

THE ROLE OF PARADOX IN MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN PERAN PARADOKS DALAM FRANKENSTEIN OLEH MARY SHELLEY

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Abstract

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is a piece of Gothic literature which has lasted in popularity until the modern age. There are numerous interesting aspects to analyze from this book. One such aspect is the use of paradoxes in this novel and its execution in the story. This paper aims to analyze four types of paradoxes present in Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein: Situational Paradox, Verbal Paradox, Character Paradox, and Thematic Paradox. The Situational Paradox highlights the contradictions between the intentions of Victor Frankenstein and the disastrous outcomes of his experiments. The Verbal Paradox examines instances of language that convey conflicting meanings, reflecting the complexity of the characters' experiences. The Character Paradox explores the duality within the characters, particularly in Victor and his creation, as they navigate their desires and identities. Finally, the Thematic Paradox addresses the broader moral and ethical dilemmas presented in the novel, showcasing the conflicts between ambition, responsibility, and the nature of humanity. This study will approach these issues from a mainly postmodern point of view which explores the complexity of these paradoxes. The results of this analysis revealed new insights into how these paradoxes not only serve as narrative elements but also reflect the ethical and philosophical dilemmas of the era. It can be concluded that Shelley employs paradoxes in various forms—situational, character, verbal, and thematic—to highlight the complexities of her narrative and deepen the understanding of her characters and themes.

Keywords: Paradox, Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, Situational Paradox, Verbal Paradox Character Paradox, Thematic Paradox.

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Abstrak

Frankenstein oleh Mary Shelley adalah karya sastra Gotik yang tetap populer hingga zaman modern. Ada banyak aspek menarik yang dapat dianalisis dari buku ini. Salah satu aspek tersebut adalah penggunaan paradoks dalam novel ini dan pelaksanaannya dalam cerita. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis empat jenis paradoks yang ada dalam novel Frankenstein karya Mary Shelley: Paradoks Situasional, Paradoks Verbal, Paradoks Karakter, dan Paradoks Tematik. Paradoks Situasional menyoroti kontradiksi antara niat Victor Frankenstein dan hasil eksperimennya yang membawa bencana. Paradoks Verbal meneliti contoh-contoh bahasa yang menyampaikan makna yang saling bertentangan, yang mencerminkan kompleksitas pengalaman para tokoh. Paradoks Karakter mengeksplorasi dualitas dalam diri para tokoh, khususnya dalam diri Victor dan ciptaannya, saat mereka menavigasi keinginan dan identitas mereka. Terakhir, Paradoks Tematik membahas dilema moral dan etika yang lebih luas yang disajikan dalam novel, yang memperlihatkan konflik antara ambisi, tanggung jawab, dan sifat manusia. Studi ini akan membahas isu-isu tersebut dari sudut pandang posmodern yang mengeksplorasi kompleksitas paradoks tersebut. Hasil analisis ini mengungkapkan wawasan baru tentang bagaimana paradoks tersebut tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai elemen naratif tetapi juga mencerminkan dilema etika dan filosofis pada era tersebut. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa Shelley menggunakan paradoks dalam berbagai bentuk situasional, karakter, verbal, dan tematik untuk menyoroti kompleksitas narasinya dan memperdalam pemahaman karakter dan temanya.

Kata kunci: Paradoks, Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, Paradoks Situasional, Paradoks Verbal, Paradoks Karakter, Paradoks Tematik.

INTRODUCTION

Frankenstein, published in 1818 by Mary Shelley, is widely recognized as a seminal work in Gothic literature. The novel not only established itself as a cornerstone of science fiction but also raised thought-provoking questions about the ethical implications of scientific exploration. Set against the backdrop of the Romantic era, the story follows the tragic journey of Victor Frankenstein, a scientist whose obsession with creating life leads to unforeseen and disastrous consequences. The novel delves into themes of ambition, the pursuit of knowledge, the act of creation, and the responsibilities that come with scientific progress, all while exploring the psychological turmoil that accompanies these pursuits.

In literature, a paradox is defined as a statement or situation that appears to be contradictory or self-contradictory but, upon closer examination, reveals an underlying truth. Paradoxes are often used to highlight complexities in characters, themes, or moral dilemmas, encouraging readers to think beyond the surface and understand deeper meanings. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley employs paradoxes to challenge conventional views of morality, humanity, and the consequences of scientific ambition. These paradoxes also demonstrate how even if technoscientific development would enable humanity to transcend the limits upon the human condition, it won't enable us to transcend human nature. (Grantham, 2015)

There have been numerous studies examining the paradoxes in *Frankenstein*. For instance, Victor as a paradoxical protagonist due to his parallels to traditional villains as he is plagued by his insecurities and acts just as an ordinary man would in times of desperation despite his elevated intelligence (Grantham, 2015). Other studies have focused on different topics such as the paradox of *Frankenstein* with its strong ecological themes yet the lack of analyses on such themes by scholars (Morton, 2016), the paradox of complex simplicity which ensues when humans manage to create an artificial being with a conscious which parallels God's creation of humanity (Gross, 2021), the paradox of Romantic self-indulgence and its consequences in *Frankenstein* (Bulz, 2016), and the paradox of humanism and posthumanism in *Frankenstein* (Boruah, Sengupta, 2024). Additionally, many of these studies are performed by American or British researchers from various universities.

