



## Fragmented Realities and Deconstructing Binary Oppositions in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Binary Oppositions, Frankenstein Novel, Deconstruction, Post-Structuralism

*Received:* 20, August

*Revised:* 21, September

*Accepted:* 30, October

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how Mary Shelley's Frankenstein deconstructs binary oppositions and delves into fragmented realities to interrogate traditional notions of identity, ethics, and power. Employing a post-structuralist lens, the research examines Shelley's narrative techniques, which blur the boundaries between creator and creation, human and monster, and good and evil. Through fragmented perspectives, including layered narratives and shifting viewpoints, Shelley destabilizes conventional identities, prompting readers to confront moral complexities and question simplistic categorization. This analysis uncovers how the novel's fragmented narrative structure challenges the stability of identity, raising ethical questions about societal rejection, scientific ambition, and the boundaries of human responsibility. By deconstructing binary oppositions and exploring the implications of fragmented realities, this study sheds light on Frankenstein's enduring relevance in contemporary discussions on scientific ethics, identity formation, and social justice.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Gothic classic *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, which was first published in 1818, continues to be a key work of literature, deftly combining themes of creation, identity, and the moral quandaries that arise while pursuing scientific knowledge. Shelley examines the serious repercussions of pushing above the bounds of human comprehension in the tale of Victor Frankenstein, an ambitious scientist who creates life through unusual means. The book explores the moral obligations of the creator, the hazy boundaries between humanity and monstrosity, and the larger ramifications of scientific ambition in addition to detailing the horrors that result from Frankenstein's experiment. Deconstructive analysis finds rich ground in its complex narrative, which is full of moral quandaries and enquiries into identity and agency. This is especially true when analyzing the binary oppositions that constitute its central theme. Jacques Derrida's introduction of deconstruction calls into question the conventional wisdom that language and meaning are immutable or set. Rather, it exposes the underlying contradictions in texts, demonstrating how binary oppositions, like those between creator and creation, man and monster, and nature and science, are never really separate but rather fluid and interconnected. Upon closer inspection, these binaries—which are usually perceived as opposing forces—intertwine and dissipate, implying that meaning is not fixed but rather fragmented and ever-changing. Because of this inherent instability and volatility in its themes and characters, *Frankenstein* serves as a model text for deconstructive study.

Shelley continually questions the boundaries between creator and created, human and non-human, in *Frankenstein*, not just by presenting a dramatic opposition between Victor and his creature. While Victor, the bright scientist, is unable to avoid the moral and emotional fallout from his actions, his creation—often viewed as the horrible 'other,' exhibits profound emotional intelligence and a desire for connection. This reversal of roles challenges readers' conceptions of identity, morality, and accountability by upending the dichotomy between humanity and monstrosity. By attempting to reconcile these inconsistencies, a deconstructive reading of the book reveals the weakness of the fundamental concepts that are used to explain the human experience. *Frankenstein* addresses broader cultural and philosophical issues in addition to the emotional struggle between Victor and his creation, particularly in relation to the Enlightenment confidence in reason and progress. Shelley criticizes the unbridled ambition of individuals like as Victor, who, in their quest for knowledge, fail to consider the moral ramifications of their choices. The story casts doubt on the notion that human knowledge can or ought to be boundless by showing the disastrous results of scientific experimentation. Shelley leaves leeway for ambiguity and different readings by structuring the story through multiple perspectives and varying emotional tones, undermining any one authoritative interpretation of the events. This storytelling approach is very similar to deconstructive theory, which emphasizes the diversity and fluidity of interpretation rather than accepting fixed interpretations.

