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# The Nobility of the Heart: Comparative study between the Creature in Frankenstein and Quasimodo in Notre Dame.

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## ABSTRACT

*Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, the most successful novel written by Mary Shelley was published in 1818 in England and some years later, in 1831, Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame* was published in France. As products of the Romanticism, the English and the French, they have certain common traits. This essay aims to analyze the similarities between the two novels in terms of their origins, themes characters and trace a common pattern that interconnects them by analyzing their cultural and philosophical background.

Key Words: Frankenstein, monster, Notre Dame, Romanticism.

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## Introduction:

*Notre Dame* and *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* were written in France and England respectively, during the Romantic Period. This essay attempts to do a comparative analysis between the two novels in terms of themes and characters focusing especially on the corruption of the figure of the noble savage incarnated by the Quasimodo and Frankenstein's creature, which is motivated by the rejection and indifference of their paternal figures, Frollo and Victor who embed the values of the 19<sup>th</sup> century society.

The essay will be divided in different sections; the first one will look at the literary precedents of both novels, focusing on the cradle of Occidental Literature, the Greek tragedy of passions and the myth of Prometheus which has parallelisms especially with *Frankenstein*. Then, the origin of both novels as romantic products, alongside with the concept of monstrosity will be analysed, as well as the topic of beauty and the beast, remarkable in both novels.

The themes have been analysed by doing an exhaustive reading of the two novels, looking for the common traits and an occidental literary background provided by philosophical theories and Ancient cultural values that allow an interconnection among them.

## The Origin of the Novels and their literary precedents.

Occidental literary productions' patterns, in this particular case *Frankenstein* and *Notre Dame* are rooted in Classical culture. Many of the themes present in Romantic Literature focus on human as an emotional being and evoke some values present in the Ancient Greek tragedies. The characteristics of both novels resemble to the tragedy of passions, inspired by many of Euripides' works. Taking into account the way in which the characters of both novels act in relation to themselves and the others, led by their feelings and impulsively, it is remarkable the resemblance to those of Euripides' works.

According to Jacqueline De Romilly Euripides was the first one to create "heroes víctimas de todas las debilidades humanas: algunos obedecen a sus pasiones, y este dominio de la pasión se describe con realismo; otros ceden a su interés y son mediocres. De todas maneras, no nos deja que ignoremos nada de lo que les pasa y podría pasar en cualquier ser humano." (De Romilly 129, 2019)

This assumption is basic to understand the plot of both novels and characters in Romantic Literature in general, but specifically the ones that Hugo and Shelley present in their novels. There is a focus on the emotions and instincts of the characters which overcome reason and even nullify it, leading to a bitter-sweet ending. As Romantic products encompassed in universal literature, it is pretty clear that they nourish themselves from this specific kind of tragedies, which put at stake the integrity and the idea of human as a perfect being subject to the dictums of reason.

The authors recover this imperfection and vulnerability of humanity; the characters are preyed upon their own emotions such as love, hate, vanity... and the subsequent inner conflicts that reason cannot solve out. There is pursuit of self-knowledge by remarking this emotional behaviour out of the pragmatism imposed by reason, and an invitation to introspection and understanding of what really means to be human, putting the individual's feelings at the core of the novels.

In terms of context, historical events such as the French Revolution had dehumanized Europe and led to war and devastated France and the rest of Europe, on the one hand, Victor Hugo was concerned with the devastating consequences of the Revolution and the subsequent corruption of society that had plunged France in one of its' obscure periods, and this dark vision and contempt towards anything that was different seemed to have nested in the heart of the French society, but it was a time of change, so a change in society, politics, and humanity was required.

Mary Shelley on the other hand, was sceptic about the excessive reliance on reason that many scientists had and her work is no less but a direct critique to the unconsciousness and vanity of one's actions incarnated in Victor, who, by relying on reason excessively dares to defy God's powers and will, as Prometheus, the first man, did in Greek mythology. "la novela de Mary Shelley se ha convertido así en el paradigma de todo empeño científico de dominar los poderes incontrolables de la naturaleza y las consecuencias imprevistas que esas iniciativas han tenido" (Mellor, Anne 316, 2017)

This despondency and harshness of a world which seemed to have forgotten the the ability of humans to feel or think from an imperfect and moral perspective instead of that of "divine" or "omnipotent" which was believed to be granted by reason is reflected

in both novels. This imperative of knowing oneself, could either lead to virtue or to moral perversion and this is seen in both novels through the opposition of fathers-sons.

