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Abstract

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde and Frankenstein by Mary Shelley are both products of Gothic Literature and though written in 70 years intervals, two novels embody main evil characters who are surprisingly similar . This study explores the relation that can be drawn between Wilde’s evil Dorian Gray and Shelley’s Monster in regard to the research question :

Analysis and comparison of main evil characters in gothic novels Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” and Oscar Wilde’s “The Picture of Dorian Gray”.

This research will be divided into four main sections dealing with the Creators, Aesthetic Awakenings, Evil Acts and Self Destruction processes. Moving in a chronologic order first, Lord Henry and Dr. Frankenstein will be analyzed as the characters who are the creators of the evil in novels. Then novels’ pivotal connection in aesthetics (Dorian is extremely beautiful and Frankenstein’s monster is extremely ugly) will be evaluated. Continuing with the explorations of evil acts and characters’ self-destructions, the question; ‘How these aesthetically converse characters can merge into one in immoral behavior?’ will be discussed. Also throughout this paper Mary Shelley’s nameless evil character will be named as Frankenstein’s Monster, The Creature or The Monster, as it is stated in the novel.

In the conclusion it is proved that The Monster and Dorian are conversely similar to each other and it is shown that though in appearance they are completely opposite, their fate and evil behavior is significantly congruent. It is also concluded that as a criticism to aesthetically obsessed society both novels convey similar social messages through two extreme examples.

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*" Give me beauty in the inward
soul; may the outward and
the inward man be at one."*

SOCRATES

I. Introduction

Gothic Fiction emerged in eighteenth century as a new way for classicist writers to escape the obligations of reason, became the literature of the supernatural. Starting with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and reaching the Stephen King's contemporary horror stories, products of this literature became commonly characterized by gruesome details of death, terror and evil. Writers exploiting the myriad elements of gothic literature have made their naïve protagonists face with bloodthirsty monsters, set their stories in gloomy castles and created abnormal situations that could unveil the latent weaknesses, frailties and evil in human nature. Even though many gothic fictions have introduced "evil" as an antagonist with no sense of beginning, some analyzed the process of "becoming evil". Focusing on the latter, this study will analyze two gothic novels: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in reference to their main evil characters.

Evolving around the main query: "Can ugliness promote evil?", "Frankenstein", written in 1816 by young Mary Shelley, tells the story of a monster and its creator. Victor Frankenstein, the creator and an ambitious scientist driven by the sole motivation of deciphering the secret of human life, reanimates The Creature -a wretched being composed of the decayed remnants of corpses. Though creature's outer ugliness can be attributed to Dr. Frankenstein's lack of aesthetic ideals, the inner one surfaces when it becomes rejected and alienated from the society. Blaming his negligent creator as the source of his banes, the creature sets out for his "merciless and sanguinary" quest of vengeance and becomes "The evil monster" of our contemporary conception.

Conversing Frankenstein's main query to "Can evil promote ugliness?" and "Can beauty promote evil?" we obtain the main themes of Oscar Wilde's revivalist gothic novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray". In Wilde's story the main character Dorian Gray is an ineffably beautiful young man who is lauded as an epitome of true aesthetics. Dorian fearing to age and lose his much exalted beauty makes a pact with an unknown supernatural power and confines the effects of years to his oil-portrait. He stays young and pristine whereas the vicissitudes of years and sins transform his face on the portrait to that of a very ugly evil person. Though Dorian is first introduced as a naïve boy, being gradually influenced by the vicious sayings of his friend Lord Henry and the hedonistic freedom that his beauty ensures, he becomes an immoral being like Frankenstein's Monster.

A general introduction to two novels elicits a surprising parallelism on the processes of becoming evil affected by aesthetic concerns. Colin McGinn, writer of the book “Ethics, Evil and Fiction” elicits this parallelism by defining Frankenstein’s Monster and Dorian Gray as “aesthetic converses”(McGinn 145) of each other: one evil because of beauty and other evil because of ugliness. The intriguing relation between two characters continues beyond the converse aesthetics with further similarities in *becoming evil* and *downfall* processes such that Dorian and The Monster’s resembling fates lead us to our research question: Analysis and comparison of main evil characters in gothic novels Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” and Oscar Wilde’s “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. In light of our research question we will not discuss whether our characters are good or evil but acknowledge it in order to compare and unravel the rather significant but generally overlooked relation between these main evil characters.