Despite the thousands of studies focused on this book, few have discussed the situational and verbal paradoxes in this book. There are many studies of the character and thematic paradoxes but none have compiled all four paradoxes into a single study. Many researchers instead wrote articles on *Frankenstein's* relation to current ethical or moral dilemmas in modern society or its commentary on the human condition.

The objective of this paper is to fill these gaps by analyzing the role of various forms of paradox in developing the themes and characters in *Frankenstein* and compiling . Through the examination of situational paradox, verbal paradox, character paradox, and thematic paradox, this analysis aims to demonstrate how these contradictions not only serve as narrative devices but also deepen the reader's understanding of the ethical and philosophical dilemmas presented in the novel.

METHODS

No participants were involved in the making of this study since this was not an on field study conducted by the authors. A subjective, critical design was employed to examine the paradoxes found in this book. It was conducted over a few weeks, with data mainly being collected through Google Scholar and the various journals read that were contained within the search engine.

The primary data sources of this study were various journals accessed through the Google Scholar search engine. Due to the data being sourced from Google Scholar, all sources are digital and have no physical form. There are no non primary sources cited in this study since the authors relied only on journals during the making of this study.

Data collection took place over the span of a few weeks where researchers searched on Google Scholar to find data. Data was collected by reading through the contents of the journals and referencing them when necessary. No data was collected through library books found on campus as all journals were sourced online.

Data was analyzed through a subjective lens by the authors of this study. The inferences found were drawn from the authors' own personal understanding of the novel and journals read for the making of this study. The authors also received guidance from the professor Dr. Nurholis of the Novel subject for the analysis. The analysis of paradoxes in *Frankenstein* reveals Shelley's critique of unchecked ambition and the ethical implications of scientific exploration. Through these paradoxes, she questions the moral responsibilities of creators and the consequences of playing god in the pursuit of knowledge. Shelley's portrayal of paradox highlights the dangers of ignoring ethical boundaries in the name of progress and serves as a reminder of the importance of balancing ambition with accountability. The paradoxes also reflect the psychological struggles of the characters, illustrating the pain of isolation, the desire for acceptance, and the devastating effects of rejection and alienation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

I. Situational Paradox

A. Definition of Situational Paradox

A situational paradox occurs when the outcome of a specific event contradicts the initial intentions or expectations of the characters involved. In literature, this paradox serves to highlight the complexities and ironies within a narrative, revealing deeper truths about the motivations, actions, and consequences faced by the characters. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, situational paradoxes play a critical role in illustrating the unforeseen repercussions of Victor Frankenstein's ambitions and the creature's desires.

B. Victor's Ambition vs. Destruction

Victor Frankenstein's ambition to defy the natural order and create life is the driving force behind the novel's plot. His goal is to surpass human limitations and achieve greatness through scientific innovation. However, the very success of his experiment becomes the root of his downfall. Despite his initial intentions of advancing human knowledge and conquering death, his creation ultimately leads to his own destruction and the suffering of those he loves. This situational paradox is poignantly expressed when Victor reflects on his creation with deep regret:

"I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Frankenstein, p. 35).

The paradox lies in the stark contrast between Victor's aspiration to achieve greatness and the catastrophic consequences that result. His pursuit of knowledge, initially seen as a noble endeavor, turns into a curse that haunts him throughout his life. It could be argued that the nobility of his endeavor was lost once Victor turned to questionable means in his effort to

create the creature thus violating the scientist's ethics to oppose abuse in the application of research findings, and to be responsible to both the limitations and the foreseeable impacts of his creature (Bird, 2014). Instead of bringing glory and advancement, his actions lead to the ruin of his family and the deaths of his closest companions. This paradox underscores the theme of unchecked ambition and the destructive power of hubris, as Victor's drive to create life ultimately ends in despair and death.

C. The Creature's Desire for Acceptance vs. Rejection

Another significant situational paradox in the novel is embodied in the creature's yearning for acceptance and companionship, which is met with fear, hatred, and rejection from society. The creature, despite its monstrous appearance, begins its existence with a pure desire to connect with others and be a part of the human community. It longs to experience love, friendship, and understanding, but is repeatedly met with hostility and violence from those who encounter him due to his hideous appearance which is why all the people who meet him turn away and sometimes even attack him.

