. Or (so my fond fancy imaged) some accident might meanwhile occur to destroy him, and put an end to my slavery forever” (Shelley 156). In other words, he views his self-inflicted situation as a kind of slavery that can only be ended by the death of the monster. He displays an incapability to mentally put himself in the place of the monster, and can only understand his own hardship, which he believes is the result of the monster’s existence, and not the result of his own actions.

Another key point to Victor’s notion of humankind’s superior importance over the monster is demonstrated in the juxtaposition of their respective difficulties. Victor continues to perceive his self-inflicted problems as more important than the monster’s crucial predicament by referring to himself as “a miserable wretch, haunted by a curse that shut up every avenue to enjoyment” (158). He believes himself to be miserable because he cannot enjoy himself due to the second project of creating one more being of the same species as the monster. In contrast, the monster is truly miserable because he is fighting for his right to existence, to be accepted and treated respectfully, not because he is unable to enjoy himself. The anthropocentric ideology of human significance is reflected in Victor who fails to sympathise with the monster, and only sees the misery of his own situation. That is to say, Victor’s misery is self-inflicted, and based on lack of enjoyment as opposed to the oppression and cruel treatment inflicted on the monster. In connection to this, Catron and Newman write that the true monster is the enlightened Victor (203). This can be seen in the discussion above in the way that Victor diminishes the monster’s hardship, and laments his lack of enjoyment in contrast to the monster’s severe situation.

## Frankenstein's Monster – The Nonhuman Animal

The monster is first described to the reader when Victor has completed him. The monster's appearance does not seem to conform to Victor's original idea. Further, his appearance is in complete opposition to Elizabeth's, which is one important reason for Victor's sensations of disgust towards the monster already before the latter comes to life:

His limbs were in proportion ... His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (50)

The monster's features seemingly derive from an initial idea of creating a human being because of the apparent similarities to the basic aesthetics of humankind. However, because Victor aspires to create a new species based on human characteristics, and not a human being per se, the monster's looks are unfamiliar to Victor, and therefore jarring. McLane writes that "Victor's labors ultimately become not an experiment to create a human being but rather an experiment in speciation" (962), meaning that Victor engages in creating a new species. In his description of the monster, Victor juxtaposes the more appealing features to what can be said to be the unattractive ones, and it is this contrast that Victor regards as horrible. He laments, "I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God!" (50), a comment which depicts his disappointment in the visual outcome of his creation. Moreover, due to Victor's eagerness for success, and his megalomania in creating a being that exceeds human proportions, "that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionally large" (47), it is probable that he did not have enough time to fully complete the monster. This is indicated in the description of the monster's skin barely covering his body, probably due to his size, all of which augment the monster's difficulties to be accepted in human society.

The unanimated monster is depicted as a subject with an unattractive appearance; however, when he comes to life, Victor alters his opinion, and portrays him as an object with an infernal physiognomy: "Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance ... I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when

those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as Dante could not have conceived” (51). Victor regards the monster as human, or in other words as a subject when unfinished; nonetheless, when the monster comes to life, Victor refers to him as an object, as ‘it,’ and a ‘thing’. Seemingly, Victor excludes the monster from humankind. What is more, he categorises the monster as the antithesis of humankind. As discussed, Victor thinks of humans as divine, and identifies himself as a godlike creator to some extent. The fact that he refers to Dante’s imagination in order to describe the monster might allude to Dante’s “Inferno,” meaning hell. Read in this way, Victor implicitly portrays the monster as an infernal being, which positions the monster in direct opposition to the ‘divine’ human.

The significance of distinguishing the monster from the human species can be said to function as a means to stress Victor’s anthropocentric notions of humankind as unique. According to McLane, Victor immediately endeavours to establish the monster as separate from the human species (963), because the creature does not correspond to the image of a human being. McLane goes on to argue that the monster’s “heterogeneous and formerly dead body violates species boundaries” (967). Noticeably, the monster is created primarily from human parts. He is also created from nonhuman parts however, which is revealed when Victor mentions that “[t]he dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of [his] materials” (48). The reason why the monster violates, or put differently, transcends species boundaries, is because he is a melange of different species; that is to say, an assemblage of both human and nonhuman parts. In creating a being that transcends species boundaries, the text thus problematises anthropocentric and speciesist notions. To clarify, the text points to the issue of the monster’s nature being neither fully human, nor fully nonhuman, which blurs the species borders. In spite of the monster’s ambiguous nature, though he is perceived and treated as nonhuman.

