

THE THEME OF ISOLATION IN MARY SHELLEY’S *FRANKENSTEIN**Fatmanur Sılığ**

The concept of isolation has been an important issue in human history whether the person wants isolation or the one who has been isolated by other people around. Being isolated from society is described as one of the worst feelings that one can experience by some authors. In some literary works there can be found the theme of isolation in many different ways. However, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* gives a fascinating insight into the very idea of isolation depending on the creature’s looks. It can be said that it is one of the finest books which deals with this subject of isolation thoroughly. This paper will show how human prejudice can lead to the isolation of indeed an innocent creature.

Isolation can be defined as not having someone to talk and share, and as a result of this feeling all alone in an enormous world. Being an outcast deeply affects a person’s actions and this can lead the way in even becoming a criminal. Shelley perfectly describes this situation in her novel *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein, the novel’s protagonist, did a hazardous experiment and somehow brought dead back to life. The creature that he created was so hideous that is why he run away from it. He becomes the first person to leave him all alone. Even though Victor created him, the second he sees creature’s figure, he immediately abandons him. After this, the book tells the creature’s struggles to find his own identity and place in a world which he has been given. Without knowing anything about the mad cruel world, the creature goes out but every single person he encountered treated him dreadfully. He became an outcast just because of his ugly look. “Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded.” (Shelley, 1994, p. 69) From this excerpt it is crystal clear that the creature had been isolated by people wherever he went. The feeling of being like a vicious demon was caused by society’s wrongdoings towards him. The only fault he had was to be egregiously ugly. Even though he did not do anything to hurt someone, people felt threatened by his looks and they harassed him as much as they wanted. Dan Brown (2013) said that, “the worst kind of loneliness in the world is the isolation that comes from being misunderstood, it can make people lose their grasp on reality” (p. 449). Eventually it all comes down to one thing: the creature was misunderstood. Victor Frankenstein, his creator, and all the

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other people he encountered, no one actually tried to understand him. “Shelley's consideration of species difference addresses the opposition between embodiedness and abstraction in Smith's moral philosophy: although his imagination brings sympathy within his grasp, the monster's hideous body consistently precludes sympathetic experience.” (Britton, 2009, p. 4) So the only hindrance to understand the creature was his ill-favoured appearance. The condition of his body obviously made other people to be indifferent to creature's actual identity.

The creature feels awful about himself, later learning how to speak and write makes him realize the fact that his creator left him all alone. “Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was.” (Shelley, 1994, p. 93) At first, he did not fully grasp the fact he was an isolated figure in society. However, after reading books he was able to see the truth. Later, he becomes furious and wants retaliation. As a revenge he kills Victor's little brother. The isolation that people forced on him actually becomes his downfall. At first, he did not have a clue about what was going on, why all the people were so rude to him. “Frankenstein's monster has only the impulses of his nature—which are, to start with, absolutely good.” (Millhauser, 1946, p. 250) It is obvious that initially he was not the bad guy everyone was so scared, he was pure. “I will revenge my injuries; if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear, and chiefly towards you my archenemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred.” (Shelley, 1994, p. 104) This quotation clearly states that he had love, but no one gave him a chance to express it. Which is why he turned to violence and took revenge. Would everything be different if Victor did not leave him in the first place? Also does it really make sense to blame Victor for everything happened? What about other people who were so prejudice that they did not even try to understand what kind of a person he is. Maybe the problem was they did not see him as a human being, they labelled him as a monster solely based on his problematic appearance.

Throughout the novel the creature was always alone, on his own and no one ever wanted to interact with him. Also, he is always mentioned as ‘the Creature’ or ‘Frankenstein's Monster’. This can be used as proof for his ultimate loneliness that he did not even had a proper name. This particular detail alone itself reveals so much about his separation from society. “Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred.” (Shelley, 1994, p. 93) In this occasion he sees himself lower than Satan, regarding the issue of having no one to talk to. It can be said that he is one of a kind, but in a negative context.

After Frankenstein completed his creation, he describes him as:

His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley, 1994, p. 35)

This horrible looking face combined with 8-foot-tall body. Thus, his look scared people away. The negative attitude of all the people made him so lonely, he was brutally discriminated from society. When the creature was trying to help a drowning woman, a man misinterpreted his actions and because of his horrible appearance he shot him. After all these incidents, he just could not take it anymore and he went to Frankenstein saying: “You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being.” (Shelley, 1994, p. 104) Acknowledgement of this inhumane phenomenon makes him desperate and he wishes a female version himself. This way he thinks he will not be alone anymore. However, while in the process of making the bride Frankenstein destroys the body and kills the last hope of the creature.

From being clueless about everything to being a merciless monster is the result of being separated from society. It is not true to blame just only society for this outcome. However, society’s contribution is non-negotiable. If only one person had helped him, he could be completely different. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem, *The Dungeon*, he states:

*“And this place our forefathers made for man!
This is the process of our love and wisdom,
To each poor brother who offends against us”* (2003, p. 234)

In this poem Coleridge criticizes the idea of prison and this is because he claims that as a society, we made those criminals, we shaped their identity as evil people. So, it is obvious that society plays a major role in the severe transition of the character. By isolating them from society and treating them badly will affect their personality in an awful way.

In conclusion, the idea of isolation is one of the most salient concern for human beings. This ‘being an isolated person’ can actually pave the way to something crucial such as being a criminal. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, this issue is deeply covered. How society’s biased opinion on a person’s character shapes his identity is a significant theme in the novel. This biased and awful opinion is constructed only depending on the creature’s natural appearance.

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