| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Interwoven Aesthetics and Identification: On Aesthetic Modernity in *Frankenstein*

Yuqing Fu

College of Foreign Studies, China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, China
Corresponding Author: Yuqing Fu, **E-mail**: lesleyfyq@163.com

| ABSTRACT

Frankenstein is famous for its exploration of humanity in its bizarre plots, but the importance of this work also lies in its aesthetic modernity, which is revealed under the veil of the complementarity of aesthetics and identification. Based on the relevant theories of aesthetics and modernity, this thesis attempts to analyze the aesthetic connotation and literary expression of *Frankenstein* from both aspects of content and form and to reveal the aesthetic modernity in this novel. The novel exquisitely depicts the desire and reflection of the created "monster" on beauty and identity, exposes the social ills and humanity defects resulting from Enlightenment modernity in the contradiction between the construction of subjectivity and the modern aesthetic shackles, expands the scope and boundary of sympathy in the switch of multiple narrative perspectives, thus constructing a community of compassion in literary creation. As a result, *Frankenstein* and its research from the perspective of aesthetic modernity have great literary value and significance.

| KEYWORDS

Aesthetic modernity, Sublimity, Monstrosity, Sympathy, *Frankenstein*.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

1. Introduction

When surveying contemporary literature and film, the specter of *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* lingers within. This leads one to ponder why this novel, seen by some critics as somewhat immature and clumsy, continues to spark contemplation on human nature and reality across time and space. On the one hand, works from different periods reflect each other and achieve intertextuality, allowing the novel to remain fresh through diverse reader interpretations. On the other hand, the novel also reflects possible worlds, constituting a foreshadowing of the future. *Frankenstein* uses the Gothic novel form to reflect on the remnants of modern political and cultural conflicts from the Romantic period. It guides readers to think about human nature through shock and sympathy, foreshadowing the future demonized postmodern society and the writing of modern humans in tragic alienation. In its literary reshaping of the concept of sympathy, *Frankenstein* implicitly contains a path to spiritual redemption. This is precisely where the novel's aesthetic modernity lies and the key to its enduring charm and expanding interpretive space.

Aesthetic modernity, in its literal sense, involves issues of both aesthetics and modernity. Aesthetics is inseparably linked to human existence and social-historical development. Writers, due to their sensitivity to life, can often capture the characteristics of the times' development and change first. The French poet Charles Pierre Baudelaire first proposed the widely accepted concept of modernity: modernity is transitory, fleeting, and contingent, representing one half of art, with the other half being eternal and immutable (1987). Within the tension between the instantaneous and the eternal, one can glimpse the inherent conflict between Enlightenment modernity and aesthetic modernity. The former advocates a progressive view of constant renewal, while the latter, in its reflection on the former, seeks a path to redemption. Thus, in Zhou Xian's view, the concept of modernity is itself a phenomenon of modern aesthetics (2016). In Matei Calinescu's examination, aesthetic modernity should be understood as a crisis concept involving three dialectical oppositions—against tradition, against the modernity of bourgeois civilization (and its ideals of

rationality, utility, and progress), and against itself, as it imagines itself as a new tradition or authority (2002). In short, aesthetic modernity is born from the inherent crisis of modernity, representing a distilled expression of modernity theory on the aesthetic level and a reflection of modernity from an aesthetic dimension.