Correspondingly, the following description of the monster supports the fact that Victor not only excludes him from humankind, but also perceives him as a nonhuman animal by portraying his appearance as animalistic: “I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs” (50). The dull yellow eye could be read as a reference to nonhuman animal eyes, especially in contrast to Victor’s description of the perfect human being, who in Victor’s point of view is Elizabeth. Her eyes are described as clear and blue as opposed to dull and

yellow. In connection with this, Jackson Petsche remarks, “Victor appears disgusted by the animality of his creation, and by the confrontation with that animality especially in the form of its gaze” (101). Human beings do not have yellow eyes, which is a key feature for many nonhuman animals that, according to Jana Beránková et al. belong to the category of predators (968). Victor’s aversion to the monster, with particular emphasis on the monster’s animalistic eyes, is probably based on an implicit association between his creation and predators, which makes him fear the monster. However, Victor might also be disgusted, or feel confronted by the monster, because the latter, associated with predators, threatens the position of the dominant predator, namely the human species, thus threatening the superiority of Victor.

With this in mind, the text emphasises both the nonhuman and the human gaze in order to depict the monster’s inferiority. As discussed, Victor associates the monster’s eyes with those of a nonhuman animal, and the monster’s gaze seems to further trouble him: “I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created ... and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me” (51). At this crucial moment, Victor and the monster look each other in the eyes for the first time. Gazing is a form of interaction, and more importantly a way of acknowledging one another. Seemingly, Victor rejects the monster’s gaze, or attempt at interaction, by accentuating that he does not think of the monster’s eyes as real eyes, probably because they do not resemble human eyes. Read in this way, Victor displays a disinclination to acknowledge the monster as human as a result of the monster’s animality. On the subject, Petsche offers another reading:

Victor’s terror at the sight of his monster exemplifies an anthropocentric anxiety at being looked at or addressed by the nonhuman. Victor knows that ‘dull yellow eye’ [sic] is looking at him and it frightens him, which is why it is so important that he attempts to render the eyes of his monster as somehow unreal by stating ‘if eyes they may be called’. Victor asserts his desire to retain his ‘human nature’ over and against the animality that is observing him. (102)

Petsche states that Frankenstein’s monster’s eyes frighten Victor because of their animality, which is why he does not acknowledge them as real eyes. More importantly, Petsche writes that the monster’s gaze threatens Victor’s human nature. However, the statement does not put forth an explicit explanation, and can therefore be read in two ways: One reading suggests that it is Victor’s superior position as a human being over

nonhuman animals that is threatened, while another reading points to the human-animal binary, meaning that Victor's human nature is threatened by the animalistic side of himself, or to borrow Boddice's term, his 'inner beast.'

In order to understand the repulsion that Victor demonstrates toward his creation, the human-animal binary needs to be elaborated further. Victor's immediate differentiation between himself and the monster not only indicates a desire to establish a pronounced species-boundary in order to alienate the monster from humankind as discussed, but also that Victor does not wish to be associated with animalism. The monster represents his primitive and natural impulses that he seeks to suppress because they are regarded as wrong according to Enlightenment ideology of the 'good' human being. Andrew Keese argues that Victor and the monster are one and the same person (2). Victor represents the human side of their same person, and the monster would then represent the animality of that person. This is one of the main reasons why the monster is never accepted in society. He represents the animality and primitivism associated with nonhuman animals; therefore, Victor rejects him as a form of suppression of instincts that are regarded as wrong, which results in the monster's complete exclusion from human society. In relation to this, Petsche states that "Victor's fear and repulsion is a reaction to the animal in the human and the human in the animal. In fact, the only way Victor can distance himself from the monster's humanity is to identify him as monstrous" (102). Petsche's statement points to the idea that the monster is alienated, and regarded as beastly because of Victor's anthropocentric notion of his own human nature as absolutely separate from the animal nature.

