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**KOZII Olha** – Ph.D., Associated Professor, Donetsk State University of Internal Affairs, 1 Velyka Perspectyvna str., Kropyvnytskyi, 25000, Ukraine (olykaaaa@gmail.com)

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9478-9502>

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## THE PROBLEM OF CHOICE AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN M. SHELLEY'S NOVEL «FRANKENSTEIN»

**Summary.** *Scientific discoveries strengthen a person's faith in own strength and ability to create. Writers of different eras and in a different creative manner – from fantastic to satirical and revealing – addressed the human desire to change nature.*

*In this article, we will touch on the problem of creating a person in M. Shelley's Gothic novel "Frankenstein", which is an example of a Gothic horror novel, but is rather underestimated from the point of view of the philosophical issues of moral responsibility and the choice of a life path and position, as well as the problem of responsibility.*

*In the creative method of M. Shelley, we trace the synthesis between the romantic-gothic appeal to the nature of human fear and the ethical and philosophical postulates of the Enlightenment. The latter consist in raising the issue of human happiness. The monster created by the scientist has an extraordinary potential that cannot be realized due to the stereotyped thinking of human society.*

*The writer admires the scientific enthusiasm of the character, respects his desire to improve a human and the world, but emphasizes the untimeliness of such experiments. The author pays attention to the illegality of human intervention into natural processes, proving the power of nature and its ability to restore and revive after abuse, dripping the creator with the hands of his creation.*

*The main character on M. Shelley's novel became almost archetypal image of the personification of horror; however, according to the writer's idea, it is not the character which is horrifying and ugly, but the experiment that brought him to life.*

*In the process of analyzing the situations in which the main character finds himself, we found out that he is on the fringes of the universe, raising the question of the feasibility of his own birth. The study of these characteristic facts is the main goal of the study, as a result of which we come to a conclusion: the author emphasizes the illegality of human intervention in the laws of nature, which leads to a dramatic resolution.*

**Key words:** *gothic novel, ethic problems, responsibility, the nature of horror, the creator and his creature.*

**КОЗІЙ Ольга** – кандидат філологічних наук, доцент Донецького державного університету внутрішніх справ, вул. Велика Перспективна 1, Кропивницький, 25000, Україна (olykaaaa@gmail.com)

**ORCID:** 0000-0002-9478-9502

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.24919/2522-4565.2023.53.4>

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## ПРОБЛЕМА ВИБОРУ ТА МОРАЛЬНОЇ ВІДПОВІДАЛЬНОСТІ У РОМАНІ М. ШЕЛЛІ «ФРАНКЕНШТЕЙН»

**Анотація.** Наукові відкриття підсилюють віру людини у власні сили й здатність творити. Письменники різних епох та в різній творчій манері – від фантастичної до сатирично-викривальної – зверталися до бажання людини змінити природу.

У цій статті ми торкаємося проблеми створення людини у творі М. Шеллі «Франкенштейн», що є хрестоматійним зразком готичного роману жахів, проте доволі недооціненим у контексті потрактування філософської проблеми моральної відповідальності й вибору життєвого шляху та позиції.

У творчому методі М. Шеллі простежуємо синтез романтико-готичних ідей про природу людського страху та етично-філософських постулатів Просвітництва. Останні полягають у порушенні питання про людське щастя. Створена науковцем потвора має надзвичайний потенціал, який не може бути реалізованим через стереотипність мислення людського суспільства.

Письменниця захоплюється науковим ентузіазмом героя, поважає його бажання удосконалити людину і світ, проте наголошує на невчасності таких експериментів. Авторка увиразнює неправомірність втручання людини в природні процеси, демонструючи силу природи та її здатність до відновлення після наруги, караючи творця руками його творіння. Головний герой Мері Шеллі став майже архетипним образом, що уособлює жах, проте за задумом письменниці жахливим і потворним є не персонаж, а експеримент, що його породив.

