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<div align="center">Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: A Cripped-Queered Literature Review</div>

   This bibliographical essay details a selection of academic works that use gender and queer studies and use crip (disability) studies to explore possible meanings in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Victor Frankenstein's creature (or monster) often serves as a point of departure: Transgender scholars often find allyship with Victor's monster and with being "monsters;" and contrastingly, disabled scholars often demand recognition and humanity for Victor's creation and for themselves and thus, reject being "monsters." Thus far, crip and queer interpretations remain almost entirely isolated scholarly conversations, and as this literature review shows, there are opportunities for merging these theoretical approaches to contribute to scholarship on *Frankenstein*.

   Susan Stryker, a transgender woman and gender studies professor, and Sonny Nordmarken, a sociologist with expertise in gender studies and a transmasculine man, have done important work in establishing the foundations for transgender and queer thought on *Frankenstein*. Both Stryker's now-classic "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (1994) and Nordmarken's autoethnography "Becoming Ever More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweenness" (2014) use *Frankenstein* as a tool for theorizing about and for understanding transgender/transsexual experiences. Both scholars find power in using Victor's monster as a symbol for queer liberation: trans people can reclaim and celebrate their monstrosity and roar along with Victor's creation.

Both types of non-normative, science-created beings can and do use their bodies and language itself to enact resistance and such threatens society, these scholars argue.

Stryker specifically traces the "unnaturalness" and constructedness of both Victor's creation and of transexual bodies. She finds connections between Victor's words toward his creation and bigoted words toward transgender and other queer people. She argues that both transsexual people and Victor's being are seen as monsters, are sometimes haunted by stories of their creation, are rejected by society and made invisible, are embodied with rage and internalized hate, are threatening toward predictable social identities, and are survivors.

Nordmarken uses *Frankenstein* to help name and to analyze the positive and negative feelings that come with being *and becoming* something other than the compulsory cisgender heterosexual (cishet) standard. Analyzing how taking testosterone changes his appearance and examining how others react to his changing body, he explores how hormones impact his level of monstrosity. Like Victor's monster, he often experiences a profound gap between body and self and is anything but aligned with cishet, able-bodied standards. Nordmarken also uses the symbol of monstrosity to further queer his thought and everyday life: "I 'monster,'…rational ways of thinking," and adds, "this 'monstering' brings me freedom and joy, yet also danger and fear" (39-40).

Jolene Zigarovich's "The Trans Legacy of *Frankenstein*" (2018) argues that Stryker has inspired scholars such as J. Jack Halberstam, Boots Potential, Jay Prosser, and Harlan Weaver who established "trans monstrosity" as an important genre. Further, Zigarovich argues that Stryker's impact reaches a range of disciplines, including physics, and has become a required reading on topics related to gender and Shelley, to the Gothic, to science fiction stories, and to Romanticism. Zigarovich is also interested in notions of a "transgothic." Like transgender people

who challenge and cross sex/gender binaries, a transgothic approach to literature challenges and debunks strict conventions and resist easy categorization. She sees the Gothic as queer with its numerous "explorations, encounters, and experimentation" (264). In 2019, Stryker reflected on her own essay and offers some self-criticism. Namely, she wishes to acknowledge her whiteness and engage with the field known as queer of color critique, and she wishes to challenge queer theory's homonormative, homonational bias. Otherwise, she maintains her analysis that sees *Frankenstein* as an empowering, subversive way to understand and to describe transgender and queer experiences.

Sometimes first attempts are inspiring, groundbreaking, and stand the test of time, as with Stryker's article, such will probably not the case with Fuson Wang and his take on disability studies as applies to *Frankenstein*. Wang's "The Historicist Turn of Romantic-Era Disability Studies, or *Frankenstein* in the Dark" (2017) argues that *Frankenstein* can help Romantic literary studies finally engage critically with disability studies and adds (arrogantly) that it can serve as a template for future work. Wang claims that disability studies and its uses among literature scholars has been too political, too immature, and too ahistorical. Throughout his article, Wang's comments focus less on applying crip studies to *Frankenstein* and more on effectively wishing Shelley had written a different book. Indeed, almost nothing in Wang's article is recognizably disability studies, disability studies being rooted in accessibility and explicit identity politics. Where he approaches engagement with disability studies he fumbles: he makes the odd argument that the monster manipulates the blind man; he omits explicit discussions of how, for example, *Frankenstein* shows that society is disabled and *blind* ipso facto its prejudices; and he makes the aesthetic judgment that the monster's straight black lips are as a matter of fact devoid of beauty.