The disadvantageous aesthetics of Frankenstein's monster is the primary reason for his predicament, because his appearance is associated with animalistic malice and bestiality. The bestiality attributed to the monster becomes a problematic matter when he tries to communicate with his creator, and he is instantly perceived as a threat to Victor: "His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed downstairs" (Shelley 51). Firstly, what can be discerned as the monster's mouth, Victor refers to as 'jaws,' indicating that he views the monster as a threatening nonhuman animal. Secondly, the monster does not possess the knowledge of language at this point, and cannot communicate either his emotions, or his intentions. Seemingly, the monster reaches out to Victor for comfort in

a confusing situation when he comes to life, and not “to detain” him. In contrast, the old De Lacey does not perceive the monster to be either malicious or nonhuman, because he is blind; therefore, he cannot see the monster’s countenance. Thus, he treats the monster with benevolence. Nevertheless, De Lacey only treats the monster in this way because he understands the latter to be human: “[I]t will afford me true pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature” (134). This situation points to the intricate aspect of the importance of appearance, and the persecution as a consequence of not corresponding to the image of a human being.

Victor seeks for praise from the new species, and when the creature finally does reach out to him, he rejects his creation based on the monster’s animalistic features that he associates with malice: “[H]is countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness tendered it almost too horrible for human eyes” (97). Victor draws the conclusion that the monster is malicious based exclusively on aesthetics, since the monster is unable to communicate his kindness to him. Correspondingly, when the monster sees his reflection for the first time, he is overcome by sadness on account of his features, which is later described in his own words:

[H]ow was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity. (113)

The monster understands that he is aesthetically different from humans, and realises that he will never be accepted as a human, or more importantly treated with consideration. According to Nancy Fredricks, “society’s valorization of the beautiful is responsible for the monster’s abandonment and abusive treatment” (178). Fredrick’s observation supports the fact that the monster’s treatment as nonhuman animal, which will be discussed presently, is rooted in his unattractive features. Obviously, Victor, in the process of his creation, is oblivious to how such an appearance as the monster’s is to be received in human society, which subsequently results in a great deal of pain and suffering for the monster.

Apart from the confusing and painful event of Victor abandoning his creation, the monster's first experience of cruel treatment is depicted in connection with him approaching human society. He enters a cottage in a village with the hope of obtaining food to calm the pangs of hunger, but is instead received with hostility and violence. He is attacked and chased from the village in a brutal manner:

I had hardly placed my foot within the door before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country... Here then I retreated, and lay down happy to have found a shelter, however miserable, from the inclemency of the season, and still more from the barbarity of man. (Shelley 105)

The fact that the monster is maltreated when he enters human society, and then escapes into nature to find shelter indicates that the monster, in this scene, makes an early association between human society and pain. He learns that humankind is 'barbarous,' but he does not understand at this point that the maltreatment is rooted in his nonhuman appearance, much as nonhuman animals do not understand the circumstances of their suffering. However, if one species, such as humankind, continuously inflicts pain on another species, the latter species will eventually associate the former species with pain, and thus avoid the species in order to avoid pain. As an illustration, the monster concludes, "your fellow-creatures [humans] ... they spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge ... These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow beings" (98). The monster's conclusion indicates that although he does not fully comprehend the reason why he is maltreated, he understands that human society ought to be avoided in order to avoid pain.

The monster not only learns that humankind is the primary cause of his suffering, but also that they do not sympathise with him because he is not part of the same species. Therefore, the monster demands that Victor create a companion for him of the same species: "You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" (145). Because the monster is perceived as nonhuman, and treated as a nonhuman animal, humankind does not sympathise with him, which results in his painful solitude. McLane argues that the monster realises that sympathy does not transcend the species barriers, and that sympathy is only possible within the same species. She also observes that the monster

sympathises with humans, but that this feeling is not reciprocated (976). Such a reading reveals the human tendency to exclude nonhumans in their capability of sympathising. It also reveals the monster's humanity in that he can feel sympathy although others do not feel sympathy for him, which supports the text's deconstruction of the species borders.