Аналіз ситуацій, у які потрапляє головний герой, допоміг з'ясувати, що той перебуває на маргінесі світобудови, тому й порушує питання про доцільність власної появи на світ. Вивчення цих характеровірних фактів є основною метою дослідження, у результаті якого доходимо висновку: втручання людини в закони природи неправомірне, бо призводить до драматичної розв'язки.

**Ключові слова:** готичний роман, етичні проблеми, відповідальність, природа жаху, творець і його творіння.

**Introduction.** M. Shelley's novel «*Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*» (1818) is one of the most famous and successful Gothic novels which was set store by such famous coevals of the author as Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott (Scott, 1963). The literary image created by M. Shelley was widely used in Masscult in which the character has nothing in common with the author's idea. The «creature» is typically introduced as a monster. When the character of a book begins living own life it separates from its creator (this aspect in this study is particularly relevant). Then the author's intention may be different from the same author's vision and interpretation. L. Varma declared that M. Shelley's novel overgrew a typical gothic novel because of its spirituality peculiar for Romantic movement (Varma, 1957, p.54). M. Shelley's novel made the basis for myth-creating in modern Masscult (Frye, 1963, p.77).

The following study aims to debunk some literary stereotypes that emerge when the author's intention and the usage of the image in many cases of the mass culture meet.

**The main material of the study.** The problem raised in the article has always been

important and topical as people always wanted to become demiurges, creators, to be just like gods. The first embodiment of this desire in literature was the mythical Pygmalion. But the sculptor in that myth created only a marble shell. The origin of life was a mystery to the ancient Greeks, which only gods possessed, so they (gods) breathed life into the artist's creation. The theme of creation can be found in folk and literary tales. The pantheistic worldview and the sense of energy in each piece of nature determine that human imagination does not search for reasons why the creatures of snow, flour, wood, etc. come to life as if by themselves.

Scientific discoveries make a human believe in own strength and ability to create. The writers of different ages and in different creative manner – from fiction to satire and denunciation – turn into the theme of the nature change as the greatest human desire.

M. Shelley's work belongs to the so-called second wave of British writers who appeal to the nature of horror. M. Shelley's «*Frankenstein*» has undergone many editions, has been redefined and transformed into various art forms – first in the theater and then in the cinema. Popular mass

culture has blended of the images of the creator and his creation. That's why the name of a young scientist Victor Frankenstein is usually given to a nameless creature that was born in a laboratory. The name of the scientist in the novel by M. Shelley is always identified with his creation, and the word «Frankenstein» has become a common name that is used to denote a brutal monster, the very existence of which contradicts the laws of nature, and whose actions are aimed to make harm to humans. This problem may also be interpreted as a problem of personality split because the creature in M. Shelley's novel is sometimes called «the monstrous projection» (Yampol'sky, 1996, p.58) of its creator. The creature has no name. Throughout the narration the author calls him «a creature», «a poor thing», «a ghost», «a monster» or «a demon». But this creature has grown beyond the borders of a literary experiment. It would be interesting to refer to the problem of spirituality of this artificially made body. The nameless character possesses inherent ability for feelings, compassion, desire to help, the need for human society – all those components of a human being are moved and forced by some immaterial energy. And the aspect of spiritual problems needs proper skills of theological analysis.

In the preface to the 1831 edition M. Shelley tells the story of writing the novel. Firstly she said that it was not a coincidence that she began «inventing stories» because her parents occupied an important place in the literature process (William Godwin in 1794 released «*Caleb Williams*» which did not contain something extraordinary but was imbued with an atmosphere of terror; in 1799 «*St. Leon*» appeared, this book dealt with the alchemists' relevant to the problem of the elixir of life). The impetus for creative work was M. Shelley's marriage life and the bohemian surrounding.