In contrast to Wang, Martha Stoddard Holmes in "Born This Way: Reading *Frankenstein* with Disability" (2018) and Amber Knight's "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Disability, and the Injustice of Misrecognition" (2020) provide excellent academically-informed, politically-informed cripped accounts of *Frankenstein*. Homes and Knight emphasize the social construction of disability. Both Holmes and Knight argue that Shelley provides countless ways to engage with disability and show how Shelley does this, and Holmes laments the dearth of such work. Importantly, while discussing disability in *Frankenstein* both authors also look at the creature's talents. Holmes underscores his talents—"strength, agility, resistance to heat and cold, eloquence, an impressive capacity for learning"—and extreme humanness that we could call "more human than human" (382). Knight further points to how Shelley carefully shows the creature's intelligence and his pain.

In one of Holmes's interpretations, Victor's monster/creature is the focus and is seen as a "child born with unexpected disabilities" (374). In others, she considers the creature as a victim of a surgery gone wrong, imagines the monster as a survivor of a tragic accident or medical event who recovers by relearning everything, stresses the importance of community for the monster (and other Othered people), and acknowledges how the monster figures out ways to attempt surviving within normative society and self-advocates. Holmes calls out Victor's murderous, eugenicist, social Darwinist behavior, while also acknowledging readings that honor well-known parental reactions that reject imperfect—disabled—children, "parents" feeling as if they have failed and will be shamed by society.

Knight places her work in conversation with and in contrast to those who suggest that *Frankenstein* symbolizes unchecked grassroots power or who believe that belittling disabled people as "monsters" does no harm. Instead of seeing *Frankenstein* as a story with implications

for science and theology or for a person's unchecked ego, she sees Shelley's novel as a story about the dangers of misrecognition and the associated feelings of shame. When misrecognized and rejected by all other characters except the blind man, the creature gradually changes into an actual monster despite only having an abnormal (disabled) appearance. Knight explains that people beyond the novel also come to have identities based on interpersonal relationships and when beings are misrecognized the psychological consequences are dire for the individuals in question and for society, a society that creates and then releases "monsters" who may not-without-reason invoke harm on others. Finally, Knight says that disabled people, like Shelley's monster, must demand political recognition and acceptance in order to avoid a similar fate and must reject an identity of monstrosity. She does not address those, like Nordmarken, who find power in reclaiming "monster" labels.

George Haggerty comes closest to seeing the full cripped-queered potential of *Frankenstein*. Writing an anthologized overview of his monograph *Queer Gothic*, in "What is Queer about *Frankenstein?*" (2016), he argues that everything about Gothic culture and literature is by its very essence queer. He points to the taboo genders, taboo sexualities, and taboo characters that help define the genre. Of sex/gender specifically, he argues that Gothic fiction creates a kind of laboratory space for safely experimenting with different possibilities. Of *Frankenstein* in particular, Haggerty argues that the creature's creation is an asexual, masculine birth and points toward the creature—being the first and only of his kind—being anything but a normative, able-bodied being. He analyzes Victor's interest in necrophilia and offers a reading that shows Victor's sexual desire for his mother—both queer and certainly deviant/not able-bodied. Like prior authors, Haggerty also finds parallels between the "monster" and queer

individuals: They mostly all experience loneliness, have deferred or impossible dreams, frustrations, and levels of monstrosity—that imposed, internalized, and reclaimed.

Future scholarship has a range of possible directions, some of those are offered here. One possibility uses my previously-coined concept of "cripnormativity" to help merge and expand existing scholarship on *Frankenstein* (Pegoda). For example, the blind man is cripnormative (or acceptably disabled) and cishet. The monster, however, is not acceptably disabled and is forced into asexuality. The monster's disability—as defined by society's social constructions—comes from his (a)sexuality, his queer appearance, and his queer creation—he is literally made of deliberately selected parts. Another direction, one that acknowledges the education Victor receives and the equipment he uses, can queer his process of creation/challenge Victor as *the* creator. It shows how no one is "abled-bodied" enough to create and work in complete isolation—everyone needs community. This interpretation also allows us to consider why Victor does not make the monster to be "perfect" and ask if the adoption of what Virginia Woolf's terms the "androgenous mind," the mind essential for creating, could have helped make a more normative, acceptable creature. Of course, such normativity should not be necessary for acceptance. There is even further room for a thesis that looks at Victor's fear of the monster (and the fear others have) in terms of the creature's (assumed) abnormally large phallus, which symbolizes both disability and (sexual) power and how the monster challenges what we call (normal) compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness in 2021.

Scholarship that applies gender and queer thought and crip thought to *Frankenstein* is fascinating and has great potential in the future. In closing, we should also acknowledge that analyzing and legitimatizing disability and queerness/non-normativity—whether in literature or in "real" life—is both a crip and a queer act. Given our ableist, anti-intellectual sociopolitical

realities in the United States studying a work as queer as *Frankenstein* is a queer act and one that requires thoughtful considerations. How we think—especially in an cultural environment that discourages thinking and effectively sees thinking as the radical, non-conformist, disabled act— is also of interest to crip studies.

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