Although speciesism mostly involves human superiority over nonhuman animals, the text highlights another possibility in which human sympathy is extended to some species, but not to others. This is presented as an inter-textual element in the monster's narrative, in which he refers to Aesop's ancient fable *The Ass and the Lap Dog*: "It was as the ass and the lap-dog; yet surely the gentle ass whose intentions were affectionate, although his manners were rude, deserved better treatment than blows and execration" (Shelley 114). In Aesop's fable, the ass, in his stable, observes how his master treats the dog on the farm. The dog follows the master and receives treats, is treated kindly, and jumps into the lap of the master to be stroked. The ass, who desires the same treatment, breaks free, and imitates the dog. When the ass tries to climb into the lap of the master, the servants on the farm run to the farmer's 'rescue,' and beat the ass with sticks and pitchforks. Frankenstein's monster refers to the moral of the fable; although he is perceived as monstrous, his intentions are benevolent, and therefore he should not be maltreated. In connection to the above-mentioned scene, the monster goes on to wonder, "[w]as man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle, and at another as all that can be conceived as noble and godlike" (118). The monster remarks upon humankind's biased attitudes, which he understands to correlate with his situation in the sense that humankind only selectively demonstrates sympathy and benevolence.

Besides the fact that Frankenstein's monster is mistreated, his very existence is devalued as well, because he is perceived as a nonhuman animal who would be killed with little moral concern due to his inferior position in relation to humans. As an example, Victor equates the monster's value with that of insects, positioned at the bottom of the cosmic hierarchical structure, or chain: "Begone, vile insect! or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust!" (97). Victor thus displays his superiority as human by exclaiming that he wishes to trample the monster, a statement which also mirrors his lack of sympathy for the monster. Victor, as a human being and the godlike

creator of the monster, feels that he has the right to kill the monster. This, then, reflects humankind's dominance over nonhumans, and humankind's sense of having the right to end nonhuman lives.

The text criticises the anthropocentric notion of humankind's right to kill other species, a critique that the monster articulates in connection with the fact that Victor does not employ the term 'murder' when he speaks of killing the monster: "You would not call it murder, if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame" (145). Murder is only valid as a term when the victim is a human being; the term does not transcend the species barrier. Nonhuman animals are killed for their flesh and skin, and exploited in research, eventually leading to death. However, human beings do not refer to the exploitation of nonhuman animals as murder so as to understate the brutality of killing. Sentience transcends all species borders, which is why the moralisation of the exploitation should be on the capacity to suffer, and not the capacity of rationality and language. According to Diana Reese, Shelley's fiction presents a being that can be defined as a "reasoning nonhuman" (56). This suggests that Frankenstein's monster's capability to reason functions as a means to criticise humankind's unjust logic of employing different terms for different species.

In like manner, laws of murder exclude nonhuman beings, in the sense that murder means the killing of a human being specifically, a fact which the monster deems frustrating. Victor blames the monster for the death of his nephew William, to which the monster tries to defend himself by referring to human laws. However, because he is perceived as nonhuman, human laws do not apply to him according to Victor; thus Victor rejects his pleas, which results in the fact that the monster reproaches human morals: "The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned ... You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy you own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man!" (Shelley 99). The monster reproaches Victor for moralising about murder, when the latter expresses a wish to murder the monster. In relation to the attitude on the morals of murdering a nonhuman being, Singer refers to what he terms the "sanctity of *human* life," which is a form of speciesism that he explains as "[t]he belief that human life, and only human life, is sacrosanct" (18). As can be seen, the text points to the anthropocentric ideology in the sense that it is morally justified to murder nonhuman animals because of their inferior status. This is problematic since the original

term that Singer refers to reads “sanctity of life” (17), which should then involve all kinds of life, whether human or nonhuman.

Another example of the text’s criticism of anthropocentric morals, in regards to murdering nonhuman beings unscrupulously, is demonstrated in the depiction of the monster as an object of hunting. In one scene, the monster, who has been residing in the woods near Ingolstadt for some time out of fear of humankind, saves a little girl from drowning. He leaves his hiding-place, and manages to bring her safely to the riverside. When he realises that she is not breathing, he tries to “restore animation” (Shelley 141). At this point, he is interrupted by a man who takes the little girl from the monster’s arms and runs away. The monster follows the man and the little girl in confusion of the situation, which results in that the man turns around and shoots the monster: “I hardly knew why; but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun, which he carried, at my body, and fired. I sank to the ground” (141). Based on the monster’s appearance, the man seemingly draws the conclusion that the monster attacked the girl, which makes him believe that the monster is chasing him and the little girl to attack them. Thus, the monster is shot, and left to suffer from his wounds, much like a nonhuman animal would be because of humankind’s conception of nonhumans as wild beasts that need to be killed, or controlled in order to protect humankind, and human society.