Research on *Frankenstein* often starts from the historical context of the book, focusing on the intertextuality between the author and the novel. Feminist researchers such as Ellen Moers and Mary Poovey have attempted to excavate autobiographical elements within the novel, analyzing themes of life and death, family education, and female growth contained within, arguing that the novel reflects and criticizes the survival of women during the Romantic period in both content and form. Their research has made a great contribution to the understanding of this novel, and relative studies are still flourishing as time goes by. Among recent perspectives, modernity is a thought-provoking one. In Stefanie Lethbridge's view, the Gothic novel as a literary form is itself a product of modernity, and *Frankenstein* resists the fragmentation characteristic of modernity within its coherent narrative (2016). Alexander Cook further analyzes the novel's modernity, pointing out that the novel critiques the philosophical and technological modernity of the Romantic period, thereby revealing that it is not humanity's thirst for knowledge but a lack of sensitivity and understanding that prevents people from discovering humanity among others (2019). This is not only the source of Frankenstein's tragedy but also the source of tragedy for Romantic society and Western society dominated by Enlightenment modernity. Therefore, a complex relationship of mutual connection and contradiction exists between *Frankenstein* and modernity. Analyzing its modernity from an aesthetic perspective, focusing on beauty and identity, the sublime, and sympathy, not only aids in analyzing and interpreting this classic literary work from a multi-dimensional perspective but also in exploring a path of humanistic care still inspiring for the present day. This paper attempts to discuss the secular sublime and monstrosity presented in the novel's aesthetic reflection, the construction of subjectivity and identity failure revealed in the alienating modern culture, and the reshaping of sympathy in literary narrative art to achieve spiritual redemption.

2. Aesthetic Reflection: The Secular Sublime and Monstrosity

Judging from the novel's title, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, there is an implication of both secular and sublime aspects. On the one hand, etymologically, the surname Frankenstein's "frank" once had the meaning of "free from bondage or restraint," tending towards Kant's definition of sublimity. John Milton often referred to Victor in *Paradise Lost* as God; thus, Victor Frankenstein is imbued with a color of religious sublimity. On the other hand, "The Modern Prometheus" seems to suggest that in the modern context that's gradually detached from religious discourse, attempting to pursue the Promethean sublimity in mythology is inevitably shackled by the secular. Thus, Frankenstein is both a spokesperson for God and a rebel. In the Christian spirit of self-sacrifice, he challenges religious narratives, separating the spiritual from the material world, yet ignoring their ironic relationship, that is, tragic separation and mutual dependence at the same time. In self-deceptive redemption, he pushes the monster to the abyss of a scapegoat outsider, making it a victim of secular judgment. George Levine bluntly states that the book is a perfect myth of secularity (1979). In this secular myth, there is no operation of metaphysical mechanisms, no God. Activating inanimate limbs with electricity eliminates the notion of the soul's operation within the body, thus viewing humans entirely as part of the material world and attempting to discover the previously attributed divine sublime within matter.

In the apparent assassination of God by Enlightenment thinkers, religion's ideological role has not receded; on the contrary, it has been taken over by various secular thought patterns ... occasionally served as forms of the replaced God (Eagleton, 2023). Reason, culture, art, the sublime, science, humanity, existence, society, the Other, desire, etc. are all examples of such patterns. However, in the process of Enlightenment reason legitimizing modernity, its lack of emotional and imaginative resources cannot construct a rational community with a common foundation. Aesthetics thus becomes an extension of Enlightenment reason, attempting to connect sensibility and reason and, with new myths, to recreate religion's Janus-faced duality, hoping to grasp everyday existence with one hand and sublime truth with the other. Aesthetics thus becomes a supplement to Enlightenment reason with its anti-instrumental rationality, reflecting on modernity not only in abstract theoretical concepts but also in literature's imaginative space.

In Frankenstein's world, the quest for truth and veracity becomes a new source of sublimity in the secular world after religious discourse has fallen from its altar. However, the reason that drives him to explore the unknown is not only in line with rationalization but also implies giving disgraceful motives seemingly rational excuses. According to Harriet Hustis, Frankenstein ignores the responsibility behind creation—the responsibility to guide, support, and sympathize with the created to enable their survival (2003). Frankenstein's materialism, refined through science, rationalizes personal desires, constructing a myth of self rather than redemption in the self-deceptive imagination that mimics religious narrative tones.

> "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's." (Shelly, 1818)

The self-styled artist Frankenstein assembles corpse parts according to aesthetic principles and scientific laws, yet the operation of supernatural vitality spawns ugliness and fear. As a result, seemingly sublime motives do not give birth to consummate and ineffable fortunate beings but to a dreadful monster.

