

# Humanity in Monstrosity: Monsters in *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

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## Abstract

Monsters are commonly stereotyped as horrible and grotesque creatures. But in *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Shelly and Wells both delineate some complicated but meaningful monster characters. These monsters' features and natures represent their creator's intention and purpose. In both texts, monsters are ugly but benevolent, while their creators are eccentric and monstrous. The relationship between men and monsters allows us to view the definition of humanity from a more critical and objective perspective.

## Keywords

Monsters, Monstrosity, Humanity, *Frankenstein*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

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## 1. Introduction

Monsters are commonly stereotyped as horrible and grotesque creatures. But *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* both delineate some complicated but meaningful monster characters. These monsters' features and natures represent their creator's intention and purpose. Moreau manufactures many humanized animals, the Beast Men, to serve his research purpose and maintain the operation of his island. M'ling, a bear tainted with dog and ox, is purchased, exploited, domesticated, and racialized to be a servant that caters to Moreau's expansion and colonialization needs. Moreau disciplines his Beast Men through vivisection and moralization to further utilizes them as his labor force. Though M'ling is created as a beast man, his nature of docility and obedience represent not only Moreau's triumph in manufacturing and controlling his creature but also the Beast Men's tragic fate of being exploited and oppressed. However, in *Frankenstein*, Victor

animates a lifeless creature, but it turns out to be a horrible wretch whose grotesque appearance is horrible but easy to identify. The monster is deserted by its creator after it is generated and then expelled by the De Lacy family due to its ugliness. The monster's ugliness does make people neglect his virtuous and benevolent soul, thus, being treated with abhor and despise. Therefore, the monster is gradually isolated from human society and exiled among continents. The essential need for the monster is to seek companionship and recognition from his creator, Victor. After Victor declines the monster's demand for a female mate, the monster seeks violence and crime for revenge. The transformation of the monster makes Victor generate a complex feeling of fear, hatred, and sympathy toward the monster. And this to some extent indicates their coexistence relationship, in which they are deeply attached to each other but also antagonized. In both texts, monsters are ugly but benevolent, while their human creators are more eccentric and monstrous. The monsters in both texts are created to serve their human creator's purposes, but the monsters present to be more humane than their creators. M'ling, the Beast Men, created by Moreau is racialized and commodified as a labor force that can be randomly purchased and created based on utilitarianism. The creature is the monster created by Victor, who not only incarnates his evil side of crazy scientific pursuit but also bridges him with the outside world and consoles his solitude. Therefore, I suggest that the monsters and their human creator are mentally and physically attached to each other, which allows them to find some comfort and companionship in the community they formed as they are all isolated from human society. The relationship between men and monsters serves as a critical lens to explore humanity in monstrosity.

## **2. Monsters in *The Island of Doctor Moreau***

### **2.1. The Beast Men: Monsters Created by Moreau**

The Beast Men are the monsters in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, humanized animals with disproportional bodies and grotesque appearances. These man-like creatures on the island are represented by bestial monsters like "Leopard Man", "Silvery Hairy Man", "M'ling", "Swine Men", "Horse-Rhinoceros Creature", "Bear-Bull", "Dog Man", and "Ape Man". [1] They are manufactured by vivisection and a series of inhumane surgeries like organ grafting, blood transfusion, tissue transplantation, and inoculation. All Beat Men are malformed and distorted with "large and protuberant noses", "bristly hair", "strangely colored eyes", "short forearms", "hunched shoulders", "forward head", and "lacked tactile sensibility". [1] Besides physical metamorphosis, Moreau also educates them about morality and obedience, while also disciplines them to suppress their animal instincts. Prendick, the protagonist rescued from a shipwreck and taken to the island by Moreau, encounters the Beast Men and describes them as "a man going on all fours like a beast". [1] Though these creatures are in human forms, their barbarous movements, countenance, gestures, and presence all indicate their bestial

origins. These monsters can speak some simple and sloppy words. But their intelligence is no better than an idiot because Moreau has implanted “the Law” to restrain their imagination and prohibit disobedience and dispute. [1] Despite their monstrous appearance and ferocious countenance, they are peaceful and timid creatures who lack the courage to attack Prendick when they spy on each other in bushes. Unlike other supernatural monsters, the Beast Men are earthly creatures manufactured through scientific experiments and surgical operations, as Moreau explains to Prendick in Latin that “they are animals which we have vivisected”. [1]