Supposedly, Shelley gives Frankenstein’s monster a voice to criticise anthropocentric notions, and human exploitation of nonhuman animals. McLane argues that language does not improve the monster’s situation in the sense that it does not secure him a position in human society, and that it does not automatically define him as a human being (959). To defend speciesism based on the fact that nonhumans lack rationality and language is faulty logic. Shelley gives the monster a voice through his capacity to learn and master the human language; nonetheless, he is still treated as a nonhuman. The text criticises Enlightenment speciesism in the sense that the treatment of nonhumans would not improve with the capacity to communicate through human language. This suggests that the perception of nonhuman animals as inferior and less sentient than humans would remain even if nonhumans were to display language proficiency. However, Shelley problematises the discourse of animal machines by gradually giving the monster a language. The monster serves as an example of the capability of suffering with or without the knowledge of language and rationality though. When he comes to life, he cannot form thoughts based on human language. As

a result, he cannot voice the pain and suffering inflicted on him. As the story unfolds, he learns and masters the French language, and is thus able to voice the brutality that he is subjected to on account of belonging to a species other than human. The text puts emphasis on the capacity of suffering, and not the capacity of rationality and language though, which reflects modern anti-speciesist discourse.

Frankenstein's monster's voice is not only used as a means to criticise anthropocentric ideology, but also to advocate a peaceful coexistence between different species. As an illustration, the monster wishes for a companion of the same species, and promises Victor that they shall leave human society for a place where "the sun will shine on [them] as on man" (147). The monster's statement endorses a cosmic unity, instead of a cosmic hierarchy. It is implied that there should be no inequality between the species because all species have the same right to existence since all species share the same place, namely earth. Nonetheless, the monster recognises that a peaceful coexistence between humans and nonhumans is problematic:

Let [humankind] live with me in the interchange of kindness; and, instead of injury I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. (145-6)

The monster thus expresses a desire to be treated benevolently, but realises that humankind, and especially human mentality, is an obstacle because of the anthropocentric conception of nonhuman animals. More importantly, the passage likens the exploitation of nonhuman animals to slavery. The monster states that he does not wish to be part of human society in which he would be perceived and treated as a slave. The text draws on the theory that human exploitation of nonhuman animals is a form of slavery, and that no nonhuman, or human, would assent their existence to slavery for the benefit of a 'superior' group of beings, which the monster resolutely concludes.

## Vivisector and Vivisected

The actual practice of vivisection is only discernable during a few pages in the beginning of the novel, in which Victor is intensely working on his creation, and is briefly revisited towards the end of the novel during his creation of the female monster. Vivisection might thus seem to be a minor element of the novel at first glance. However, it can be traced as an implicit theme throughout the novel. The actual practice of vivisection can be observed by analysing Victor's word choices, which refer to nonhuman animals and their body parts, but the practice is hardly articulated. In fact, there is only one occasion in the whole novel in which Victor assumes his role as vivisector, and accentuates that he "tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay" (47).

With this in mind, the text problematises the anthropocentric discourse of vivisection from a moral viewpoint. On the one hand, Victor refers to the nonhuman animal body parts as 'materials' and 'matter.' For example, he states that "[t]he dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of [his] materials" (48), and that he became "capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" (45). According to Bellows, Victor "uses terms that can be applied to both animals and machines throughout his experiment such as 'parts,' 'instruments,' and 'creation'" (11), suggesting that Victor is, in fact, thinking of the unfinished being as parts that he has to assemble like mechanical machinery. On the other hand, Victor admits to having "tortured" the nonhuman subjects, which implies that he acknowledges the fact that nonhuman beings are sentient beings, who can feel pain, or else it would be impossible to torture them. Read in this way, Victor portrays a conflict between Enlightenment advocacy of scientific progress, and the resulting moral concerns about the nonhuman beings subjugated to the painful practice of vivisection.