In the case of the French novel, according to Umberto Eco: “Victor Hugo reconstruye una Edad Media oscura y pintoresca en la cual se desarrolla una trama de amor y muerte en lo que lo sublime y lo grotesco se mezclan según los típicos dictámenes del romanticismo” (Eco 53, 2017). The core and scenario of the novel is the gothic Cathedral of Notre Dame and the aim of the novel is to portray the view that the author had of Parisian society through the eyes of a Gothic monument identified with Quasimodo, a deformed hunchback, defined as the personification or “incrustation” of the cathedral who was locked in it and condemned to see the freedom of the people of Paris, while he is flanked by the cleric Frollo, the dichotomy between goodness and wickedness is incarnated by Quasimodo and Frollo while in *Frankenstein* the romantic dimension is marked by the gothic genre and clearly forged through the horror of its plot but at the core of the novel there is also this dichotomy between the creature and Victor whose pride and vanity create a monster who does not know how to cope with a world and a paternal figure that constantly reject him. The gothic dimension lays not so much in the stories *per se*, even if both have death as one of the central themes or obscure elements such as the cathedral, but in Hugo and Shelley’s use of imagination to link them to the conflicts and wrongs of their current times.

Hugo’s novel is an excellent example of the need that romantics had for creating parallel realities through imagination and sensitivity without evading reality. The book owes its origins to a Greek word written in the walls of the Cathedral. The word is Ἀνάγκη, which means “tragic destiny” and caught the attention of Hugo. From this point onwards, and as the author wrote in the Preface, he started imagining the story of the wretched being who could have written that chilling word on the walls of the cathedral. According to him, the letters had a gothic shaped style and could have been written in the Middle Ages. Therefore, the novel was process of imagining and creating a possible story of the man who wrote that inscription.

This “fatum” was a common element in Greek tragedies and myths, since the first moment, heroes and Gods were born they were marked by their destiny, and this fact was closely related with the succession of events that led to a fatal destiny for many of the characters. In a fragment of his personal notes Hugo wrote:

“La Fatalidad, que los antiguos clasificaban de ciega, ve claro y razona. Los acontecimientos se siguen, se encadenan, y se deduce en la historia con una lógica que espanta. Colocándose a cierta distancia se pueden aprender todas sus demostraciones en sus rigurosas y colosales proporciones y la razón humana rompe su corta medida ante estos grandes silogismos del destino.” (Hugo 80, 2015)

Therefore, according to the author, this fatality is not trivial as the Greeks thought and there is nothing that human reason can do to escape from destiny.

This scepticism towards reason is present in both novels and in none of them rationality prevails in the characters’ minds, instead they are guided and even blinded by impulses and emotions and this fact would explain the cyclical dimension of history and of literary dramas since the first occidental literary products.

Then and turning back to the origins of Occidental Literature, it is not strange to find out the parallelism between Frankenstein and Prometheus, and that the original title of the novel is *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. Prometheus’ myth is tragic. He was the first man created by the Gods, modelled by Hephaestus from mud and given reason and intelligence by Athena. But he tried to defy the Gods by stealing the fire from them and Zeus, punished his vanity by chaining him to a mountain and sending an eagle to devour his liver every night. In Greek mythology many characters punished by the Gods succumb to hybris or vanity, they believe that they can fool or be better than the gods and it is precisely what happens with Victor, his vanity creates a monster that will punish him for his indifference, vanity and self-pride.