The scope of this study, therefore, will be the comparison of the characters’ motives, outer appearances, acts and emotions, and this analysis will lead us to determine to what extent our characters are similar and different.

II. Creators of Evil: Influence and Ignorance

The plot of both novels includes characters who act as the creators of evil characters. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Dr. Victor Frankenstein creates the evil monster out of corpses and animates it by using his supernatural discovery in revitalization and in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry creates the evil Dorian Gray with the influencing power of his toxic words. Both novels include a symbolic "devil", a creator, who encourages and tempts main characters into acting evil.

In order to analyze Dorian Gray's creator, Lord Henry Watton, recounting Dorian's naive and moral personality prior to his introduction with him is necessary. In the first chapters of the novel, Dorian is an innocent and inexperienced young boy who is defined as a "brainless, beautiful thing"(Wilde 5). Nevertheless after his introduction to Lord Henry who adopts a hedonistic life ambition and a philosophy with his notorious saying: "...the only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it."(Wilde 29), Dorian starts to alter his life principles in reference to Henry's witty sayings and immoral advice. Lord Henry defines immorality as an essence of life and claims that it is concomitant with morality in pursuit of a pleasurable life. As a character, Lord Henry Watton is a true cynic, an elitist and a sexist who gets his enchanting power out of his venomous oratory. "Lord Henry, as the devil himself, is merely the agent of destruction"(Raby 114) who with constant effort tries to tempt Dorian into acting evil. By influencing Gray with his immoral world conception he creates once naïve now evil character; Dorian Gray. His words pervade into almost every façade of Dorian's life philosophy and the downfall of Dorian Gray starts when he yields to the toxicating notions of Lord Henry. The process of becoming evil starts when Lord Henry destroys Dorian's first love affair by his influencing words. Lord Henry who sees women as "a decorative sex" (Wilde 54), depreciates Sibyl in eyes of Dorian and prompts him to abandon her; An act which causes Sibyl's suicide –Gray's first ruthless act. Henry's stagnant presence continues to influence Dorian throughout the narrative. He describes his unyielding power over Dorian by his saying "You will always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you never had the courage to commit"(Wilde 83). Ironically this assumption loses its accuracy in evidence that Lord Henry is a passive talker who does not live according to his philosophies and leads a rather dull, moral and desperate life.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the creator is Victor Frankenstein who unlike Lord Henry physically creates and gives life to his evil monster. Victor is a young, ambitious man who grows up to be an alchemist and a modern scientist. Victor's tragic flaw lies within his blinded ambitions in pursue of discovering the secret of human life and animate the dead. In his case, the tool of evil creation is not the art of rhetoric but the natural sciences. Victor, works night and day in gruesome tasks and he animates a dead body. However, the ugliness of the monster he engenders makes him abandon it, causing Creature to hate and question its creator: "Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust?"(Shelley 155). Though Victor is a creator from the inchoation, he becomes the creator of the evil when he neglects and leaves the monster that he is supposed to guide. He, as the person who has shaped the creature, despises him the most. Creature is first introduced as naïve and unguided child with no sense of identity but starting from Victor's abandonment and society's successive contempt, he turns into a dejected and alienated being and seeks to revenge on Victor.

"All men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated... Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me... I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends"(Shelley 113).

Both physically and psychologically Victor is the creator of the nameless evil creature. While he creates the physical part of the creature by mixing the remnants of corpses, he creates the psychological evil by abandoning it.

Overall, the analysis of evil characters' creators in both novels gives the reason why characters' naïve and inexperienced personality transforms into an immoral one and initiate a ruthless series of evil acts. In *Frankenstein* Victor's cowardice and failure as a father figure makes Creature seek for revenge and in Wilde's novel Lord Henry's sayings and misleading guidance cause Gray to choose evil over morality.