With regard to this moral conflict, it would be preferable for Victor as a scientist to adopt the notion that nonhuman animals are nothing more than machines in order to solve the conflict. Bellows notes that Victor refers to the animal parts as materials in order to distance himself from the "atrocities that he has committed" (8). Bellows' statement, then, draws on the idea that Victor recognises the cruelty of his practices, and in order to morally justify his practice he diminishes the nonhuman animal to insentient

objects. In connection to this, Bernard E. Rollin observes that “[f]or some philosophers, granting moral status to animals is highly problematic, which is why so many of them have been concerned to prove that animals are really automata” (90). Victor views nonhuman animals as machines so that moral concern will not interfere with his practice of vivisection, and more importantly his pursuit of enlightenment. Rollin goes on to say that “[m]orality presupposes that the objects of our moral concern have feelings” (89). Victor does not feel moral concern for the nonhuman subjects in his practice, because he apparently does not believe that these beings have feelings, and are capable of feeling pain.

Although Frankenstein’s monster is not subjected to vivisection in the sense of being cut apart, he is nonetheless a victim of vivisection in terms of pain and suffering. Accordingly, Jackson Petsche observes that “[u]nlike [Victor’s] earlier acts of vivisection, the creation of his monster is essentially an act of vivisection in reverse” (101). As opposed to being cut apart, the monster is subjected to Victor’s experimentation of putting body parts together to bring him to life. The fact that the monster is basically stitched together would naturally imply significant amounts of pain; however, he is not alive during this process, and it is impossible to know whether he is in physical pain when he comes to life because of Victor’s experimentation. According to Boddice, “[t]he category of pain is closely, intrinsically, linked to the category of suffering and therefore is not limited to physical pain, but includes mental and emotional anguish” (18). In regards to pain being both physical and psychological, the monster’s appearance is a result of Victor’s experimentation, which entails a great deal of psychological suffering. For instance, the monster suffers on a psychological level because he fears the brutality of humankind, and because of the sorrow he feels about his exclusion or otherness in relation to his appearance.

Furthermore, Victor violates the monster’s rights in the sense that the monster has not consented to the experimentation, nor has he agreed to existence under the cruel circumstances he is confronted with on account of his physicality. In the light of this, Ryder states, “to experiment upon an animal is to violate its rights and therefore it is wrong, regardless of any advantage to others” (239). Based on anti-speciesist discourses, Ryder points to the fact that pain and suffering are not the only reasons why vivisection is wrong. Vivisection is wrong because it is practiced on nonhuman animals that have not consented to being experimented upon, and thus the practice violates the

nonhuman animal's rights, just as it would in the case of experimentation upon human beings. In connection to this, Bellows observes that Victor is supporting one of the "major institutions of animal cruelty" (10), namely vivisection, which not only subjects nonhuman animals to great amounts of pain and suffering, but also violates their rights. Additionally, Petsche writes, "[t]he very creation of the monster illustrates how notions of the human are called into question by human treatment of nonhuman animals" (100). Such a reading points to the text's underlying criticism of humankind's unethical treatment of nonhumans and humankind's conceptions of nonhuman animals as insentient and machinelike, especially in connection to vivisection. As a result of human notions, nonhuman animals are deprived of any rights that would protect them from cruelty.

Another important aspect of vivisection can be seen chiefly in Victor's expressive emotions of disgust and guilt. For instance, he is repulsed by his visits to the dissecting-rooms and slaughterhouses. However, Petsche argues, "[a]ny guilt he might feel is at best connected with a notion that it is the correct 'human' thing to do to show compassion toward the lower animals" (100). In other words, Victor does not experience emotions of guilt based on sympathy for the nonhuman animals, but rather because indifference towards any cruelty would disparage his 'good human nature.' Petsche goes on to say that Victor "must deem his creation monstrous, just as the vivisector must deem the nonhuman animal to be an inferior being in order to continue conducting her or his experiments" (101). In order to protect his 'good human nature,' and to avoid the inconvenient feeling of guilt, Victor not only diminishes the monster's value, but also considers him atrocious so as to further rid himself of any feeling that might interfere with his work.

Nevertheless, the guilt that Victor tries to justify in different ways cannot be suppressed, and therefore surfaces as fear instead. On the one hand, Victor is, according to Petsche, probably afraid of "becoming a subject of vivisection" (102) himself, which points to the fact that Victor is highly aware of his proceedings being cruel and painful, and thus he is afraid of being subjected to the same treatment he inflicts on his vivisection subjects. On the other hand, Victor's fear is manifested in the idea that his vivisection subjects and especially the monster will take their revenge on him. According to Petsche, one of these revenge acts is illustrated in the murder of his nephew William (103). As a matter of fact, the monster goes on to kill Victor's good

friend Clerval, and his stepsister and future wife Elizabeth, which are all acts of revenge on Victor, so that he may experience the same painful solitude as the monster, and experience the same feeling of helplessness as the monster, and Victor's vivisection subjects.