> "His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! 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." (Shelly, 1818)

Aristotle believed that beauty's form contains order, symmetry, and determinacy, and a monster is a mistake of nature in creating life, with monstrosity representing a purposeful error. Though Frankenstein's monster has a body with proportions and features conforming to human aesthetics, its birth does not align with nature's laws of creating life. Mechanical causality under personal desire cannot apply to the creation of beauty but intensifies the horror effect. Edmund Burke incorporated clear eyes and smooth skin into the category of beauty. Infant William's blue and clear eyes are unquestionably essential factors to inspire the tenderest affection. However, the monster's vague eyes suggest its objectivity as an artifact, revealing its exclusion from the veiled realm of subjectivity. Moreover, the monster's skin, hastily assembled, only barely covered its veins and muscles, displaying a fragmented and chaotic effect, with the visual impact of this uneven surface strikingly affecting the intuitive perception of the soul's depth, considering it an ugly heap rather than an artistic object containing beauty.

Ugliness and sublimity belong to different categories in aesthetics, yet both can trigger intense fear, presenting blurred boundaries in *Frankenstein*. The monster's ugliness is not just an aesthetic experience but also a survival issue. Just as the mad Martha in *Jane Eyre* mirrors the repressed passions of all other characters, Frankenstein's monster symbolizes the unrepresented, that is, the repressed ugliness in the depths of a sophisticated symbolic system. And this ugliness represents a monstrosity, an overlooked humanity excluded from human aesthetics, threatening not only the subject itself but the entire representation system. This monstrosity, considered "the real existence" in Kant's aesthetics, will cause people to reject it due to its threat to their consistency and ignore the broader existence when escaping from its ugly shell. In the novel, those who witness the monster's ugliness feel intense fear and rejection, except for the blind De Lacey, who sees it as a complete individual with a subjectified experience within the chain of existence, a chain linking people through the repression of "the real existence," allowing all but the monster to survive. According to Kant, grandeur, religious emotions, slightly constrained free minds, and enthusiasm are crucial factors of a sublime mindset. The monster's ugly, large body, with skin that "barely covered the muscles and veins," hints at its disproportionate deformity, presenting traits that destroy its overall concept, thus possessing monstrosity. Ironically, this monstrosity is precisely born from what Kant calls the sublime—Frankenstein's religious zeal for life creation and the lightning, considered as a typical representation of the sublime by Kant and Longinus. Barbara Freeman points out that Kant's definition overlooks the potential destructiveness inherent in sublime sources (1987). The sublime lightning activates the monster, revealing its ugly face in the darkness, creating a terrifying effect while potentially destroying other existences in nature. Frankenstein, attributing himself to a sublime purpose, becomes a self-isolated prisoner in self-deceptive imagination, neglecting his position in the collective and his creation's transgression against the concept of the chain of existence. On the one hand, he simulates religious sublimity with the narrative as a shell, and on the other hand, his selfish nature shatters this secularized sublimity. Rather than creating a monster, it is more accurate to say that monstrosity under secular sublimity itself gives birth to a life entity.

In the post-Reformation and Enlightenment society, rebuilding a credible narrative of values and matching action plans to alleviate the tension and contradiction between religious discourse and new value narratives is a key issue within modernity and the thought-provoking point of the secular and sublimity in *Frankenstein*. Monstrosity born from the contention for narrative power between old and new value narratives becomes personified in the novel, transforming from an abstract existence in Aristotelian theory into a symbol with penetration and infectious power in literary space, warning of modern human alienation under modernity's shadow.

3. Origins of Alienation: The Construction of Subjectivity and the Failure of Identity

Ludwig A. Feuerbach defines alienation as "the object or entity produced by the subject not only detaches from the subject but also turns against the subject, constraining, dominating, and even suppressing the subject. (1984)" Frankenstein's grand vision of human creation and the living monster oppress him spiritually and materially as alienation. The sublimity of his grand vision is subverted by monstrosity, with the monster becoming an extension of Frankenstein's partial self. His longing for recognition in the public domain and family completely mirrors the monster's ugly appearance and survival predicament. However, the vitality bursting from monstrosity fosters the possibility of rational construction. In hidden corners, through imitation and learning, the monster gradually develops intellectual awareness, constructing the rational basis for subjectivity. Despite possessing both rationality and sympathy, aesthetic judgment, as an a priori consciousness, hinders the monster from becoming a secular subject,

thus generating in the monster a desire for revenge that, as an alienation, governs its body and mind. This, alongside Frankenstein's guilt, runs parallel in the text, linking fragmented narratives and suggesting the uncertainty and fluidity of subjectivity.

