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THE JOURNEY OF THE DOUBLE IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*¹

EL VIAJE DEL DOBLE EN *FRANKENSTEIN* DE MARY SHELLEY

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ABSTRACT

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, often classified as a Gothic and science fiction novel, also embodies the essence of a travel book. The novel takes readers on a journey across various European countries, from Milan to the Arctic, as its characters constantly move from one place to another. Travel literature played a significant role during the Romantic era, representing a quest for self-discovery and a connection between external landscapes and internal emotions. Shelley's own travels to Central Europe served as inspiration for the novel's itinerary. This article explores the intertwined themes of travel, identity, and the doppelgänger in *Frankenstein*, emphasizing the constant pursuit and evasion between Victor Frankenstein and his monstrous creation. Through a Freudian lens of "the double", the author examines the notion of the double and its impact on the characters' journeys, revealing the inherent struggle for self-acceptance and the exploration of the repressed self.

KEYWORD: Frankenstein, Gothic Novel, Travel Literature.

RESUMEN

Frankenstein de Mary Shelley, clasificado a menudo como una novela gótica y de ciencia ficción, encarna también la esencia de un libro de viajes. La novela lleva a los lectores en un viaje a través de varios países europeos, desde Milán hasta el Ártico, mientras sus personajes se mueven constantemente de un lugar a otro. La literatura de viajes desempeñó un papel significativo durante la era romántica, representando una búsqueda de autodescubrimiento y una conexión entre los paisajes externos y las emociones internas. Los propios viajes de Shelley a Europa Central sirvieron de inspiración para el itinerario de la novela. Este artículo explora los temas entrelazados del viaje, la identidad y el doble en *Frankenstein*, enfatizando la constante persecución y evasión entre Victor Frankenstein y su monstruosa creación. A través de la mirada freudiana del "doble", el autor examina la noción del doble y su impacto

¹ Fecha envío: diciembre 2022. Fecha aceptación: enero 2023.

en los viajes de los personajes, revelando la lucha inherente por la aceptación de uno mismo y la exploración del yo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Frankenstein, NovelagGótica, Literatura de viajes.

THE INNER TRAVEL

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* not only belongs to the Gothic and science fiction genres, but also, hiding beneath both, is a travel book. From Milan, where Victor Frankenstein was born, to the Arctic, where he died, the novel barely keeps its protagonists for a few months in the same place, and through its pages one travels across most of Continental Europe (Italy, France, Germany and the Netherlands), Great Britain, Ireland and the distant lands of Russia.

Travel literature occupied a central role in the Romantic Movement. Traveling during the Romantic era, known as "The Great Tour," held immense importance. Romanticism celebrated the connection between external landscapes and internal emotions. Immersion in awe-inspiring natural environments awakened profound feelings and a sense of the sublime. Travel broadened horizons, offering encounters with diverse cultures and traditions, challenging preconceived notions, and expanding knowledge. It symbolized both an external and internal journey of self-discovery, enabling individuals to break free from societal constraints and explore their authentic selves. Travel literature further popularized the wonders of distant lands, inspiring readers and fostering national identity. The Romantics sought inspiration, perspective, and a deeper understanding of the world and themselves through travel. It was a transformative experience that embraced the power of nature, the awe of the sublime, and the limitless possibilities of exploration.

The itinerary in the novel is a reproduction of the trips that Mary, Percy and her step-sister took to Central Europe in 1814 and in 1816 –this being the trip during which they spent that famous evening with Lord Byron and Dr. John Polidori, in which Mary conceived the idea of a being created with human members. Upon her return to London, she edited the diary of her travels together with a number of letters and a poem by Percy while at the same time she wrote *Frankenstein*. The travel book was published in 1917 as *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, whereas the gothic novel came out at the beginning of the following year. It seems to me that the two books have more in common than the mere use of similar locations.

The relation between the journey and fiction has been present almost since the origin of this form of art (the *Odyssey* is undoubtedly behind most of the tradition in European literature), to such an extent that the two have been considered synonymous of one another. In Michel Butor's words, "to travel, at least in a certain manner, is to write (first of all because to travel is to read), and to write is to travel"². Every narrative requires a causality of events, in the same way that a journey is a sequence of places. In the tension between sequence and consequence (temporal and spatial evolution), the story is built, as Bakhtin correctly pointed out in his definition of chronotope.