This study seeks to illuminate the intricate relationships between themes in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the manner in which she simultaneously creates and destroys conventional dichotomies by breaking down the novel's central binaries. This analysis centers on Victor's relationship with his creation, showing how Shelley blurs the lines between creation and destruction, nature and science, and humanity and horror. The novel's fractured worlds, where meaning is continuously postponed and initially inflexible boundaries are eventually flexible and permeable, are revealed by this dissection. Also, this study will look at how *Frankenstein* might be interpreted as a critique of the Enlightenment, a movement that placed a premium on reason and scientific advancement. One could interpret Victor's terrible demise as a cautionary tale about the hubris of people who try to control nature without thinking through the moral implications of their choices. Shelley poses age-old concerns regarding the moral obligations of those in positions of authority through her depiction of Victor's unrelenting pursuit of knowledge. These concerns are relevant to both the scientific community and more general human endeavours. By applying a deconstructive analysis to *Frankenstein*, this study will illustrate how the book engages with these more general philosophical and ethical discussions and how its themes, characters, and narrative structure lead to a more in-depth examination of the human condition. The novel draws readers into a world of moral ambiguity and ethical complexity, where standard binaries are constantly brought into question, rather than providing simple answers. This research will advance a more sophisticated comprehension of *Frankenstein*'s ongoing significance in literary and philosophical discourse by addressing the disjointed and unstable reality of the novel. *Frankenstein* is ultimately a profound examination of the conflicts between creation and destruction, knowledge and power, and human and non-human. It is not merely a story of science gone wrong or horror. This study aims to resolve these conflicts and provide fresh perspectives on the ways in which Shelley pushes the limits of identity, ethics, and the human experience through a deconstructive interpretation.

### **Research Objectives**

RO1: To analyse Shelley's narrative strategies that reveal the complexities of identity and ethics in *Frankenstein*.

RO2: To examine how the interplay of themes related to knowledge and power contributes to the deconstruction of binary oppositions in the novel.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Deconstruction theory has been used in a number of earlier studies to examine binary oppositions in a variety of literary texts, providing a starting point for the analysis of *Frankenstein*. These studies, however, demonstrate the flexibility and specificity of deconstructive methodologies by presenting variations in thematic focus, analytical methodology, and contextual application. Huiqing [4] conducts a noteworthy analysis of John Donne's poetry "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," dissecting binary oppositions as "male

vs. female," "soul vs. flesh," and "sacredness vs. worldliness." Huiqing's analysis highlights how Donne's poetic form undermines conventionally established ideas of identity and spirituality, exposing the layered and shaky character of these dichotomies. This strategy is reminiscent of Shelley's use of intricate thematic dualities in *Frankenstein*, which leads to a reconsideration of the relationship between creator and creation. In the Indonesian short story *Dokter* by Putu Wijaya, Silviyanti [8] dissect binary oppositions by looking at concepts like "doctor vs. shaman," "God vs. human," and "modern vs. traditional." Similar to the moral ambiguities in *Frankenstein*, this study reveals hidden meanings and reversals in hierarchical binaries. The moral quandaries in Shelley's story are reflected in Victor Frankenstein's dual positions as creator and scientist, which emphasise the fuzziness of the lines separating divine and human knowledge. The characters in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* are subjected to deconstructive analysis by Romlah [6], who concentrate on the binary oppositions between male and female characters, especially between John and Jennie. Their analysis demonstrates how the characters' identities change as opposing viewpoints change along the story. This concept is useful for examining the character dynamics in *Frankenstein*, as Victor and his creature's identities change throughout time, defying established roles and undermining the dichotomies of "creator vs. creation" and "human vs. monster." Ahmadi et al [1] compare structuralist and post-structuralist interpretations of the Masnavi stories in order to investigate the fluidity of meaning through binary oppositions. Their emphasis on the text's vocabulary complements Shelley's depiction of shattered identities and ethical dilemmas in scientific research, deepening *Frankenstein*'s thematic richness.

### **Literary Theory**

Literary Theory primarily focuses on how language constructs meaning and operates as a communication tool. It offers a set of guidelines that explain how language works and is processed, which in turn affects how readers interpret what they read. Western thought has been influenced by a variety of philosophical ideas since the seventeenth century, which has resulted in a broad perspective on the world as perceived by the human mind. This viewpoint has led philosophers to position themselves as judges of beauty and virtue by relating representations to their social, cultural, and moral consequences. Plato, who addressed current philosophical conundrums, is credited with laying the groundwork for literary theory. Descartes and Kant, two Enlightenment philosophers who maintained that knowledge comes from inside the individual, were affected by his ideas. Humanists, especially Descartes, emphasised human subjectivity as a source of beliefs and validations and maintained that all rational individuals could access knowledge. By arguing that the "subject of knowledge" is an abstract mind or reason that reconstructs the cognitive capacities of rational beings, Kant raised this self-awareness to a transcendental degree [5]. This focus on the author as the source of meaning implies that the reader's capacity to correctly decipher the author's intentions is the key to understanding literature in its entirety. When the reader understands