When human reason becomes autonomous, religion becomes what Feuerbach calls humanity's alienation. The internal frame—modern science, along with other described aspects—the buffered self and its discipline, modern individualism and its reliance on instrumental rationality and secular time (Taylor, 2016), replaces religious narrative, interpreting the universe, society, and moral order with its inherent secularity, becoming the source of modern human value, meaning, and sense of direction. However, a world that operates without divine intervention fosters a capricious, irrational secular God. When reason largely becomes instrumental, calculating, and causal, it risks emptying the meaning and value of social existence. Behind Frankenstein's sublime vision is fideism dominated by instrumental rationality. When the former tries to supplement with the latter after detaching from metaphysical foundations, humanity's integrity and autonomy face constant threats of being overturned. Identity is defined by whom I interact with to fully function as a subject, particularly in judging, distinguishing, and affirming what is truly valuable or important (Taylor, 1985). When secular beliefs become the alternative discourse legitimizing modernity, the rational believer Frankenstein dares to create a completely materialistic human being. However, in his material world, this sublime undertaking, nurtured in personal spiritual space and completed in personal material space, deprives the monster of the right to construct legitimate subjectivity through social interaction, failing to grasp the concept constituting his overall integrity. On the one hand, overwhelmed by the passion for rational belief, he becomes a one-dimensional man; on the other, he exercises his subjectivity in imagination and refuses to interact with others or assume responsibility for the monster. Consequently, the melancholy, fear, and guilt resulting from the monster's destructiveness enmesh him like a vast net, making him unable to face himself or others, ultimately leading to his demise.

The accidentally animated monster, initially shaped, rejected, and abandoned as Frankenstein's object, passively and negatively develops individual consciousness. The monster, outside the human recognition system, initially lacks aesthetic value judgment but realizes its ugliness and the aesthetic judgment of detesting ugliness through human fear and violence. Therefore, its unalterable, shaped appearance drives it to seek human recognition through the rationality of knowledge—language, the godlike science.

> "Although I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make an attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure; for with this also the contrast perpetually presented to my eyes had made me acquainted." (Shelly, 1818)

Learning the language opens the monster's imagination and enhances its understanding of human society. However, the monster, possessing both rationality and emotion, cannot position its existence -- "I am poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I know not where to find refuge. (Shelly, 2014)" As a product of materialism dividing body and soul, the monster's ugly material body contradicts its intense desire for recognition. Despite possessing the rationality of human subjectivity, aesthetic value judgment, based on bodily experience, prevents self-consistency and integration of body and mind. Intense negative emotions shatter the artificially framed moral compass, departing from the Enlightenment values' subjectivity concept while embodying revenge through bodily actions, controlling Frankenstein's psychological and behavioral expression.

The 18th-century French Enlightenment thinker Étienne Bonnot de Condillac believes that human functions encompass not only rational judgment and thinking but also emotions arising from interaction with others. People forge close connections through mutual reflection, discovering natural law parallel to self-preservation and preservation of others. However, when excessive passion infringes upon others, self-loathing, as a correction mechanism, integrates with rational judgment to maintain natural law's status in human society. Frankenstein, of noble lineage and harmonious family, epitomizes secular happiness. Yet, his transgression of the life-death boundary reveals monstrosity beneath this placid exterior. As family and friends perish, his self-loathing and fear of the monster, along with resentment, gradually erode his self-identity, thwarting the possibility of rebuilding subjective agency through interpersonal interaction. The monster's poignant narrative once elicits Frankenstein's sympathy and responsibility, yet before secular society's altruistic natural law, rational judgment again plunges him into tragedy. "A race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? (Shelly, 2014)" This moral perspective implies his fear of an uncontrollable subject's foundation—rational logic cannot endow the monster with collective emotions born from interpersonal interactions, how to construct identity in non-human collective emotions, and non-human identity systems' threat to humanity. Ironically, Frankenstein and the monster reach a high degree of unity in mutual revenge, both as victim and perpetrator, subject and object, inseparable yet mutually dissolving in their life-and-death struggle.