What the creature demands is love and what Victor can give is just ignorance in that aspect because he has always been governed by reason, he knows nothing about love or compassion. However, unlike Zeus, who in spite of being the God of Gods is also portrayed as imperfect as humans, Victor cannot control his creature, because he is just a human even if he had thought that he himself was a God. And in *Notre Dame*, to such an extent, there is also this boundary of father-son, defined by the disparagement of Frollo to Quasimodo but it is even more tragic, because, Frollo does not love Quasimodo, he just pretends to love the poor wretched and as Victor, he does not know anything about love or compassion, there is a chapter in which Quasimodo is tied and flagellated in the middle of the square and Frollo ignores his pleas and suffering, this



image also resembles to Prometheus chained to the mountain and tortured by the eagle. Therefore, both stories have echoes and parallels of the myth.

Focusing on the origins of *Frankenstein* it is worth mentioning that it is a product of a dream that a young girl had. Daughter of two revolutionary thinkers, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft and wife of Percy Shelley, she always felt isolated, her mother died after giving birth to her, so she grew up without a maternal figure and she lost a baby, these two events marked her personal life. One day, she had a dream which awoke certain concerns about her own pregnancy, she imagined that she was giving birth to a monster and she wondered whether if she could end up killing her own son, and according to Mellor she translated to her imaginary, those personal fears and worries produced by the lack of maternal love and external appearance. (Mellor, Ann 317, 2017) and this is completely perceivable in the novel. Abandonment, death, excessive reliance on reason, lack of love and a parental figure are some of the events that marked her and forged the novel.

Both novels, indirectly criticized the 19<sup>th</sup> century French society and 19<sup>th</sup> century English society and become social critiques.

In essence, the contempt towards the different, the pride of the intellectual elite, as well as the people and their indifference towards the threat that the blindness of scientists and reliance on the excessive pride and reason, which induced them to defy the nature laws and the power of creation exclusive of God in *Frankenstein*, the corruption of the clergy and the degeneration that art and architecture experienced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Paris, in contrast with the status that they used to have during the Medieval Ages depicted in *Notre Dame*, the goodness of the heart inherent in the romantic figure of the Noble Savage and the corruption of these feelings inducted by society alongside with the gothic elements turns both novels into masterpieces of the romantic literature.

## Romantic Novels and the conception of Monstrousness.

One of the main elements that enables to classify both novels as Romantic works are two of their main characters: Quasimodo and the creature of Frankenstein are, on the one hand, defined as monsters but on the other, as many romantic characters, their actions and emotions depict a humanized image of them to the readers. Both possess

consciousness of their “ethos” or identity but experience a rejection from society. In this section, two traits will be analyzed: The definition of monster as somebody uncompleted or with some physical and psychical defect and the original definition that the word had in Latin, in order to determine their nature and the relevance in both novels.

According to Maienchein and MacCord in the essay “Concepciones cambiantes de la Naturaleza humana” in which they explore the human nature of the character’s in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, they refer to Aristotle to deny that the creature in *Frankenstein* should be considered a human:

“Un humano según Aristóteles es un ser de tipo humano. Es una criatura que ha conseguido la forma debida y ha seguido el curso de desarrollo apropiado (tanto física como racional/emocionalmente) para el tipo humano. Así la criatura según Aristóteles la creación de Victor Frankenstein no puede considerarse humano.” (Shelley, 2013)

Therefore if a monster is a creature that has not been properly developed psychically and physically both characters are indeed “monsters”. On the one hand Frankenstein’s creature is a “collage monster”, meaning that he has been created from the attachment of different body parts from corpses. This fact gives him many physical defects in the sense that he is not fully himself. As a creation, born from Victor’s blindness and avarice, he is not able to control his emotions, he is abandoned and neglected so neither physically nor emotionally, can he be fully considered human.