the author's intended meaning, reading becomes enjoyable. But later, rival theories that aimed to undermine the importance of the author and text disputed this emphasis on authorial intention. One of the first major challenges to early humanism came from Marxist criticism, which maintained that people cannot always understand precise meaning. Marxists contend that texts are reflections of societal attitudes and beliefs, and that knowledge of the social context of a book is necessary to comprehend its meaning. According to this viewpoint, historical occurrences and social interactions mould awareness, enabling people to become their "true species being," which stands for the complete expression of their human potential. By providing an explanation of self-identity and self-possession, Freud's contributions further muddied the concept of authorial primacy [3]. Freud introduced the idea of the "ego" as a framework for comprehending behaviour and meaning, arguing that the human mind governs how people connect to outside influences. The concept of complete authorial control is contested by psychoanalytic criticism, which contends that the reader is essential to understanding texts. Psychoanalytic methods run the risk of becoming reductive if they are not used carefully, even though they can uncover underlying mental controls that influence both authorial purpose and textual meaning [5]. When analysing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, these theoretical frameworks draw attention to the intricacies of narrative devices and how they affect moral obligations and identity. By combining Marxist and psychoanalytic viewpoints, it is possible to better comprehend how the text's fractured realities subvert conventional ideas of identity and to examine the moral implications of the characters' choices and interactions in a more nuanced manner.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research employs a Post-Structuralist Approach, specifically focusing on Deconstruction Theory, as articulated by Jacques Derrida [2]. This framework is instrumental in examining how Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* deconstructs established binary oppositions, which are foundational to Western thought and literary analysis. According to Derrida's theory of Binary Opposition, a lot of philosophical and cultural concepts are predicated on oppositional word pairs that favour one term over the other, such as life/death, creator/creature, and rationality/emotion. Shelley negotiates these contradictions in *Frankenstein*, exposing their intricacies and interdependencies. Using a deconstructive perspective, this study will examine how Shelley's storytelling techniques challenge these dichotomies, showing that identities are fluid and fragmented rather than fixed. According to Derrida's theory of Binary Opposition, a lot of philosophical and cultural concepts are predicated on oppositional word pairs that favour one term over the other, such as life/death, creator/creature, and rationality/emotion. Shelley negotiates these contradictions in *Frankenstein*, exposing their intricacies and interdependencies. Using a deconstructive perspective, this study will examine how Shelley's storytelling techniques challenge these dichotomies, showing that identities are fluid and fragmented rather than fixed. The emphasis on

Deconstruction Theory makes it possible to examine how Shelley questions accepted notions of identity and moral obligation. The creature created by Victor Frankenstein, for example, is a crucial illustration of how the lines separating creator and created are blurred, challenging readers' assumptions about morality, agency, and human nature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to examine how Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a book that pushes the limits of knowledge, ethics, and identity, deconstructs binary oppositions and fractured realities. *Frankenstein* challenges conventional ideas of humanity, creation, and moral responsibility through the use of nuanced characters, narrative interruptions, and symbolic contrasts. In this case, a qualitative method is crucial because it allows for a multi-layered, interpretative investigation of how the novel challenges binary frameworks and subverts stable meanings. This research paradigm, which is informed by Jacques Derrida's Post-Structuralist Theory more especially, Deconstruction which looks at how *Frankenstein* creates and undermines dichotomies like male against female, civilization versus monstrous, creator versus creation, and life versus death. These dichotomies, which emphasize the text's dismantling of identity as a stable thing, are not fixed but rather flexible. Derrida's idea of binary opposition makes it possible to examine in great detail how the lines between these opposites blur, exposing the subjectivity and meaning's instability.