In Terry Eagleton's view, subjectivity is one of God's many secular appellations, and if the subject proves elusive, the primary reason is the external form of subjectivity, threatening to break the bounds of traditional thought with its unfathomable depth, eternal movement, infinite will, and dynamic self-shaping (2023). Reflecting on the Enlightenment's concept of subjectivity, idealism embodies the realization of subjectivity through concepts, while Romanticists produce imaginative subjectivity in artworks, with idealism inventing speculative dialectics and Romanticism inventing literature. The monster, struggling to survive in human society, has its rationality and emotion presented in narrative art, thus constructing a self-rationalized subjectivity through refusing objectified identity. However, this imaginative subject, in its contest with secular reality, gradually edges toward the void and the unknown, like the escaping monster in the novel, becoming a specter haunting each individual's quest for self-subjectivity.

4. Reshaping Sympathy: Aesthetic Redemption in Narrative Art
For radical Romantics, art reproduces values for which we live, imagination having a centrifugal intent, extracting us from dull existence and enabling recreation of experiences as something or someone else (Eagleton, 2023). This imaginative empathy allows individuals to realize they share a broader, common form of existence, aware of the self's foundation sinking into infinity. However, in attempting to reveal divinity hidden within things, Romantic art, with its sublime spirit of animating the dead, also harbors a devastatingly destructive force—obscuring the sensory world and plunging individuals into a terrifying abyss of self. All, save I, were at rest or in enjoyment: I, like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me;1 and, finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me (Shelly, 1818). Frankenstein's creation of life from dead fragments is an "artistic" conception in boundless self-imagination, where the absence of empathy gives rise to the tragedy of mutual destruction between humans and the monster.

Meanwhile, *Frankenstein'*s creator, Mary Shelley, regarded literary creation as a capacity to grasp themes and shape and perfect the ideas they contain. In this creative view, creation is not a single creative impulse or a series of thoughts but a relational process, shaping and perfecting the created work within the context best suited for the theme's development (Hustis, 2003). *Frankenstein* uses the epistolary form as its basic structure, blending 18th-century Gothic and sentimental novel narrative styles. Through fragmented narrative voices, it unfolds the conflict between the private inner life and the public domain, integrating fear and sympathy within the monster's tragic existence, guiding readers to reflect on subjectivity and construct a community of compassion based on universal sympathy within literature's imaginative space.

In first-person narrative's immediate writing, letters construct a private inner life. Conflicting yet blending emotions are perceived, written, and reflected by individuals, hence promoting personal integrity and self-consistency. However, letters also expose the inner self to public scrutiny, so constructing inner subjectivity is threatened by the fear of public constraint. In the early modern context, though religious constraints and the loosening political authority fostered inner concepts, inner life constantly contended with external forces, struggling to preserve itself (Jin, 2024). In *Frankenstein*, Captain Walton is an observer and scribe of Frankenstein's tragedy. His emotional writing pervades the novel and links personal inner construction with the novel's public domain. Within the epistolary framework, letters are nested in other letters, and the seemingly digressive stories interleave with the overall tragedy. They attempt to break free from traditional narrative order and the obsession with systematic knowledge. Emotional writings from different perspectives simulate attention shifts in crisscrossing and confusion and shift readers' attention at the same time, thus guiding readers to ponder human nature through autonomous choice. Captain Walton, sharing Frankenstein's sublime sentiment for exploring the material world's mysteries, focuses more on his crew and his emotions rather than worldly conquest after witnessing and reflecting on the destructive force of boundless self. In emotional writing mediated by letters, Walton's original confusion, pain, and fear are relieved, and his self-identity and self-consistency are enhanced, thus stimulating readers to construct fluid subjectivity through emotional transformation in reading.