III. Aesthetic Awakening: Defying the Beauty Mystique

The prevalent aesthetics and morality relation propounded through Plato's theory, "The Beauty Mystique", states that "the beautiful is good, and the ugly is evil; and conversely that the morally good is physically beautiful and the evil is ugly"(Synnott 78). However, the analysis of our evil characters' aesthetic awakenings shows a relationship that rebuts this theory. Analyzing the initially moral but aesthetically dejected Frankenstein's monster and aesthetically sublime but morally corrupt Dorian Gray we see that aesthetics is the most important part of characters' identities. Undeniably in two novels characters' outer appearance is the principal motivator for evil behavior and all heinous acts are prompted by aesthetic concerns. So it is no surprise that the process of "becoming evil" starts when characters realize the societal conception of their aesthetics; Monster's ugliness and Dorian Gray's beauty.

Frankenstein's Monster is an ugly creature. Victor Frankenstein creates his monster by mixing the bodies of corpses he has stolen and literally gives no consideration to beauty of his scientific product. He creates such an ugly thing that when the creature is animated, even Frankenstein despises him. The creature, running away from the contempt of his creator with an intellectual capacity equivalent to that of a newborn, struggles to find an identity and a reason for his existence.

"Where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days; no mother had blessed me I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I?" (Shelley 143)

With these questions, monster's search for identity proceeds and he seeks a place or a group to which he can aesthetically belong. In this search he hides in a cabin house where he observes the daily routine of a welcoming family but even that warm family rejects him in the face of his abnormal figure. Wherever he goes he gets humiliated and shooed with the cries: "Monster! Ugly wretch! You wish to eat me and tear me to pieces. You are an ogre!" (Shelley 170). Though initially Frankenstein is a morally good creature, after observing what a normal human being looks like he becomes aware of himself and he rightfully takes his personal ugliness as the reason of his wretched existence. With this awakening once unguided and naïve creature sets out to pursue an evil vengeance quest after his creator, a quest that

starts when he kills the brother of his creator. "You belong then to my enemy — to whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim"(Shelley 171). His aesthetical awareness is actually what sets the foundation of Creature's evil goals and character. Frankenstein's monster could answer his question "What was I?" only after he learns that he is the lonesome product of a regrettable lab experiment and he is not a human who could find a mate or attune to real world. It is needless to say that such a realization and a societal dejection could unravel the natural propensity to evil behavior and give grounds for evil behavior. In Monster's case he feels indignant towards the apparently happy state of Victor and yearns to make him as unfortunate as himself.

As a converse of Frankenstein's Monster, Dorian possesses an "extraordinary personal beauty"(Wilde 3). Oscar Wilde's strong inclination to aestheticism, a movement which values aesthetics over moral principles, can be seen in Dorian Gray's characteristics. Analyzing Dorian's aesthetic awareness process can date back to painter Basil Hallward's portrait. When Dorian sees his beauty reflected on canvas and got invincible to the cruelty of time, his weak self-confidence combined with the fear of losing his beauty (a supremacy in London social environment) leads him to a pact made with a supernatural power. He chooses his beauty with all the pleasure it provides and sells his soul to immortality.

"How sad it is! I shall grow old... But this picture will remain always young... if it were only the other way!..I would give my soul for that!"(Wilde 42)

The freedom towards the usage of unnatural elements in gothic fiction enables Dorian's seemingly figurative wish to come true. Dorian's pact functions in every sin he commits and he observes his painting aging and tarnishing while he stays unaltered. His appearance and inner nature separates and this dualism bolsters his motivation to pursue pleasure through his heinous acts. The easily influenceable nature of Dorian causes him to fill his mind with the aesthetically obsessed notions of Lord Henry and blurs the moral distinctions. "Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances."(Wilde 35)

Though both Dorian and Frankenstein's creature eventually become evil characters, the transformation occurs with their aesthetic awakenings. Importance of appearance lies within the social perceptions and judgments that praise beauty and shun ugly. While once good Frankenstein's creature is evil because of the rejection and loneliness caused by his outer ugliness, Dorian is evil because of the fear and selfishness related to his existing beauty. In

short, aesthetics triggers existing natural propensity to evil and makes characters susceptible to immoral choices.