Bakhtin's concept of chronotope refers to the fundamental unit of analysis in the study of literary texts, encompassing the inseparable interplay between space and time. According to Bakhtin, every literary work constructs a unique chronotope, where the temporal and spatial dimensions mutually shape and define one another³. The chronotope not only influences the plot and setting of a narrative but also deeply impacts the characterization, dialogue, and overall meaning of the text.

The theme of the voyage has also had an important relation with the search for identity. Expressions like "journey of self-discovery" or "the life journey" are commonly used and there exist numerous contemporary literary examples of that relation: *Sidhartha* by Herman Hesse, *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, and several of Cormac McCarthy's novels can be evoked amongst many others.

With this premise in mind, linked to the romantic meaning of the journey as an assimilation of experiences, it is not too far-fetched to consider that the constant changes of location made by Victor Frankenstein throughout the pages of the book had more significance than that of providing agility to the narration or of taking advantage of the knowledge of those locations to provide the story with an exotic context for the English reader. What I would like to suggest is that this tension between time and space that I just alluded to has, in this novel, a function of searching for one's own identity, albeit not in the typical way, because Victor, as we know, is never alone.

² Kai MIKKONEN, "The 'Narrative Is Travel' Metaphor: Between Spatial Sequence and Open Consequence", *Narrative*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2007) pp. 286-305, p. 289.

³ Mikhail M. BAKHTIN "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notestoward a Historical Poetics". *Mikhail M. Bakhtin. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 284-258.

THE DOUBLE

The confusion that exists in popular culture between the name of the creator and that of the created one (Victor and his creature), seems to me to reveal more than the mere fact that the creature does not have a name of its own (which is nevertheless in itself revealing). There is an identification between both characters that goes far beyond the “family” relationship they have.

Much has been written about the interpretation of the monster as the “double” or *Doppelgänger* of Victor: being “a mirroring or duality of a character’s person, the concept of the doppelgänger refers to the twin, shadow double, demon double, and split personality, all common characterizations in world folklore”⁴. The figure of the double acquired significant importance in subsequent Gothic literature, with such well known examples as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

*The Gothic’s use of doubling is a clear indication of the internalisation of ‘evil’. Indeed in the new, predominantly secularised context of the mid- to late nineteenth-century Gothic, ‘evil’ seems a misnomer because such ‘inner’ narratives can be explained in psychological and social, rather than strictly theological, terms*⁵.

The feeling of strangeness produced by the double was thoroughly analyzed in Freud’s well-known text, *The Uncanny*, and I believe it is perfectly applicable in the case of *Frankenstein*. According to the father of psychoanalysis, the double represents the sinister, or *unheimlich* in German. Freud explains the construction of the word: the negation -expressed in the prefix “un”- of the familiar, or *heimlich*, is perfectly reflected in the title itself: “It may be true that the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition”⁶. The idea of negation that is contained in the word is intimately opposed to the unconscious, which is by definition unfamiliar with “no”. Thus:

⁴ Mary Ellen SNODGRASS, *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature*, Facts On File, New York, 2005, p. 83.

⁵ Andrew SMITH, *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007, p. 94.

⁶ Sigmund FREUD, “The Uncanny”, in David Sandner, *Fantastic Literature: a Critical Reader*, Praeger, Westport, 2004, pp. 74-101, p. 94.

The “return of the repressed” which, according to Freud, is one of the characteristics of the Doppelgänger, may then be paraphrased as the “return of negation.” These are the confrontations, in consciousness, of what the unconscious cannot deny⁷.

The result, in the novel, is the physically monstrous being embodied by the creature:

The monster is what embodies otherness in the extreme. It comprises the other side of what we are. The monster is an abject which has helped us to delineate the boundary of the self, by making itself repulsive to us. That may be the reason we cannot look away from it, however horrible it might be. The monster is part of us, a horrible image of ourselves with which our narcissistic self is enamored. Monsters are our kin, horrible but fascinating. It is this kinship between us and monsters that continuously allures us towards them. We try not to recognize them as ourselves, and just look away and flee from them, and try to forget about them⁸.