In the late 18th century, as poetic justice waned, Gothic novels helped deconstruct Enlightenment subjectivity through the negative emotion of fear, implying the exploration of restoring subjectivity and redeeming modern subjects. Gloomy Gothic architecture and terrifying Gothic novels suggest the connection between sacred fear and secular fear. The novelty and terror of the material world itself and the supernatural forces still astonishing people after religious experience's decline permeate Gothic novels, revealing the transition from sentimentality to fear in people's daily emotional structures after metaphysical foundations recede. In Frankenstein and the monster's tragic contest, the negative emotion of fear, while stimulating human senses, reveals the duality of sympathy among subjects—convergence and alienation. Sympathy in the 18th century developed to include compassion and the individual's ability to experience and identify with others' emotions. Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, defines sympathy as an abstract system constituted by the juxtaposition of the same sensory and concrete responses in visual perspective transformation (1759). However, this visual-based error also permeates moral philosophy beyond the 18th century, responding to external flaws with moral deficiencies. Therefore, sympathy's subjects trigger sensory reactions based on external similarities, but this imagination, founded on visual bodily experience, relates to moral judgment, enabling mutual identification or alienation. Without external transcendent foundations, individual identity relies on temporal constructs and social institutions established by humans, and individuals in emotional flux can be bound by culturally constructed sympathy, creating alienation and estrangement.

The monster's alienated appearance presents material evil, and its supernatural vitality evokes extreme fear. So sympathy is precluded besides the colossal body and the failure of imagination. However, for readers outside literary narratives, fear brings the novelty of exploring the unknown and constructs universal emotion through rational reflection.

Janis McLaren Caldwell argues that Mary Shelley redefines sympathy as actively accepting differences through compassionate listening or striving to hear the invisible (1988). Jeanne M. Britton asserts that Shelley revealed sympathy's more robust reliability in literary space rather than among subjects by emphasizing the relationship between hearing and sympathy, thus expanding Smith's definition (2009). She reframes sympathy as a narrative phenomenon encompassing listening and creation, setting the novel as a literary genre relying on compensatory sympathy. In the novel, the monster's ugly body excludes it from human emotional identification, yet in auditory perception, it constructs convergent sympathy through listening to others' narratives and employing linguistic artistry in storytelling. For example, it forms emotional resonance with Safie and elicits sympathy and recognition from Frankenstein and myriad readers in the art of language. Thus, emotional practice neglected and rejected in visual experience is presented in auditory experience, and human nature is obscured in cultural construction revealed in literary narrative. As a psychological experience and a key to intersubjective identification, sympathy links fragmented letters and digressive discourse, merging the crisscrossing first-person and third-person narrative perspectives. *Frankenstein* exhibits the narrative essence of sympathy and expands sympathy's possibilities in narrative art. This possibility of entering sympathy through narrative exposes absurdities in human nature—the non-human monster is more humane than humans. Hence, the monster reveals humanity's cognitive fallacy, that is, the aesthetic, ontological premises maintained on a subconscious level in humanity defined by reason.

If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear (Shelly, 2014). The monster's declaration unveils the tragedy's core—fear accompanying love. Williams notes that tragedy depends on the ability to relate events to broader universal facts (2007). In such cases, events are not merely incidental but can bear universal meaning. Eagleton extends the scope of tragic protagonists and views the fearful as tragic protagonists, with fear as an object of pity, not its inducement, thus eliciting compassion for the fearful (2007). However, as *Frankenstein* reveals, sympathy's relativity and limitations obscure emotional identification between subjects, erode human subjectivity, and impede love's genesis. In the art of tragedy, using fear as a sensory stimulus in the literary narrative's aesthetic space guides readers to rationally contemplate the monster's tragic existence and the vitality beneath monstrosity, constructing a positive emotion that narrows intersubjective distance—a convergent sympathy. Thus, *Frankenstein* contains a path to spiritual redemption through a compassionate community in its reflection on modernity.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, in the secular rewriting of myths, *Frankenstein* approaches Kant's concept of the sublime through the aesthetically ugly monster and writes the sublime in the presentation of monstrosity. Besides, tragedy is constructed in the monster's recognition of humanity's identification system, its attempts to integrate with humans, and revenge, thus subverting the instrumental rationality favored in post-Enlightenment British culture. More importantly, sympathy is reflected through varying narrative perspectives in tragedy, exposing the blindness and flaws of humanity. By emphasizing hearing as an aesthetic sense and literature's artistic form as a role in evoking sympathy, *Frankenstein* manifests eternal value sought but unachievable by Frankenstein. Thus, *Frankenstein*'s aesthetic modernity is highlighted. Its use of literary narrative to construct subject interaction and expand sympathy's domain is not only the monster's expression of humanity within the novel but also an exploration of redemption and paths of humanistic care. In contemporary society's rapid progress, the shackles of modernity's problems remain unshaken. Revisiting Romantic literary works and exploring their inherent aesthetic modernity provides new perspectives to interpret classic literature and offers insights into contemporary society's ongoing alienation. Therefore, an analysis of *Frankenstein* from the perspective of aesthetic modernity is of great significance. However, limited to theoretical depth and the knowledge of Romanticists as an intellectual community, this paper has only provided a relatively fundamental study and a possible perspective to delve into *Frankenstein*. Further research is expected to apply a more systematical theory structure and a more comprehensive understanding of *Frankenstein*'s literary network.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations or those of the publisher, the editors, and the reviewers.

