

# Gothic Horror and Technology in *Frankenstein*

Wan-ling Huang

National Chung Cheng University

嘉義市民生南路 403 巷 40 弄 1 號

[annasui\\_1124@hotmail.com](mailto:annasui_1124@hotmail.com)

## Abstract

This article explores the ways in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley's intrigued thinking, combines the dead back to life and the process of producing a monster. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* defines Gothic Horror novel successfully in the Romantic period. This Gothic Horror novel also combines themes of Science Fiction. The theme of Gothic Horror describes many parallels to the Science Fiction that contains mystery and unrealism. There are lots of elements in Gothic Horror novel such as the darkness, "spooky castles, pathetic fallacy, ominous portents," the supernatural, mystery, and suspense. Moreover, Gothic novels "originates from gothic architecture" so *Frankenstein* is also represented the archetypes of modern horror writing. Besides, the birth of synthetic living thing will bring troubles, which related to the dangers of technology and science. Due to the birth of the monster, the protagonist, Victor, not only infringes the authority of God but also breaks the law of theology in the society.

**Keywords:** *Gothic Horror, archetype, synthetic living thing, technology, playing God*

*Frankenstein* is a novel about the process of producing a monster. In my opinion, the author, Mary Shelley, wrote this kind of horror novel because her life was surrounded with death frequently. Mary Shelley's mother "died just ten days after giving birth to her and her daughter died within two weeks of birth." Unfortunately, her husband drowned when he took a boat out to sea in a storm. Perhaps, because of these deaths, Mary Shelley wanted trying the absurd thing to make it possible. Because of tragic experience in her life, Mary Shelley became intrigued in bringing the dead back to life so she wrote this Gothic Horror novel, *Frankenstein*.

Since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, *Frankenstein* defines Gothic novel in the Romantic period. This Gothic Horror novel also "incorporates themes of Science Fiction." The theme of Gothic Horror describes many parallels to the Science Fiction that contains "mystery and unrealism." There are lots of elements in Gothic Horror novel such as the darkness, "spooky castles, pathetic fallacy, ominous portents," the supernatural, mystery, and suspense. There are examples in the chapter five of the novel. The opening paragraphs of chapter five in *Frankenstein* narrated that

It was on a dreary night of November that I [Victor] beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature [the monster] open; it breathed hard, and a

convulsive motion agitated its limbs. (58)

This scene draws a feeling of darkness and makes this description partially shadowed. The dull weather seems to emphasize the birth of monster. The scene also makes the reader thinking of the mystery. As Valdine Clemens points out that “the gothic tale is generally most effective when it is affective” (1). The story must make the reader in some way to be horror and the reader will be affected by the inward fear. While the scene is filled with overcast and dull atmosphere, the author will make the reader falling into the horror story successfully. Also, “the supernatural event, Victor’s creation, is one element the author utilizes to support the Gothic genre.”

Moreover, Gothic novels “originates from gothic architecture” so *Frankenstein* is also represented “the archetypes of modern horror writing.” The archetypes mean that a repeated “collective unconscious” in our mind. According to *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*,

Carl G. Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, in *Contributions to Analytical Psychology* (1928), postulates the existence of a “collective unconscious,” an inheritance in our brains consisting of “countless typical experiences [such as birth, escape from danger, and selection of a mate] of our ancestors.” Few people today believe in an inherited “collective unconscious,” but many people agree that certain repeated experiences, such as going to sleep and hours later awakening, or the perception of the setting and the rising sun, or of the annual death and rebirth of vegetation, manifest themselves in dreams, myths, and literature—in these instances, as stories of apparent death and rebirth. (115)

Therefore, what Carl Jung “called ‘myth-forming’ structural elements are ever present in the unconscious psyche; he refers to the manifestations of these elements as ‘motifs,’ ‘primordial images,’ or ‘archetypes’” (Guerin, 202). We can see that the “archetypes” in *Frankenstein* such as the gloomy castle, the dull weather, the darkness of human nature, and mystery. Also, the subtitle of *Frankenstein, The Modern Prometheus*, is the archetypal pattern because of the mythology in Greek that Prometheus stole fire from the gods and to create human beings. These archetypal patterns of Gothic novels are to evoke terror to the readers; on the other side the authors also claim to reveal the dark side of human nature.