The structure of the novel has been described as a constant pursuit between the persecutor and the persecuted. Those two roles explain the nature of the journeys that fill the book and the relationship between Frankenstein and the monster:

If we can visualise this pattern of pursuit as a sort of figure-of-eight macaberesque—executed by two partners moving with the virtuosity of skilled ice-skaters—we may see how the pattern takes shape in a movement of advance and retreat. Both partners are moving in opposite directions, yet one follows the other. At the crossing of the figure eight they all but collide. Such a crossing occurs when Frankenstein faces his Monster alone in the mountains, and another, when Frankenstein makes his critical decision to destroy his nearly completed female Monster. Once these crises are passed, however, we find Frankenstein and the Monster moving apparently away from each other, but still prosecuting the course of their pattern. It is not until Frankenstein, on his bridal night, finds his wife murdered by the Monster that the roles are reversed. Frankenstein (to keep our image) increases his speed of execution,

⁷ Dimitris VARDOULAKIS, “The Return of Negation: The Doppelgänger in Freud’s “The ‘Uncanny’”, *SubStance*, 35, 2 (2006), pp. 100-116, p. 102.

⁸ Heonjoo SOHN, “Monsters in the Mirror: Frankenstein’s Monster at the Dawn of Industrial Civilization”, *Horizons*, 6, 2, December (2015), pp. 245-259, p. 250.

*and the Monster slows down; now, at Chapter XXIV, Frankenstein becomes the pursuer, the Monster, the pursued*⁹.

THE TRAVEL OF THE DOUBLE

My proposal is to combine the two ideas exposed above: that of the journey as a search for identity, and that of the denial of oneself that the *Doppelgänger* implies. The result would be that the two characters travel across European territory looking for their own identity (the monster) and rejecting of the repressed self (Frankenstein) in a constant game of hide and seek until the final union takes place in the North Pole.

Let us begin with the first encounter between the two, the moment of the “birth” of the monster. What is Frankenstein’s reaction?

*The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep*¹⁰.

The horror is infinite. Although he had been working on that body for months, the emergence of life makes him shudder and instinctively reject him. He tries to sleep but does not manage to and the second time he attempts to confront his creature he is so overcome by that aberration that he flees. His escape marks the beginning of a race that will not end until his death.

The porter opened the gates of the court, which had that night been my asylum, and I issued into the streets, pacing them with quick steps, as if I sought to avoid the wretch whom I feared every turning of the street would present to my view. I did not dare return to the apartment which I inhabited, but felt

⁹ Muriel SPARK, “On the Shifting Roles of Frankenstein and his Monster”, in Harold Bloom, *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, Bloom’s Literary Criticism, New York, 2003, pp. 91-96, p. 93.

¹⁰ Mary SHELLEY, *Frankenstein*, Penguin, London, 2003, p. 58.

*impelled to hurry on, although drenched by the rain which poured from a black and comfortless sky*¹¹.

According to the Freudian theory of the *Doppelgänger*, Frankenstein's reaction is due to the terror caused by the contemplation of the return of his repressed self, the image of his unconscious, of his most denied self. It therefore seems reasonable that, faced with the emergence of the repressed, he opts for escape, a greater repression or a greater denial, whichever way one wishes to look at it. One needs to be brave to confront its own fears, and Frankenstein was never famous for his braveness. One can safely claim that Victor is not prepared to confront his other self and hence starts a journey of headlong flight. The day after the creation, his friend Clerval arrives in Ingolstadt and Frankenstein acts as if nothing had happened. He will continue to act that way for almost two years, refusing to return to Geneva with his family even though his return was expected in the fall:

*I felt this delay very bitterly; for I longed to see my native town, and my beloved friends. My return had only been delayed so long from an unwillingness to leave Clerval in a strange place, before he had become acquainted with any of its inhabitants. The winter, however, was spent cheerfully; and although the spring was uncommonly late, when it came, its beauty compensated for its dilatoriness*¹².

That reluctance to return seems to me to be related to the denial of that adverse reality that is his other self. He does not want to think about it, so he lives in a state of escapism until he receives the letter in which he is informed of his brother's death. The creature does not fail to show up in Geneva, the place of his childhood, and it is only as a consequence of the murderous actions of the creature that Frankenstein reacts and approaches him (this method will be used in numerous times, most efficiently, when he murders his new wife Elizabeth). However, and despite the urgency to get there, we see how Frankenstein resists and keeps delaying his departure:

*My journey was very melancholy. At first I wished to hurry on, for I longed to console and sympathise with my loved and sorrowing friends; but when I drew near my native town, I slackened my progress*¹³.

¹¹ *Id. Cit.*, p. 60.

¹² *Id. Cit.* p. 70

¹³ *Id. Cit.* p. 76.