## 2.2. M’ling: The Commodified and Racialized Labor

However, these Beast Men are created to serve Moreau. There are more than sixty Moreau’s monstrous creatures on the island. M’ling, “a bear tainted with dog and ox”, is the most docile and humanlike one among all the Beast Men. [1] It is trained by Montgomery to be an attendant, who chops wood, prepares food, and manages all the domestic chores. M’ling is one of Moreau’s most complex and elaborate works and develops an intimate relationship with its masters. This servant is a “black-faced man”, implying it belongs to people of color, or more specifically, not white. [1] Therefore, it’s fair to say that Moreau intentionally creates this servant in black because M’ling is artificially modified into human form. M’ling is a humanized animal and black servant, but Moreau is a white British scientist and master of the island. The huge contrast in race, complexion, and social status leads to their different destinies. Moreau embodies the European colonist who enslaves and exploits the people of color, especially black men like M’ling. Montgomery kicks, beats, and even pelts M’ling with stones after he is drunk. But M’ling serves Moreau and Montgomery with absolute tenderness and whole-hearted devotion who “loves nothing so much as to be near [them]”. [1] Viewing M’ling’s mistreatment from a racial perspective, this black-faced man is inferior to his white masters just due to his skin color, which indicates that a hidden racial hierarchy is established between men and humanized animals even on this deserted island. Taneja reads M’ling as a “racial other of the British characters”, the intermediary that links the human masters and the Beast Men. [2] According to Taneja, the British and the racial others are classified by Darwin’s evolutionary theory. Therefore, the abuse and assault that M’ling undergoes are justified because it is subordinate to humans on the evolutionary ladder. The British masters, like Prendick, Moreau, and Montgomery, are more civilized and intelligent than bestial creatures. However, they are still unable to maintain their sympathy and humanity because the civilization and expansion of their island empire can only be achieved through strict administration and merciless exploitation. That is how they successfully turned “the green stillness” into a self-sufficient island. [1]

Therefore, Moreau is desperate to create an ideal humanized animal. He begins his first attempt with sheep and makes a thing of “pain and fear and [leaves]

it bound up to heal”. [1] Though it looks like a human, it is clumsy and unable to interact with Moreau. The failure of humanizing animals reveals that the “fear-haunted pain-driven” animals who lack courage and pugnacity to face torment are “no good for man-making”. [1] Besides his passion for scientific research, Moreau manufactures humanized animals for a more practical purpose because he intends to utilize the Beast Men as his exclusive labor force that contributes to the island. The dark-skinned M’ling is Moreau’s ideal labor, who is undoubtedly loyal, docile, and obedient to its masters. M’ling not only perfectly fulfills his job as a servant but also has an emotional response like humans. When Moreau is found dead, M’ling becomes rigid and shocked, making a vibrating and “growling noise” to express his sorrow. An ideal laborer is deprived of self-consciousness like M’ling, who follows any orders of his master and even drinks “a dose of raw brandy” at Montgomery’s request. [1]

M’ling is racialized by Moreau as most Beast Men, whose dark complexion impresses Prendick on the ship that transports them to Moreau’s Island. The ship, *Lady Vain*, is loaded with bestial creatures, departing from Africa to Hawaii and transporting them as commodities for sale. Prendick discovers that most of the creatures on board are “black-faced”, grotesque, and wild, just like enslaved Africans. [1] Moreau’s animal transformation plan echoes the Transatlantic slave trade, which consists of purchasing savage animals from Africa, modifying them into human-like creatures, educating and training them to be docile and obedient, and exploiting them for practical and industrial use. As Tyner remarks, Moreau adopts “a modern, industrial technology that reduces non-human bodies into the raw, bloodied materials for the capitalist (re)production of potential labor.” [3] That is to say, the Beast Men on the island are commodified as a labor force that can be randomly purchased and created based on utilitarianism. Their life purpose is to engage in their masters’ industrial processes and scientific projects while serving them with loyalty, tenderness, and care.

### **3. The Monster in *Frankenstein***

#### **3.1. The Creature: The Monster Created by Victor**

There is also a similar manufactured monster in *Frankenstein*. Victor majors in natural philosophy and chemistry and is devoted to experiments that animate lifeless creatures. Victor finally discovers the cause of generating life through his unrelenting examination and analysis. Unlike Moreau’s method of vivisection, Victor chooses to animate the lifeless thing in a chemical way by “infusing a spark of being”. [4] This animation also requires collecting and arranging materials to frame all intricately “fibers, muscles, and veins” together. [4] However, a creepy wretch is created who has “yellow eye”, “yellow skin”, “pearly” white teeth, “lustrous black” hair, “watery eyes”, “straight black lips”, and a “shriveled complexion”. [4] The creature’s “gigantic stature” is proportionally formed so its muscle and joints are able to move. [4] But its massive size further magnifies its deficiencies, which makes it more grotesque. The creature’s horrible appearance

destroys Victor's dream of making a perfect and beautiful being. The miserable monster is so hideous that even "Dante [can] not have conceived". [4] Its appearance is in accordance with the generally perceived monstrous images that are skeleton, horrible, and grotesque. While physically, this monster is also extremely powerful and endowed with "superior" height and more "supple" joints. [4] The monster brutally murders Victor's family and friends, chases him from mountains to glaciers, and burns the cottage that once shelters him. Its ferocious and destructive power allows it to pose a threat and take revenge on anyone it wants, even its creator. Unlike Moreau's absolute control over his Beast Men, Victor is haunted by the monster he created with mixed feelings of anger, fear, detestation, guilt, revenge, and reliance.