References

[1] Abrams, J. J. (2018). *Aesthetics in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. *Journal of Science Fiction and Philosophy, 1*, 14.

[2] Britton, J. M. (2009). Novelistic sympathy in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. *Studies in Romanticism, 48*(1), 3-22. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25602177

[3] Cook, A. (2019). Perfecting monstrosity: *Frankenstein* and the Enlightenment debate on perfectibility. *Nineteenth-Century Contexts, 41*(3), 243-253. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08905495.2019.1600792

[4] Freeman, B. (1987). Frankenstein with Kant: A theory of monstrosity, or the monstrosity of theory. *Substance, 16*(52), 21-31. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3685382

[5] Hustis, H. (2003). Responsible creativity and the 'modernity' of Mary Shelley's Prometheus. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, 43*(4), 845-858. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4625101

[6] Kant, I. (1968). *The critique of judgment* (J. H. Bernard, Trans.). New York, NY: Hafner. (Original work published 1790).

[7] Levine, G., & Knoepflmacher, U. C. (1979). *The endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's novel*. London, UK: University of California Press.

[8] Lethbridge, S. (2016). Negotiating modernity, modernizing heroes: Heroes and heroines in Gothic and sensation fiction of the long nineteenth century. In *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction Since 1800* (20, 1, 31-46). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

[9] Marshall, D., & Caldwell, J. M. (1988). *Surprising effects of sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[10] Shelly, M. & Hunter, J. P (eds.). (1818). *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text Contexts and Criticism*. London, UK: Norton Company.

[11] Taylor, C. (1985). Legitimation crisis? In *Philosophical papers: Philosophy and human science* (Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 248). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[12] 金雯. (2024). *情感时代*. 上海, 中国: 华东师范大学出版社.

[13] 路德维希, 费尔巴哈. (1984). *费尔巴哈哲学著作选集* (荣震华等, Trans.). 北京, 中国: 商务印书馆.

[14] 威廉斯, 雷蒙斯. (2007). *现代悲剧* (丁尔苏, Trans.). 南京, 中国: 译林出版社.

[15] 卡琳内斯库, 马泰. (2002). *现代性的五副面孔：现代主义、先锋派、颓废、媚俗艺术、后现代主义* (顾爱彬 & 李瑞华, Trans.). 北京, 中国: 商务印书馆.

[16] 泰勒. (2016). *世俗时代* (张容南等, Trans.). 北京, 中国: 三联书店.

[17] 伊格尔顿, 特里. (2007). *甜蜜的暴力——悲剧的观念* (方杰 & 方宸, Trans.). 南京, 中国: 南京大学出版社. (2023). *文化之用：从启蒙运动到反恐战争*. 上海, 中国: 上海文艺出版社.

[18] 波德莱尔, 夏尔. (1987). *波德莱尔美学论文选* (郭宏安, Trans.). 北京, 中国: 人民文学出版社.

[19] 周宪. (2016). *审美现代性批判*. 北京, 中国: 商务印书馆.