Quasimodo, on the other hand is described as a cyclop (Hugo 98,2013) who was an anthropomorphic figure of the Greek mythology with just one eye. Cyclops as mythical human-shaped beings, according to classical tradition and alongside with others such as the moirae, are classified as monsters. However, and even if this creature inspired Hugo to create Quasimodo, he has even more physical defects than a cyclop, he is deaf due to the sound of the bells and Hugo describes him this way:

“Mas bien toda su persona era pura mueca, Una enorme cabeza erizada de pelos rojizos y una gran joroba entre los hombros que se proyectaba incluso hasta el pecho. Tenía una combinación de muslos y piernas tan extravagante que solo se tocaban en las rodillas y por si no bastaran todas esas deformidades, tenía también un aspecto de vigor y agilidad casi temibles, era, en fin, algo así como una excepción a la regla general, que supone que tanto la belleza como la fuerza deben ser el resultado de la armonía”. (Hugo 98,2013)

He is grotesque, physically and he is also hidden in the cathedral and neglected, he has emotions but he doesn't know how to manage them properly, the love for Esmeralda turns into rage against his master as it also happens with the creature of Frankenstein who ends up demanding someone like him. And it will be precisely this condition, the whirlwind of human emotions alongside with their physical defects that will classify them as monsters.

### Humanized Monsters: Matriarchal Products

Romantic authors were prone on seeing the beauty beyond the form; even the ugliest and fearful being could be beautiful, as it is seen with Quasimodo and the creature. The feeling of horror awoke fascination and this fascination was transformed into sublimity, a way of understanding or seeing beauty towards elements such as darkness, death, creepiness, mystery and monsters. That is among other characteristics what the gothic genre entails. *Frankenstein* is one of the works that belongs to it as it was created from Mary Shelley's nightmare and contains many gothic elements, a laboratory, death, a scientist who loses his reason, electricity, dead corpses sewed up together to create a human like being... but from this parallel reality or dream and the horror that it entails, Mary Shelley criticises the excessive pride of scientists, the vindication of her belief that only God can give and take life, the lack of tolerance and acceptance towards the different, the long for love of an innocent creature and Frankenstein's attitude towards his creation.

*Notre Dame* however, is more realistic; in a sense that it comes from the imagination of Victor Hugo but does not have this horrific dimension and the idea of resurrecting a dead being, although death is also present. It could be argued that the Cathedral is a Gothic scenario as well as the grotesqueness of Quasimodo's aspect but as it has been mentioned before, that it is part of the excessiveness of Victor Hugo's writing style. When reading it, one does not get the feeling of horror as it happens with *Frankenstein*, one rather feels pity for the hunchback and the way he is treated. It is not Quasimodo who is criticised, Hugo reflects through him, the lack of tolerance and the cruelty of society towards somebody like him as well as towards the architecture, the desire of being loved no matter what one's physical aspect is, the dehumanization of society and the nobility of a soul confined in a ugly body.

Both are parallel characters, created to show not just the struggling of the different, but the wrongs of society as well, the attitude of people towards the otherness and the dehumanization of society. Then, if this theme is one of the central in both works and they are noble at heart and innocent, according to Claudio Naranjo, it could be stated that both novels according to their main characters and their characterization are “matriarchal” books.

“El tema central: el choque de la sabiduría intrínseca de niño con la ignorancia prejuiciosa del mundo de los “adultos”. (es decir, “la sociedad”) Mientras que en los libros patriarcales la sabiduría se asocia a la edad (i.e “el viejo sabio”) para la mente matriarcal, la sabiduría es una cualidad innata antes que adquirida; nace con toda pureza en el niño, que luego olvida. (Naranjo 2014, 40)

Both are like divine kids, they are pure, innocent and kind of childish in need of a parent, the goodness and hope is reflected on them, who despite of their physical aspect; prove to be more human than any other character in the story, thanks to their nobility which at the same time, counterpoises them with Frollo and Frankenstein, basically due to their physic or “what the human eye perceives”. That façade or mask embodied by their physical appearance, is what gives them on the one hand, the category of monsters, unnatural beings, outcasts, but on the other, and deep inside, when analysing their characterization, they possess something that goes beyond their physical aspect and moves them closer to the humankind; the nobility of the heart, a kind of innocence and the longing for love, which is precisely what romantic writers, though their sensitivity perceived. But this goodness, if ignored by the rest, is a double-edged sword, it vanishes when they are abandoned with no love and no consideration, they can react in a violent way. His rage turns them into authentic monsters, and the tragedy and fatality take ownership of their history and destiny.