Victor's slowdown contrasts with the monster's accelerated movements. In the first encounter they have, in the middle of the Montanvert glacier, the monster's figure in the distance is characterized by the speed with which it approaches Victor: "I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed"¹⁴.

In the exchange that follows that encounter, the monster describes the nature of the relation that binds them: "You, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us"¹⁵.

The drawing near and drawing apart of the two characters is rendered explicit in the monster's narrative when he tells his experience in the forest cabin. His search for identity leads him to leave the forest with bad memories and go to Geneva, because he knew it was Frankenstein's city. "You had mentioned Geneva as the name of your native town; and towards this place I resolved to proceed"¹⁶

The third and final volume of the book contains most of the trips and is the volume in which the relationship between search and flight can best be perceived. Frankenstein believes that he needs to go to England to consult an English philosopher regarding important discoveries. However, that trip to England, which was apparently necessary for the making of a female creature was delayed: "but I clung to every pretence of delay and shrank from taking the first step in an undertaking whose immediate necessity began to appear less absolute to me."¹⁷ The subsequent trip will occupy the following chapters until his arrival to the most remote of the Orkney Islands of Scotland. During his trip, he is aware that the monster, in line with the stalker theme that is so common to Gothic literature, is following him in the distance. In spite of the stalking figure of the monster, the trip is described with all the details of the romantic journey. And as I already said, the itinerary coincides with the author's several years before.

Chapter III of this third part represents a turning point, for Frankenstein reveals himself to the monster and destroys the female he was creating. The relationship between the creator and the creature is altered with these words that the latter addresses to the former:

¹⁴ *Id. Cit.* p. 101.

¹⁵ *Id. Cit.* p.102.

¹⁶ *Id. Cit.* p. 141.

¹⁷ *Id. Cit.* p. 155.

*Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master – obey!*¹⁸

From here on, it is the monster that will track Frankenstein on the return trip: Ireland, France and finally Geneva, until the wedding night in which he murders the bride, in Chapter VII. This is the moment the roles are exchanged. Frankenstein decides to destroy the monster. The creature finally achieved its purpose, which was none other than to draw the attention of its creator, his other self. On the other hand, Frankenstein finally faces his identity. The denial of his other self, extended for so long, has come to an end.

My first resolution was to quit Geneva for ever; my country, which, when I was happy and beloved, was dear to me, now, in my adversity, became hateful. I provided myself with a sum of money, together with a few jewels which had belonged to my mother, and departed.

*And now my wanderings began, which are to cease but with life. I have traversed a vast portion of the earth, and have endured all the hardships which travellers, in deserts and barbarous countries, are wont to meet. How I have lived I hardly know; many times have I stretched my failing limbs upon the sandy plain, and prayed for death. But revenge kept me alive; I dared not die, and leave my adversary in being!*¹⁹

The persecution is endless, although unreal. Despite the force with which Frankenstein crosses half of Europe, it is the creature that is actually creating that persecutory race. It has achieved the purpose of drawing the attention of his other self and is now preparing the final encounter. On several occasions, it helps Frankenstein in his pursuit, fearing that he would lose track of it. In his last moments of life, Frankenstein acknowledges who is the persecutor and who the persecuted, when he says: “The strength I relied on is gone; I feel that I shall soon die, and he, my enemy and persecutor, may still be in being”²⁰.

And so does the monster, as it contemplates the inert body of its maker: “I have devoted my creator, the select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration

¹⁸ *Id. Cit.* p. 172.

¹⁹ *Id. Cit.* p. 205.

²⁰ *Id. Cit.* p. 218.

among men, to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin. There he lies, white and cold in death²¹.

The trip is over. It no longer makes sense, for this was a trip of discovery and search for identity, and one of the two figures has disappeared. The monster, acknowledging the end, decides to take his life.

Frankenstein is a travel book, one amongst many books that resort to geographical relocation as a means to develop the personality of the protagonist. And there is no doubt about the fact that Victor Frankenstein evolves during his journeys. However, the main novelty of the book lies in the fact that the trip is not caused by the search for a final goal, but rather, the quest is behind it. Its objective is the encounter with the monster, but the plot will revolve precisely around the flight from that objective. From the other perspective, the monster's quest is simple, contact with his creator, but to achieve that objective it must acquire various roles: follower, stalker, hunter, and finally, prey.

²¹ *Id. Cit.* p. 224.