Percy Shelley wanted his wife «to write her name onto the pages of literary fame» (Shelley, 1992, p.12). The novel «was born» as a result of the competition between P. Shelley and Lord Byron. In 1816 Lord Byron offered to write a terrible story just for entertainment. One of the members of this impromptu literary circle was also a physician and friend of Byron, John Polidori. His story «*The Vampyre*» was published under the name of Lord Byron and marked the beginning of

one of the most prolific themes in the history of Gothic literature. Further reference to this subject by B. Stoker in his «*Dracula*» in Victorian times led to the total seizure of bloodsuckers.

A young writer (she was only 19 years old) laid out to write a book that would «address hidden fears and cause shudder; make the reader be afraid to look back, would thump heart and ripe blood in the veins» (Shelley, 1992, p.15). Mary won the contest and her opponents noted the writer's talent and the uniqueness of her work. However, understanding her marginal status in the preface to the novel M. Shelley wrote that she was not obliged to the husband in any episode or thought.

The discussions between Lord Byron and P. Shelley at that time played an important role in making the plot of the original and terrible story. The two friends were speaking about the origin of life and the possibility of its reproduction, as well they discussed the experience of Erasmus Darwin. They developed the theories about the revival of the matter, the creation of separate human organs and so on. This aspect of coverage can be found in the novel: Victor Frankenstein expresses his admiration for scientists, compares them with the gods, as they know as «spinning the blood in our body and what is the air. They have new, almost unlimited power» (Shelley, 199, p.32).

The main trends in the English Gothic novel may be traced in the work of M. Shelley: the main heroine of the early works was replaced by the male hero. The change in semantic accents as well can be traced in «*Frankenstein*» as the terrible nature of cemeteries and medieval castles is transferred to the laboratory of a scientist. A «pale adept of mysterious sciences, established himself upon his being» appears in front of the inner vision of the writer. «This hideous creature which at first was lying motionless then by some unknown force started to move clumsily» (Shelley, 1992, p.55). Apparently, not being too competent in matters of medical science M. Shelley did not dare to put forward any hypotheses about reviving dead bodies. Therefore, the reader can only imagine the process of creating. The writer instead focuses on the aspects of a «personality» of that artificially-born being, his/its feelings and the feelings of his/its creator.

The main character of M. Shelley's novel traces the way to knowledge that is not limited

by certain ethical considerations but this process results into monster creating. But rather quickly he understood that this track was wrong. And the creature was already there against his will. At the same time he/it (the creature) was trying to understand the world and himself, his own place in the world, and rightly blamed Victor in the lack of responsibility for his existence. Frankenstein and his creature is a Gnostic pair illustrating the futility of human attempts to take over the functions of God and the impossibility of knowing God. Analyzing this situation through the Enlightenment rationality prism it turns into a problem of moral responsibility of scientists for their own deeds.

Victor Frankenstein – the «father» of the creature which was made to become a superhuman – said that he «always wanted to learn the secrets of nature» (Shelley, 1992, p.67). His aim was a noble one as he wanted «to save people from diseases, to save from death» (Shelley, 1992, p.68).

The creative method of M. Shelley is the synthesis of romantic and gothic reference to the nature of human fear and moral and philosophical tenets of the Enlightenment. The last aspect as well deals with the problem of human happiness. The writer feels not only fear of the very process of creation and abuse of the nature's laws but sympathizes with the lonely miserable creature. Like Robinson who felt lonely that's why he taught parrots to talk just to hear at least this simulation of human language, so the «child» of Frankenstein learned to speak and did it very quickly.

This character is a *human* not only a *creature* as he is able to feel. When his father and creator rejects him, this miserable monster still does not understand but can feel and at the same time shows self-criticism. «I was miserable, helpless and unhappy, – he told Victor about the early days of his «life», – I did not understand and did not know what to do. I just felt that I was suffering, – and cried» (Shelley, 1992, p.153). The *demon* is fairly described as a very attentive one; the nameless character evolves in own abilities and world-view, with his mind and soul he understands his place in the Universe: «I began to recognize the stream that consumed me, and the trees that covered me with the shadow. I realized that pleasant sounds I heard were created by tiny

winged beings. I had to learn to express feelings that agitated me, and wild sounds that I uttered, I was scared» (Shelley, 1992, p.134).