### The Creature and Quasimodo: The opposition of Victor and Frollo.

The core of this essay focuses on the imaginary part and the values that characters incarnate the themes and the plot. These elements are interrelated and they easily reflect especially in the hunchback and the Creature, the goodness and the hope, in which Mary Shelley and Victor Hugo believed. This belief comes from a philosophical theory proposed by the French philosopher Rousseau and it is present in

many romantic writings and characters. He suggested that goodness is inherent in any human being, but it is corrupted by society and this philosophical theory, leads to another literary topic common in Romantic Literature, the noble savage, which refers to the inner goodness of an individual who has not been corrupted by society, the child or innocent being described by Naranjo. At least, at the beginning of the novels, both will be seen as the paradigm of the noble savage in opposition to Frankenstein and Frodo.

Focusing on this topic and the portrayal of both characters at the beginning, they have a golden heart; they are sensitive and just long for affection and love but at the same time are rejected by the society. As Rousseau explained, there is a transition and corruption of their goodness, they undergo a transformation from goodness to evilness due to the rejection, mistreatment and lack of understanding that they suffer from society. Society from his incomprehensive point of view corrupts their pureness and innocence and that causes alienation and the feeling of abandonment. There is a quote in *Frankenstein* that the creature, after being rejected, beaten and isolated tells to his master and depicts this corruption. “Soy malvado por qué soy desgraciado. ¿ O no me odia toda la humanidad? Vos, mi creador, me destrozaría en mil pedazos y os alegraría de semejante triunfo.” (Shelley 185, 2017) the creature is giving the reason of his evilness and corruption, the rejection of humanity and his master. He also says “Vengaré mis sufrimientos; si no puedo inspirar amor, causaré terror; y principalmente a vos, mi enemigo supremo por qué sois mi creador, os he jurado odio eterno.” (Shelley 185,2017)

It is not coincidence that at one point of the novels, their physical monstrousness turns into psychological. In the literary classics, due to their universality, these dysfunctional characters abound and have a specific purpose. Provided that monsters are dysfunctional, according to Margolis and Saphiro: “the disabled characters in classic literature are allegories of our times” and “classical literature transmits values, teaches in form of allegory and provides models for identification and behaviour” Margolis and Saphiro (18, 1997) and as imperfect human beings anyone can succumb to the most violent and primary emotions such as rage, vengeance and frustration, these characters represent humanity at its most primary stage, as a cumulus of emotions and imperfections.

The fact that they are marginalized and present certain physical disabilities, allow identification with the reader, who can have emotional or physical scarcities. It is part of human's imperfection. They both become romantic heroes, they suffer with impotence and resignation the mistreatment and prejudices of people and the abandonment of their own "fathers" who are presented as their opposite, rational, machiavellic beings deprived of love and empathy towards them. In a certain way, Frollo and Victor are a reflection of the corrupted 19<sup>th</sup> century society, and they also have emotional scarcities, they cannot take responsibility and show love towards their sons, so in a way, they are also monsters.

The emotions of these four characters, grant them an "ethos", and this "ethos" or own personality allows the establishment of a connection and identification of the reader with them. The transition from goodness to evilness culminates when "the monsters" release themselves from their "fathers" and destroy them as revenge with sorrow and fault.

### The Beauty and the Beast: physical opposition.

Another remarkable theme of these novels is love, which is portrayed as an overwhelming emotion with terrible consequences. Provided that there are two "monsters", it is logical that they fall in love with beautiful women. This attraction towards two young, beautiful women, who are the opposite of them, is known in literature as the Beauty and the Beast topic which marks the fatum of some characters.

In *Frankenstein* the corruption of a pure soul is more evident, and in opposition to the creature, the beauty is incarnated by Elizabeth, Victor's bride. However, this beauty also undergoes a transition, provided that the monster demands an alike female being externally and internally so he is demanding a monster, and imitating Victor's blindness towards the other, because he is not willing to accept Victor's rejection. When Victor breaks his promise, Elizabeth is chosen to be the monster's girlfriend and the target of his rage, she is killed by the creature, and this fact obliges Victor to bring her to live again as a monster.