### **3.2. The Coexistence Relationship between Victor and His Monster**

Despite its monstrosity, the monster also has a tender and humane side. Victor deserts the monster after it is created. Victor cruelly cuts their physical tie by distancing from the creature. However, the intimate kinship between Victor and his monster is consolidated through their endless entanglement. Victor's laboratory embodies the maternal body that gestates the monster. Therefore, Victor gives birth to the monster in a laboratory experiment instead of a physical womb. Though Victor refuses to admit their father-son relationship, the monster constantly emphasizes that "I am thy creature". [4] The monster blames its loneliness and desolation on Victor's desert because it has no association with any companion or friends. The monster is aware that its deformity and ugliness may scare people away at first sight, but it still strives to establish an intimate relationship with others. Being friendless and exiled, the monster turns to Victor to seek companionship. Although the monster spares no effort to win its creator's fondness, Victor still abhors and spurns it with a determination to annihilate it. The monster harmlessly confesses that its soul is blessed with benevolence and humanity, and it will be "mild and docile to my natural lord and king" if its creator could treat it with love. The monster's essential need is to get connected with the human world, so Victor is its only hope.

Then the creature asks Victor to create a female companion for him, who "must be of the same species, and have the same defects". [4] But Victor refuses his request by arguing that their "joint wickedness might desolate the world". [4] The unfortunate monster is first abandoned by its creator and then detested and expelled by the De Lacy family. Thus, it is disengaged from any possible social relations, being lonely and isolated. As Rauch claims, the monster's demand for a female mate is "merely trying to find a social context for his own". [5] Ideally, the creature fantasizes that they can live together, be attached to each other, and heal their traumas. But the truth is that the monster is isolated by human society, which is also true for Victor himself because he is the mad scientist who generates a monster. Victor is eccentric and lonely when he is young, despite being

accompanied by tender parents and amiable companions. He dedicates himself to scientific research and deprives himself of rest and health once he is engaged in a task. Victor is consciously alienated from his family and friends after he creates the monster, which commences his voyage around the world by himself. Like his monster, Victor is a self-containment and self-contradictory wanderer who enjoys solitude but seeks companionship.

Though Victor sympathizes with the creature because they share the same fate of loneliness, he still cannot trust that the creature will fulfill his promise of leaving Europe once the companion is created. He initially compromises but ends up withdrawing his consent. Brooks remarks that a female monster would be a “substitute for inclusion of the Monster within the human chain”. [6] Requiring this substitute is the monster’s way to win its creator’s attention and recognition. Bernatchez deems the creature as “a metaphor for the dependence of the individual on a community”. [7] Victor has long denied his kinship and resemblances with the monster he created, but they both suffer from loneliness as well as their inborn monstrosity. And it is the frantic monstrosity that leads Victor to create a monster but disassociate it from the community. The destruction of the female mate represents Victor’s self-denial of his monstrosity. Though Victor refuses to admit it, the monster is not only an incarnation of his evil side, a disguise of his crazy scientific pursuit, but a bridge connecting him with the outside world and a confidant who consoles his solitude. To some extent, Victor and his monster establish a coexistence relationship. They are mentally and physically attached to each other, allowing them to find some comfort and companionship in the community they formed. However, Victor and his monster are also antagonized, whose unfortunate fate can only be consummated by annihilating the other. Victor’s death does not satisfy the monster but leaves him with infinite agony, remorse, alienation, and loneliness.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, M’ling in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and the monster in *Frankenstein* are humanlike monsters made by crazy scientists. Though their grotesque appearance and ferocious behaviors may isolate them from the community, they possess humane and benevolent natures like men. However, the men who manufacture the monster are more eccentric and frantically proceed with their horrible scientific pursuits. The definition of a monster is thus blurred, for we can see humanity in monsters while monstrosity in humans. They are mutually dependent but at the same time antagonize each other. In both texts, the relationship between man and monster enlightens us to view humanity from the perspective of the monster. Though these grotesque monsters are created to serve their eccentric creators, they are docile, disciplined, and loyal to their masters. Their creators, however, greedily exploit and oppress the monsters as their own property, neglecting their needs and merits. M’ling and the creature are monstrous and repugnant, but they also provide another lens for us to view hu-

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manity, which does not only exist in humans but in monsters.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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