## **The Vegetarian Monster: Problematizing Human Conceptions of Nonhuman Animals as Food**

As in the case of vivisection, the vegetarian theme is not obvious at first glance, but functions as an implicit means to emphasise the more apparent critique of anthropocentrism. That said, Frankenstein's monster is instinctively vegetarian, which highlights his function as the critical voice of anthropocentrism on behalf of nonhuman animals. The monster has not been brought up in human society where meat eating is advocated, and thus he instinctively chooses not to consume nonhuman animal flesh. In the light of this, Petsche writes that "[c]arnivorism, as a system, depends upon the speciesist recognition of the intellectual and emotional superiority of humans, and an ideology that rests upon the notion that it is natural to consume nonhuman animal flesh" (104), which underscores society's influence on its members. Because the monster is not accepted in human society, he is not influenced by its ideology. Therefore, he eats what is available to him in nature such as "berries ... hanging on the trees or lying on the ground" (Shelley 101), and also roots, nuts, and acorns (103-4). There is only one scene, in which the monster seemingly consumes meat:

I found some of the offals that the travellers had left had been roasted, and tasted much more savoury than the berries I gathered from the trees. I tried, therefore, to dress my food in the same manner, placing it on the live embers. I found that the berries were spoiled by this operation, and the nuts and roots much improved. (103)

As can be discerned, the monster consumes some of the offal that the travellers leave behind, but he does not consider meat to be 'his food,' which is emphasised in his way of differentiating between his food and their food (as in human food). Although the monster consumes meat on this one occasion he resolves to not make meat part of his

diet. To clarify, he abstains from meat even though he is suffering due to lack of nourishment: “Food, however, became scarce; and I often spent the whole day searching in vain for a few acorns to assuage the pangs of hunger” (104). Although the monster does not easily find edible foods in the forest, he does not once consider the possibility of hunting for meat, which points to his conception of the unnaturalness of killing another being to satisfy one’s own needs.

Nevertheless, there are other reasons for the monster’s rejection of meat, which Petsche has observed. One reason for the rejection is rooted in the fact that the monster is not human, in the sense that “he does not reject meat-eating as a human subject but as a hybrid being that is part animal, part human” (104). Petsche suggests that the monster’s vegetarianism is not solely a critic of speciesism, but that his diet challenges the human-animal binary (104-5). The statement implies that the monster’s hybridity blurs human-animal boundaries, which problematizes human justifications to consume meat. Another reading suggests that “Frankenstein’s monster rejects a diet based on exploitation because he himself is a product of such exploitation” (Petsche 106). The text can be said to criticize meat-based diets because of the exploitation and suffering of nonhuman beings that such a diet entails. In other words, the monster’s vegetarianism accentuates the exploitation of nonhuman beings that is concealed by the human system that promotes meat-based diets.

With this in mind, the monster can be said to be frightening because he is basically meat that is animated:

Frankenstein’s monster is a ‘monster’ because he is meat that was not consumed and brought back to life. What was intended for the human table comes to life and defies the social order. His vegetarianism only serves to reinforce the horror which his corporeal being presents to human society. Both his body and his diet invoke the ‘strange system of human society.’ (Petsche 107)

The monster is perceived as frightening because he creates an obvious link between the live nonhuman being and the meat product, which is an association that is troublesome and challenging to human beings. Because the monster is created from offal from the slaughterhouse, and is given a human frame, an association is made between the life and the meat product. This, then, points to society’s reasons for concealing the operations inside of slaughterhouses, which involve the transformations of live beings to dead products ready for consummation.