The main character, Victor, is a scientist with wild enthusiasm and he devotes himself to researching in science. He endeavors to research the lifeless thing into living creation, and then the synthetic living thing comes into the world, which Victor regards as an ultimate and powerful being. But, the birth of synthetic living thing will bring troubles, which related to the dangers of technology and science. As Henk van den Belt points out, “In science and technology studies, entities that challenge the settled boundaries of nature and society are often designated as ‘monsters’. Like the creations of synthetic biology, Victor Frankenstein’s creature was a prime example of a ‘monster’ in this particular sense” (259). Therefore, we can discover that Victor creates not merely a living thing but also a truly monster. At first, the monster has a pure and virtuous character. He can be taught and educated in the society. As Shun-liang Chao asserts that

In the novel [*Frankenstein*], the mental growth of the monster is imbued with Lockean empiricism: his mind begins as a *tabula rasa* [a clean slate] to be written on by observation and sensory experience. In his

initial encounter with the world, the monster's sensory experience teaches him the function of fire, housing, and language, as well as the feeling of pain, pleasure, and "a mixture of pain and pleasure." (224)

The monster still can learn the behaviors and he can perceive these behaviors by the "sensory experience." Hence, the monster is like a normal human being absolutely. However, people can't accept the existence of a monster. Because of his frightful surface, people are not only afraid of him but also alienated from him. People push him aside everywhere so the monster suffers from the cruel marginalization in the society. He thinks that Victor abandons him and he feels isolated. Therefore, the monster wants to revenge to Victor, he kills several people such as Victor's younger brother and his father. Consequently, the monster's pureness and kindness turn into the brutality and ruthlessness.

Furthermore, the technology of playing God also exists in *Frankenstein*. As Mary Shelley wrote in the introduction of *Frankenstein*,

I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion [the absolute unnaturalness of the monster]. Frightful must it be, for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world [the hazardous consequences of misused knowledge]. (9)

Shelley's description summons the principal themes, such as "the utter absolute of the monster," the relationship between creator [Victor] and creature [Monster], and "the hazardous consequences of misused knowledge." Victor brings the horrible disaster into the society and he indulges himself in creating the "unhallowed arts" extremely. Dreadfully, Victor constructs of monster from the body parts that

His [The monster's] limbs were in proportion, and I [Victor] had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a 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 shriveled complexion and straight black lips. (58)

Victor bestows the lifeless substance a new life and he is proud of his wonderful creation, which is a supernatural being. In reality, Victor challenges to God's authority and he also wants to play God indeed. As Henk van den Belt declares that

In discussions on biotechnology and synthetic biology, alongside and in combination with allusions to the presumed arrogance of playing God, a name is very often invoked that many scientists consider a tainted 'F-word': Frankenstein. In fact, the Frankenstein theme is closely entwined with the motif of playing God. (260)

Due to creating the monster, Victor not only infringes the authority of God but also breaks the law of theology in the society. Moreover, the psychological symbol presents in the subtitle of *Frankenstein, The Modern Prometheus*. Victor's behavior is like Prometheus in Greek mythology. Prometheus stole fire from the gods and used it to create human beings. Henk van den Belt points out that "a Dutch literary critic concisely explains, 'The moral seems clear, and is more relevant than ever in the 21st century, which is dominated by the advancing genetic and bio-technologies: do not play God and beware of the dangers of technology'" (260). The dangers of technology" will bring lots of problems so we should face this issue squarely. We have to respect the God's authority and the life in the world.