There is a love triangle here but it is not as remarkable as the one in *Notre Dame*, because *Frankenstein* is more focused on the relation creator-creature and the

fusion of emotions between them. Elizabeth seems to be a collateral damage, a mean that the creature uses to take revenge on Victor.

However, in *Notre Dame*, Esmeralda, has a central role, because many of the events in the novel and actions of the masculine characters are induced because of her existence. The opposition of characters, a beautiful, young woman, kidnapped by an ugly and monstrous creature avid for an overflowing emotion such as love which turns into revenge against a third male is the culmination of fatality.

In *Notre Dame*, the hunchback tries to kidnap her when his master, Frollo asks him so. But he does it in order to please his master. However, once he is accused and punished for his crime, lashed in the middle of the square, he realizes about his “father’s” indifference towards him but due to his innate goodness, he assumes that he deserved the punishment for having abandoned the Cathedral. The central theme of the novel is love in all its possible forms which is common in Victor Hugo’s novels. The love triangle established between Esmeralda who loves Phoebus, but he does not love her back, Frollo’s sickly and obsessive love for Esmeralda, and Quasimodo’s love divided between his paternal figure and the girl ends up taking the life of the three of them. Frollo is killed by Quasimodo, when he realizes that Frollo has condemned Esmeralda to death, she dies tragically on the gallows and several years later, the people of Paris discover two skeletons lying together one of them is deformed with what seems to be a hump and this one, disappears in the wind.

One of the main differences of the role of the beauty in both novels is the physical transformation that Elisabeth undergoes in *Frankenstein*. She is killed by the creature and she is then transformed physically into a beast or monster to be alike his murderer. But she doesn’t recognize herself; she turns to life to discover that she has been transformed into a beast. She cannot understand it; she cannot recognize herself and decides to kill herself. She is physically turned into a monster, but her heart and inner self, is kind and pure and it is still human.

Esmeralda, however, doesn’t lose her beauty, neither the inner nor the external. At the external level, Quasimodo is his opposite but both possess a golden heart, her opposition at the inner level is Frollo. His obsession with her, the lust and blindness turn him into a beast who tries either to possess her or to kill her. So there are two different beasts in contrast to a beauty. It is remarkable the fact that he is a cleric, and apparently

and according to the catholic doctrine and laws he should act in a kind and moral way but that is not seen when analyzing the character. As it has been mentioned the novels are a critique to the wrongs of the époque, and one of them was the corruption and hypocrisy of the institution of the church in *Notre Dame*.

In *Frankenstein*, Victor, is blinded by his pride and excess belief in reason, and tried to defy the laws of nature and God in order to create life from death, creating the creature, a horrific creature with emotions and feelings, but he does not take that into account his indifference towards the creature and the creature's revenge on them, merge the two characters into one fearful being.

### Conclusions:

To sum up the whole essay, there is a clear intention of both authors of turning the tables to prove that monstrosity can either be internal or external and that even though, since the Ancient Greece, a monster has been defined as somebody who is physically or psychically uncompleted, the depravity of vital emotions such as love which should be inherent in a paternal figure can be devastating and that attitude tormented Mary Shelley and Victor Hugo, at a personal and social level.

The physical incompleteness tends to be judged at a superficially. However, the authentic monstrosity is the one that is not seen physically but it is hidden in actions induced by an excessive reliance on reason and the exile of emotions from one self as it happens with Frollo and Victor Frankenstein, a cleric and a scientist, two of the most intellectual figures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The story of the beauty and the beast, helps to see the authentic nature of these monsters full of physical deformations. The feminine characters become victims of Victor's and Frollo's actions and incarnate what Quasimodo and the creature long for, love and affection which is what their fathers have not given them and seem to lack.

However, love, if not controlled properly is a double edged sword and can have tragic consequences. Therefore, there is a critique to excessive emotionality and excessive reason, monstrosity in humans is defined by imperfection and the inability to think of the consequences of their actions, especially when they affect other human beings.



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