Victor does not reflect upon his visit to the slaughterhouse, and does not display any kind of sensitiveness to the scenes observed. Bellows suggests that the indifference Victor displays in relation to the visit to the slaughterhouse is a result of society's normalisation of these kinds of places (10). That being said, the text draws on the issue of society's normalisation in regards to meat eating in the sense that killing nonhumans for their flesh is so normalised that Victor does not even reflect on the misery and cruelty behind the product. Seemingly, he does not observe the slaughtering of the animals, but only focuses on finding 'materials,' or more specifically, offal, for his creation. Victor's indifference and perception of the body parts as 'materials' can be related to the disassociation between nonhuman animals, and their flesh as a finished product for human consumption. Bellows agrees with this by saying that "[t]here is a disconnect with what is done to what is produced" (11). For example, Victor tears apart the female being he has worked on, and notes that he needs to dispose of the remaining body and body parts so as to not upset the human population: "I ought not to leave the relics of my work to excite the horror and suspicion of the peasants" (175). This example is relatable to the concealed operations at slaughterhouses, where nonhuman animals are killed for their flesh behind closed doors in order to not subject the public to the systematic killing of sentient beings. Also, the quotation suggests that humankind is sensitive to horror, and therefore nonhuman animals should be slaughtered and disposed of behind closed doors, as in the case of meat production.

Finally, the monster's lack of identity, and his explicit critique of meat consumption make him the ultimate representative for nonhuman animals being exploited in the meat industry. The fact that the monster is nameless is an important aspect in the text's criticism of the meat industry. To not give a name to the monster is to deny him an identity, which makes it easier to regard him as an object. Correspondingly, nonhuman animals in the meat industry are not given any names, only a number, so as not to humanise the 'products,' which would probably result in moral concerns in connection with the slaughtering process, and thus challenge the meat industry. In connection to this, the monster concludes, "[m]y food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite" (147). The word choice 'glut' in the monster's statement indicates that the consumption of meat is not necessary, but a choice related to humankind's tastes and palates. Moreover, it is suggested that the consumption is not moderate, but rather excessive. The monster points out the

destructive behaviour of humankind that deprives other beings of their right to a peaceful existence on account of social constructs, such as names and diets.

## Conclusion

This essay has analysed how Shelley challenges speciesism popular at the time of the publication of *Frankenstein*. The analysis has shown how Victor Frankenstein's character demonstrates beliefs of humankind's superiority over other species, and humankind's right to exploit nonhuman animals for the benefit of humankind, especially in relation to vivisection on the one hand and vegetarianism on the other. This portrays Victor Frankenstein as the epitome of speciesist thinking, putting his own interests of becoming an esteemed scientist before the interests of the monster and of other unspecified nonhuman animals in the novel. The function of the monster has proven to problematise human conceptions of nonhuman animals as insentient objects and completely separate from the human species, an attitude which serves as a means to justify the exploitation of nonhuman animals. The monster's lack of identity and his scrutiny of humankind's perception and treatment of him as a nonhuman being, combined with his capability to communicate through language, problematise humankind's justification of their sense of superiority. The monster's attributed qualities of reason and language directly oppose Enlightenment conceptions of nonhuman animals as soulless machines, which Shelley's criticism of speciesism draws on. Moreover, the depiction of the monster's humanity and Victor's inhumaneness blurs the boundaries between the species, highlighting their similarities, and thus breaking down the conceptualised boundaries that segregate *us* from *them*.

The fact that *Frankenstein* was published in a time when human superiority over other species was taken for granted, one hundred and fifty years before the rise of anti-speciesist discourses and movements, shows how Shelley was ahead of her time. The monster's otherness can be analysed in terms of racism as well as speciesism because of their correlation; however, because Shelley portrays the monster as nonhuman and interweaves themes such as vegetarianism and vivisection in her novel in connection to

the social process of *othering*. In other words, *Frankenstein* functions as a means to criticise the way humankind perceives and treats nonhuman animals.

In conclusion, the anti-speciesist discourse in *Frankenstein* displays humankind's proneness to emphasise one group's value over another in order to substantiate the injustice exerted on those who are perceived to be weaker beings. The monster's ambiguous nature opens up for both racist and speciesist readings. To highlight the correlation between speciesism and racism, and the former concept as an extended form of the latter, facilitates our understanding of why exploitation based on species differentiation is just as wrong as favouring one group over another based on ethnicity. One reason why anti-speciesist discourses are not as widely accepted as anti-racist discourses is due to society's normalisation of nonhuman animals as food, products, property, and dispensable objects, much like society's normalisation of slavery in earlier times. Given these points, Shelley's novel is timeless in the sense that the subtext in *Frankenstein* is as relevant today as it was when it was first published in the early nineteenth century, if not more so because of the ever growing industrialisation of sentient beings.

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