The technology of creating the monster also breaks the law of nature in the world. Nature has its law about conservation of mass so nobody has the right to break the balance in the universe. Kim Hammond notes that

However, the most powerful, persuasive and influential arguments employed to mobilize support and sympathy in a whole range of environmental campaigns, especially anti-GM food campaigns, are romantically inspired, opposing modernity's nature-dominating progressive science and technology [The creature or monster in *Frankenstein*], highlighting the destructive impact of industrialization, and claiming that contemporary (ecological) problems are the result of tampering with or working against nature, and using unnatural rather than natural processes. (185)

Hammond's notion is certainly those arguments that "*Frankenstein* has come to symbolize." In my opinion, the monster is just a product to Victor and Victor is so selfish that he creates the monster to satisfy his achievement in science. Afterwards, Victor escapes the reality from abandoning the monster and he does not take the responsibility to the creature. At finally, Victor also wants to kill the monster to solve this serious problem. This kind treatment is really unfair to the monster. Moreover, the identity of female is also an important issue in the *Frankenstein*. The role of Elizabeth Lavenza balances the society. In my opinion, Elizabeth is represented the nature and she gives the power to protect the family. On the contrary, her husband, Victor, offends the balance of society and destroys his household. As Wilfred L. Guerin maintains that "In *Frankenstein* femininity embraces life and regeneration, whereas masculinity murders and turns suicidally upon itself. Victor is alienated from the domestic sphere in his masculine quest for scientific glory" (249). Victor only concerns himself and is alienated from all things in his family. Additionally, Victor has the sin, which he offends "the function of the female by giving birth to a child" (249) and he does not respect the authority of female.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* defines Gothic Horror novel successfully in the Romantic period. *Frankenstein* is infused with the elements of Gothic Horror and Mary Shelley constructs the horror feeling in the novel completely. In my opinion, *Frankenstein* also reflects "the impotence" of technology in the society. The incompetents of technology are synthetic living thing, playing God, and break the law of nature in the world. Perhaps Victor is the real monster in the society. As Thomas Vargish maintains that "He [Victor] plans to employ his new technology to create a race of dependents who will worship and praise him, usurping what was almost universally regarded as a divine prerogative" (329). Victor wants to play God and he looks down upon the holy divine. He devotes to his science work extremely so leads him become a mental aberration person. In fact, Victor

“views his scientific paternity as the legitimate gratification of vanity and the extension of his authority” (Vargish, 329). Because of his selfishness and self-conceit, he creates the synthetic living thing so brings about the tumultuous phenomenon in the society. Accordingly, Victor is punished for his transgression, such as the miserable end of Prometheus. Zeus punished Prometheus “by fixing him to a rock.” Also, there was a predatory bird came to devour his liver everyday. Similarly, Victor’s family is destroyed and his loved persons disappear that the monster kills them. He just discovers the seriousness of creation and acknowledges his fault. Victor regrets bringing the monster into the world and he decides to get away with the monster. Consequently, Mary Shelley constructs a successful Gothic Horror novel, *Frankenstein*. On the other hand, this novel also reflects “the impotence” of technology in the society.

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# 科學怪人裡的哥德式恐怖和技術

黃婉綾

中正大學

嘉義市民生南路403巷40弄1號

[annasui\\_1124@hotmail.com](mailto:annasui_1124@hotmail.com)

## 摘要

本文在探究 Mary Shelley 著作的*科學怪人*之其方法，如何讓已故者復活以及製造怪物的過程和所帶來的問題。*科學怪人*，這本小說成功地定義了在浪漫時期時的哥德式恐怖。哥德小說也結合了科學小說的主題，包含神秘的事物和不寫實性。在哥德小說裡有很多象徵元素，例如：黑暗、幽靈般的城堡、感情誤置、不祥的跡象、超自然、神秘、懸疑等等。這種小說是來自哥德式的原始架構，因此*科學怪人*也是現代恐怖小說的原型。然而，人造的生物將會導致紛亂，牽連於自然科學的技術而造成危險。另一方面，主角 Victor 不只侵犯上帝的權力，也破壞了社會宗教體系的法則。

**關鍵字：**哥德式恐怖、原型、人造物、技術、玩弄造物主