IV. Evil Act: First Sin to series of destructions

The evil can only unravel through a concrete act. So the analysis of first evil acts and the following series of destructions is necessary in order to underscore the similar phases that characters go through. In both novels evil behavior starts with a first act that leads to series of evil destruction. Also in both novels evil is introduced as a character who causes the death of an innocent person and takes pleasure or joy from this act. As observed from the two main characters, selfish Dorian and revengeful Frankenstein's monster, the sin comes as result of intense emotions and continues with an insatiable motion.

Dorian Gray's first victim is young actress Sibyl Vane who lives in the dejected regions of London and plays Shakespeare in an inferior theater. Dorian, before his aesthetical awakening, sees Sibyl Vane and falls in love with her but his affection falters with Lord Henry's misogynist comments about her acting. With Lord Henry's vicarious influence, Dorian leaves Sibyl and causes her suicide. This first evil act marks Dorian's first divergence from a moral lifestyle. Though he suffers immense guilt and hysteria from the fact that he caused a young innocent girl's death, with Henry's consolation his qualms of conscience yields its place to further immoralities. After the death of Sibyl Vane, Dorian comes home to find out that his countenance in portrait has changed and adopted a "touch of cruelty near the mouth" (Wilde 99); a change which shows that the supernatural pact has been working. With this plot twist Wilde uses gothic elements to bestow a freedom upon Dorian which means "the painted image might be seared with the lines of suffering and thought, and that he might keep all the delicate bloom and loveliness of his then just conscious boyhood" (Wilde 99). The dualistic separation of Dorian's sins and his appearance is the true reason why Dorian ensues further immorality after the first evil act. Sibyl Vane's suicide becomes his first show of how he literally applies Lord Henry's sayings to his own life and proves that his love towards anyone but himself is unreal. Dorian's evil acts continue with the adulterous affairs, blackmailing, drug abuse but the climax of his immorality is reached when he murders his painter friend Basil. As compatible to nature of sinners his first sin entails further destructions and once moral Dorian transforms into an evil being.

As Dorian is blinded by his impeccable mirror image, Frankenstein's monster is blinded by his revenge lustful quest of revenge. His first act is the murder of Victor Frankenstein's little brother and like Dorian's murder of Sibyl, the death of this innocent child guides character's

future decisions. Running away from the dejection of his creator in forests, Frankenstein's monster comes across a young boy who refuses to come with him and be his friend. When he learns that he is the brother of his cruel creator, he kills him and with this act he finds out that imposing pain on his creator is the only way to relieve the pain his loneliness gives. The monster kills many people related to Victor: his best friend Henry Clerval, maid, brother, wife and consequently causes Victor's death. What turns Frankenstein's creature to a monster is not only his hideous appearance but also his acts of monstrosity. Frankenstein monster experiences introspective moments that could halt his sanguinary quest but every time his hatred towards Victor prevails over his good nature:

“Man! You may hate, but beware! Your hours will pass in dread... — revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food!...Beware, for I am fearless and powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom” (Shelley 206).

Having previously discussed the causes for evil acts (creator, aesthetics), analysis of the concrete villainies in both novels shows that they are consequences of willful decisions. Two main characters are not merely antagonists but they are protagonists to whom reader can understand and relate to through inner monologues. The analysis of evil acts leads us to conclude that both Dorian and Frankenstein's Creature are stereotypical examples of gothic evil (L'homme fatal¹) which is defined as "mysterious character, torturing others because himself tortured by unspeakable guilt, who, though a villain, usurps the place of the hero in the reader's interest" (Abrams 17).

¹ “L'homme fatal” French. Deadly Man.

V. Self-Destruction: Atonement

Evil characters' developments end with their destructions. The endless quest of destruction and pain characters impose on others yield to such a voracious quest that after all the evil they have caused, characters understand their immoralities and repent via their self-destructions - suicides. The self-destruction prevails as a unifying theme in both novels and it comes in form of suicide that marks the downfalls of evil characters.