The character evolves not only as a biological unit, acquiring specific characteristic features of a human and also of a society unit. This artificially created person begins to think. The writer fills his thoughts with philosophical reflections of the Enlightenment's main representatives. When he sees fire for the first time he does not run away from its destructive power, as animals or the tribes which are far from the civilization, instead of it the character comes to the philosophical conclusion that «one and the same cause produces different effects» (Shelley, 1992, p.76).

The *monster* has enormous potential. That's a true superhuman: he is as tall as the giants that inhabited the planet of the legendary Golden Age, this creature has extraordinary physical strength, can stand cold and heat, is resistant to hunger and fatigue. Watching the residents of the slum from his ambush the creature quickly learns to distinguish people by age and sex, makes conclusions about their options, feels joy and pain.

The «new Adam» that was born in the laboratory is more holistic and organic than ordinary people. Being created of the pieces of human bodies that he/it is free from their (people's) born sin. His/its extremely strong body does not even need to eat meat of dead animals and feeds on berries, nuts and roots instead, this creature is an integral part of nature, as follows humanitarian principles of peaceful coexistence with all living things and the surroundings. The soul that lives in an ugly body is clean and open. The creature has no memory so looks at the world as a naive newborn baby.

He painfully realizes that he differs from the general public and such diversity could hurt him. His heart is open to friendship and love, which he offers to the people: «I knew that I would be a disgusting one to them, but I hoped that my gentle soul and a kind word would be able to earn their affection» (Shelley, 1992, p.185). But people's fear, inspired by stereotypical worldviews, forced them to destroy, to kill him.

And its creator, observing the results of his own work, was fulfilled by frustration and fear. He «was afraid even to recall that frantic enthusiasm that pushed» him as soon as possible to «create own wicked enemy» (Shelley, 1992).

Just like A. de Saint-Exupery in the 20<sup>th</sup> century M. Shelley raises the question of moral responsibility «for those we tame» (Saint-Exupery, 1984, p.115). But in «*Frankenstein*» that accountability is even stronger. The scientist undertakes to God, creating a new being. The creation of Victor Frankenstein raises the question of the liability of his creator to him. He says that no one is allowed to play with life: «Even you, my creator – the creature desperately exclaims, – hate and push me, your creation, away. And you'd like to kill me. How can you play with life?» (Shelley, 1992, p.184). The postulate of A. de Saint-Exupery's novel turns into the inverse proportionality in M. Shelley's novel: «You are my creator, and I'm your host» (Shelley, 1992, p.185) – that's a real challenge to the researcher from his *child*. These words embody the aspect of parental responsibility to children and the fatalistic penalty for interference into God's deals.

The real cause of the tragic ending according to M. Shelley is that the human world is a prisoner of stereotypes. As we know the work under consideration was a successful literary experiment. The idea of the novel was born at night, when a monstrous creature appeared in front of the inner vision of the writer. In the preface to the work she wrote what was the most scarring for her: «What could be worse for the people than any attempts to emulate the unique creation of God?» (Shelley, 1992, p.18).

The author shares the feelings of the creator she feels what he feels and is as much scared as he. In the preface she puts a rhetorical question of «what could be worse for the people than any attempts to emulate the unique creation of God». And then with the character of hers expresses the hope that «the spark of life would fade when the creature was abandoned to its own fate» (Shelley, 1992, p.79). M. Shelley supposed her readers would be scared as she was: «What scared me would make the others shudder, it's enough only to describe the ghost which visited me at night» (Shelley, 1992, p.14). Although the creation of a scientist is called the «demon» and the «ugly one», it is not left without the author's love and compassion. «So I send my ugly offspring into the world, – M. Shelley writes in the preface to «*Frankenstein*» (is it told about the novel or a nameless character?). – I feel tenderness towards it, because it was born in that happy time when

death and grief were just words to me» (Shelley, 1992, p.17).