In order to find and examine examples where fragmented identities and narrative structures highlight the criticism of binary thought, the study entails closely examining significant passages. Examining these instances reveals how the book critiques Enlightenment values by posing queries regarding the nature of creation, selfhood, and ethical obligation. This methodological approach enables a nuanced interpretation of *Frankenstein* within the framework of Deconstruction Theory, unravelling the use of fragmented narrative structures and binary oppositions. The study portrays *Frankenstein* as a seminal work that not only challenges binary thinking but also foreshadows discussions on identity, ethics, and the boundaries of scientific ambition by highlighting Derrida's theories on textual multiplicity and the fluidity of identity. This essay highlights *Frankenstein*'s contribution to challenging dogmatic conceptions of human nature and moral limits.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the results of the analysis conducted on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, focusing on how narrative techniques deconstruct binary oppositions and how fragmented realities challenge traditional notions of identity and ethical responsibility. By examining key lines from the novel, the findings reveal the layered meanings embedded in the text, illuminating Shelley's critique of societal norms and her exploration of the complexities of human existence. The findings address two main research questions, each examining a critical aspect of Shelley's work.

Mary Shelley's use of a multi-narrative structure allows for a diverse exploration of perspectives, particularly through the voices of the creature and Victor Frankenstein. This narrative technique serves to challenge the reader's assumptions about monstrosity and morality. The creature's poignant reflection,

*"I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?"*

Illustrates how Shelley humanizes the creature, challenging the binary opposition of good versus evil. By presenting the creature's feelings of abandonment and despair, Shelley invites readers to empathize with his plight. This perspective reveals the creature's suffering as a consequence of societal rejection, positioning him not merely as a monster but as a victim of circumstance. Such an approach complicates the traditional heroic narrative surrounding Victor, who is often viewed as the quintessential protagonist. Victor Frankenstein's character embodies the tension between creation and destruction, showcasing the complexities of ambition and ethical responsibility. His lamentation:

*"I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body,"*

Reflects the duality of his desires and the chaos that ensues from his quest for knowledge. Shelley's portrayal of Victor emphasizes the ethical dilemmas of creation, suggesting that the pursuit of scientific advancement can yield tragic consequences. Furthermore, Victor's eventual realization of his failure:

*"I had a great experience of my own, and I felt as though I was my own creator,"*

Underscores the complexities of identity and responsibility intertwined with creation. Through Victor's tragic downfall, Shelley critiques the Enlightenment ideals of unchecked ambition, challenging the binary of creator and created. The epistolary format enhances the narrative by presenting the story through letters, particularly Walton's correspondence. This technique creates distance between the reader and Victor's experiences, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of his character. Walton's initial admiration for Victor quickly turns to disillusionment as Victor's hamartia surfaces, illustrating the complexity of human nature and the challenge of categorizing characters as purely heroic or villainous. The framing device of letters also emphasizes the theme of isolation, as each character struggles with their own inner demons. Walton's reflection:

*"I have no friend, and I cannot consider myself one,"*

Echoes the loneliness experienced by both Victor and the creature, reinforcing the theme of alienation and the inadequacy of societal connections. Shelley's exploration of gender binaries is evident in the portrayal of Victor and the female figures around him. The destruction of the female creature signifies Victor's fear of female autonomy, as he reflects:

*"I was about to undertake a task of greater importance than the creation of a rational creature."*

This moment highlights the patriarchal anxieties surrounding female power and complicates the binary of male dominance and female subservience. The limited roles assigned to women, such as Elizabeth Lavenza, often reduce them to symbols of purity and domesticity, showcasing how societal expectations shape individual identity. Victor's relationship with Elizabeth further illustrates this dynamic, as he views her as a possession rather than an equal partner, reinforcing traditional gender roles and underscoring the limitations imposed on women in a patriarchal society.

The creature's fragmented identity is central to the narrative, illustrating the complexities of selfhood shaped by societal rejection. His assertion:

*"I was an imperfect creature; I am not deformed; I am only unlearned,"*

Emphasizes his yearning for knowledge and connection. This self-awareness challenges the idea of identity as a fixed construct, revealing how external perceptions influence one's sense of self. The creature's realization that his appearance dictates his treatment by society demonstrates the profound impact of societal norms on individual identity, compelling readers to reconsider their own prejudices and the fluidity of identity. The creature's experiences reflect the impact of social constructs on identity formation. His realization:

*"I am a solitary being, misunderstood and unloved,"*

Critiques societal norms that dictate acceptance and belonging. This fragmented reality underscores the novel's commentary on how societal attitudes shape and often distort individual identity. Shelley uses the creature's plight to illustrate how social rejection can lead to a fragmented sense of self, challenging the notion that identity is solely an internal phenomenon. By situating identity within the context of social interaction, Shelley emphasizes the relational aspects of selfhood and the profound effects of alienation. Victor's failure to take responsibility for his creation raises critical questions about ethical accountability. His reflection:

*"I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel,"*

Highlights the moral implications of his actions and the necessity of nurturing one's creations. This reversal of the creator/creation relationship complicates traditional notions of responsibility, emphasizing that the act of creation entails ethical obligations. Victor's ultimate rejection of the creature serves as a poignant critique of the consequences of irresponsibility, suggesting that neglecting one's duties can lead to catastrophic outcomes. Shelley's exploration of moral ambiguity invites readers to grapple with the complexities of ethical decision-making and the consequences of failing to acknowledge one's responsibilities. The novel's exploration of fragmented realities also extends to the inherent contradictions within humanity. Victor's admission:

*"I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me,"*

Reveals the complexities of human nature and relationships. This duality invites readers to reconsider traditional understandings of humanity, encouraging a more nuanced view of ethical responsibility in the context of fragmented identities. The interplay between creation and destruction in both Victor and the creature highlights the paradoxes of human existence, where the pursuit of knowledge can lead to alienation and despair. Shelley's portrayal of these contradictions underscores the multifaceted nature of identity, emphasizing that individuals cannot be easily categorized into binary oppositions.

These findings illuminate the depth of Shelley's narrative techniques and the intricate themes of identity and responsibility within *Frankenstein*, demonstrating how her work continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of ethical and social complexities. By challenging traditional notions of identity and morality, Shelley invites readers to engage in critical reflections on the nature of humanity, the consequences of isolation, and the intricate relationships that define our existence.

Shelley's complex narrative structure in *Frankenstein* questions oversimplified conceptions of ethics, identity, and the dichotomies that frequently characterize human experience. Shelley undermines the sharp divisions between good and evil by placing characters like Victor and the creature in ethically dubious situations, highlighting the complexity of human nature. Through the creature's need for acceptance and Victor's aspirations to become a scientist, the novel implies that identity is molded by both inward wants and societal expectations. In addition to encouraging readers to adopt numerous perspectives, Shelley's complex storytelling especially through Walton's letters also demonstrates how subjective viewpoints affect assessments of responsibility and character. Shelley gently criticizes patriarchal systems by depicting Victor as an unbridled artist, highlighting the moral dangers of power when it is not balanced by empathy and accountability. Victor's destruction of the female creature reflects greater gender conflicts of the time and conveys concerns about feminine agency. Through these interactions, *Frankenstein* raises ethical problems about scientific ambition and societal exclusion, striking a chord with contemporary bioethical concerns and forcing readers to consider the moral obligations that come with knowledge and power.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* skilfully deconstructs binary oppositions, challenging conventional notions of good versus evil, creator versus creation, and male versus female. Shelley illustrates the intricate relationship between identity, ethics, and power through intricate characterizations and disjointed narrative frameworks. The perils of unbridled ambition and moral disregard are highlighted by Victor's conceited quest for knowledge and his eventual rejection of the creature. Furthermore, the disjointed viewpoints especially through Walton's letters and Victor's retrospective story invite readers to consider these characters and their deeds

from a variety of angles, highlighting the significance of empathy and moral consciousness in comprehending human motivations. Shelley's examination of authority and accountability is still relevant today, inspiring contemplation on the moral ramifications of technological advancement and social marginalization.

Future studies could build on Shelley's perspective on gender and identity by examining its ramifications in the framework of feminist literary criticism, especially in light of the story's use of agency and repressed female voices. Furthermore, because the novel's themes are highly relevant to current scientific developments, multidisciplinary studies could examine *Frankenstein* in greater detail in light of contemporary ethical debates surrounding biotechnology and artificial intelligence. Scholars and educators may find it useful to analyze Shelley's writings from a modern ethical perspective, utilizing *Frankenstein* as a framework to investigate the obligations associated with human interactions and invention. In the end, this book reminds readers of the moral difficulties inherent in advancement and exhorts them to approach knowledge with humility and a sense of collective duty.

#### **FURTHER RESEARCH**

This research still has limitations so further research is still needed on this topic "Fragmented Realities and Deconstructing Binary Oppositions in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein".

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