In Frankenstein's case his suicide comes as an atonement made towards all the sins he has committed. After killing everybody related to Victor and causing Victor's death, Monster loses its objectives to sustain living. This aimlessness is indeed a central theme to the novel in a way that all the immorality and pain characters inflict on others are based on no concrete objectives but merely caused by characters' self-conflicts. Although the apparent victim of monster is "Victor", in the end of the plot both Victor and his creature find themselves beaten up by their mutual vengeance quests. Through the inner monologues of the creature, it can be inferred that the principal reason for creature's suicide is his fear of loneliness. While the creature yearns to kill Frankenstein, he does not consider the fact that though being "an accursed creator" Frankenstein is the only person he knows in this aesthetic dominated world. As a result of his inner conflicts his goals and objectives that once filled him with rage become denuded to mere desperation and he chooses to kill himself. Gradually the "ugly but good creature" who defies the beauty mystique transforms into an "ugly and evil monster" that people perceive him to be. We may evaluate creature's realization of this change as the point where the monster chooses to atone for his sins.

"...It is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely... I have devoted my creator... to misery ... Fear not that I shall be the instrument of future mischief ...I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation. Polluted by crimes and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?"
(Wilde 276).

Dorian's self destruction and atonement are results of a rather indirect process. Analyzing Dorian's plot of evil, we see that although Dorian has tried to repent for his sins many times in his life, he has always faced with the deterrent words of Lord Henry who purported that the ennui that is concomitant with morality is the greatest bane in life. Although throughout the story Dorian is unable to oppose to Lord Henry's wishes of him as "The Immoral Dorian", in

the end of novel Dorian succeeds in acknowledging the evil influence of Lord and resists it: “Yet you poisoned me with a book once. I should not forgive that” (Wilde 242). Aforementioned indirectness of Dorian’s suicide is caused by Wilde’s use of gothic elements in pursue of a symbolic narration. In the end of the story Dorian decides that living with a pretty face is not worth the fear and guilt that he suffers and he decides to destroy the painting which bares the traces of all his villainies. This is actually an indirect decision to leave his immoral life behind and kill himself since Dorian comprehends that many of his sins cannot be repented. Dorian’s dilemma is such that “...he had tarnished himself, filled his mind with corruption... been an evil influence to others, and experienced a terrible joy in being so; But was it all irretrievable? Was there no hope for him?” (Wilde 224). In the end of the novel Dorian wants to destroy the portrait (that has been carrying the traces of immorality and time while Dorian has been staying unaltered) through stabbing it. But ironically when he stabs the portrait the deal with the devil ends and dualistic nature of the painting and his psychical body merges into one. So though indirectly, Dorian stabs himself and dies repenting his sins. The self-destruction similar to the case of Frankenstein’s creature is the only way out for Dorian. The mystic elements of gothic novel make the ending ambiguous since it is not obvious whether Dorian committed suicide or killed himself as a consequence of an ironic accident.

Two characters’ endings draw out such a parallelism that in the end both characters choose destruction as the only way to salvage their souls. An introspection to characters’ evil motives from creation till the destruction elicits the psychological motives behind evil behavior. Though Dorian and Monster diverge in the main theme aesthetics, their fate and downfall merge into one in death.

VI. Conclusion

In this study while investigating our research question it has become obvious that both novels bore a resemblance much further than their common genre. The analysis led us to conclude that though motivated by converse aesthetic concerns both characters become evil as a result of similar events. In light of our findings we discovered that although our main twist focused around the relation “Beautiful Evil” versus “Ugly Evil”, the apparent irony was the fact that Oscar Wilde’s Dorian was immoral because of his supreme beauty and Mary Shelley’s Creature was evil because of his wretched ugliness.

It was understood that downfalls of novels’ characters are results of a complicated process which develops in various stages. First, characters become influenced or encouraged by their creators and this unravels their existing inclination to misdemeanor. Then characters experience a gradual awakening about their appearance and this awakening urges them to commit the first felony. This felony leads to further evil acts and finally all these events merges to create the tragic downfalls of evil heroes.

All in all, both characters are mishaps of failed experiments: one scientific and other an artistic one. Their stories convey a social message that censures the aesthetically obsessed nature of human and admonishes towards the dangerous consequences of elevating beauty over moral values. As a synthesis of this research it can be said that Monster and Dorian act as writers’ mediums of social criticism and the comparison of this two extreme examples becomes a cautionary tale towards aesthetic intolerance. Although through this study the reasons for evil acts are understood, whether these reasons are ethically justifiable or not is still open to further discussions.

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