The essence of horror in the novel by M. Shelley differs from that aspect of the early Gothic novels. This difference is even proclaimed by the main character. He admits that he has never experienced any fear of darkness, and a cemetery seemed to him only as «a resting place for dead bodies» (Shelley, 1992, p.26). The scientist from Geneva cares not of a new problem, because people have been always interested in the ways to continue physical existence: so Knights Crusaders sought for the Holy Grail, while alchemists tried to invent an elixir of immortality. Thus with scientific progress Victor Frankenstein makes him similar to Prometheus who was bearing fire to warm and illuminate human life. Full of pride the character exclaims: «I was the first who destined to overcome the boundaries between life and death and illuminate our dark world by dazzling light» (Shelley, 1992, p.186). Excited with success the scientist begins to make plans to change the laws of nature: «Once I learned how to revive a dead matter after a while I'll be able to give a second life to flesh which death has doomed to extinction» (Shelley, 1992, p.112).

The situation in M. Shelley's novel can be compared with the situation in the book by D. Defoe «*Robinson Crusoe*»: the two characters are in isolation. It is the only common feature because when Robinson gets on a desert island, where for 28 years he goes through millions of years of world civilization he does not lose the contact with «his» world. It can be traced in details, things brought by him from the ship, calendering, trying to follow a usual lifestyle.

The character of D. Defoe is brought to the island as an adult and a son of his country and era and tries to bring all these phenomena into the place of his isolation, he adapts the local wildlife to his needs. The creation of Frankenstein in M. Shelley's novel is born in the laboratory as an adult living being. Unlike a completely helpless newborn baby he is able to walk, think, analyze. He (as the writer gives his masculine traits) is very quickly to learn to speak and even read. If the creator equates to Prometheus who sought to bring the fire of enlightenment and brought outrage over life and death, he created the creature who was a kind of grotesque Adam.

Being created from the parts of dead bodies he is not intended to carry death, he is very peaceful to the surrounding world and is ready to help.

The philosopher created by Frankenstein has a kind human soul and a look of a night terror. After escaping he ponders about the meaning of his life and his place in it. He is in a tight corner as «he does not know by whom and when he was created» (Shelley, 1992, p.190).

M. Shelley's novel (incidentally, the same author has defined a genre as a story) is a thing underestimated and not fully understood. This also applies to the problem of interpretation of images and compositional structure, which is a binding of diaries and letters of the characters and numerous literary allusions, together with the complicated structure (the «real» time of the story is blended with epistolary) create complex inter-textual phenomenon. The latter is not always logically motivated. The creature is rather educated and that fact is somewhat exaggerated, he learns to speak and read extremely quickly as well he becomes a familiar with classical authors (Milton).

**Conclusions.** M. Shelley embodied the basic philosophical conflict between a natural human being and the circumstances that hinder its development in the novel which is usually

perceived just as a horror story for children and adults. The features of the Enlightenment character are «divided» between the creator (Frankenstein) and his creation. The first one is led by the thirst for knowledge, for understanding nature and having power over it, and the other character («demon», «monster» and a poor creation) seeks inner harmony and understanding of the environment. The unnamed character born in the laboratory desired to be happy turns into a monster because of involuntary alienation.

The problem of the creator's responsibility towards his creation and the world that has to accept this creation is solved dramatically. It should be emphasized that M. Shelley's talent which does not only appeal to both interesting and terrible story, but also reveals to the depth and ambiguity of moral and ethical issues. The novel makes the readers shudder with fear in front of artificially made creature neither dead and nor alive, makes tremble with horror because of human cruelty; the work evokes sympathy towards the pseudo-scholar who desired to become Prometheus but instead became a necromancer that played with death and as well we regret his unfortunate creation which sought to achieve harmony for his own soul and to bring harmony in the cruel world of the living.

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