This paradox is highlighted when the creature laments, *"I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me"* (Frankenstein, p. 102). Despite its efforts to seek kindness and understanding, society's reaction is to judge it solely based on its outward appearance, leading to its isolation and rage. Even Felix and his family turn away from him despite their previous kindness to the outsider Safie. Then the creature demonizes himself when he reads *Paradise Lost* and compares himself to Satan thus showing how the creature came to accept his role as a monster. The paradox deepens the themes of alienation and societal prejudice, as the creature is driven to vengeful acts due to the rejection it faces. Its quest for acceptance ultimately transforms into a desire for revenge against its creator and all of humanity, highlighting the irony of its existence. This situational paradox illustrates the creature's transition from innocence to malevolence, shaped by the cruelty it encounters. The irony lies in its initial desire to be good, which is corrupted by society's inability to look past its physical form. The creature's descent into violence is not a result of its nature, but a reaction to the relentless rejection it faces, emphasizing the impact of societal judgments and the pain of alienation.

II. Verbal Paradox

A. Definition of Verbal Paradox

A verbal paradox in literature occurs when a character's words or expressions reveal contradictory emotions or thoughts. This kind of paradox is often used to convey the inner conflicts, complexities, and dualities of a character's psychological state. In Frankenstein, Mary Shelley employs verbal paradoxes to expose the emotional turmoil experienced by Victor Frankenstein and his creation, highlighting the conflicting feelings that drive their actions and decisions.

B. Victor's Reflections on Creation

One of the most striking examples of verbal paradox in the novel is found in Victor Frankenstein's reflections on his creation. Victor is a man who yearns to create something which could benefit humanity. Victor experiences a sense of pride and accomplishment when he successfully brings his creature to life, fulfilling his scientific ambitions. However, this

feeling quickly gives way to horror and regret as he realizes the consequences of his actions. He describes his reaction with conflicting emotions, stating:

"No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (Frankenstein, p. 36).

This verbal paradox highlights Victor's shift from pride to disgust in a matter of moments. His initial joy at achieving what no man had before quickly transforms into a fear of the very being he created. This contradiction illustrates the complexity of his emotions, as his ambition to create life is overshadowed by the horror of its manifestation. The verbal paradox here serves to underscore Victor's inner conflict and the unforeseen consequences of his pursuit of knowledge.

C. The Creature's Expressions of Love and Hatred

The creature in Frankenstein also embodies verbal paradox in its expressions of both love and hatred. Despite its outward appearance as a monster, the creature initially seeks compassion and acceptance. It yearns for connection and understanding, hoping to be loved by humanity. However, its repeated rejection and mistreatment lead it to express feelings of anger, vengeance, and despair. The creature laments its plight, saying:

"I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me" (Frankenstein, p. 128).

This verbal paradox captures the contradiction between the creature's desire for love and the hatred it harbors due to its suffering. Its words reveal a deep conflict-while it seeks to be good and kind, it feels justified in its cruelty as a response to the cruelty it experiences. The creature's contradictory expressions of love and hatred highlight the tragic nature of its existence and the impact of society's rejection on its psyche.

D. The Complexity of Human Emotions

Shelley uses verbal paradoxes throughout Frankenstein to portray the complexity of human emotions and the psychological struggles of her characters. Both Victor and the creature express conflicting thoughts that reflect their inner battles-between pride and shame, love and hatred, hope and despair. These verbal paradoxes emphasize the dual nature of their experiences, making the reader aware of the multifaceted aspects of their personalities and the emotional turmoil they endure.

Through these paradoxes, Shelley explores the themes of identity, responsibility, and the consequences of unchecked ambition. The verbal contradictions not only reveal the characters' innermost thoughts but also serve as a narrative device that deepens the exploration of moral dilemmas and psychological conflicts. By exposing these layers of

contradiction, Shelley challenges readers to consider the complexities of human nature and the intricate web of emotions that define her characters.

III. Character Paradox

A. Definition of Character Paradox

A character paradox refers to a contradiction within a character's development or personality, where they display conflicting traits or actions that seem to oppose each other. This paradox can highlight the complexity of human nature, illustrating the struggle between opposing forces within an individual's psyche. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley masterfully creates character paradoxes that delve into the moral and ethical complexities of her protagonists, revealing the multifaceted nature of their identities.

B. Victor as Creator and Destroyer

Victor Frankenstein serves as the epitome of character paradox in the novel. As the creator of life, he attempts to go beyond the limits of human possibility but is scared of his own creature. Seeing how ugly his creation is once he has animated it, Victor abandons it in horror. This ambition to create life paradoxically leads to destruction and suffering, both for Victor himself and for those around him. Instead of being a benevolent creator, Victor becomes the source of chaos and tragedy:

"I, who had ever been surrounded by amiable companions, continually engaged in endeavoring to bestow mutual pleasure - I was now alone. In the midst of thousands, I was alone"(Frankenstein, p. 152).

This paradox of Victor as both creator and destroyer emphasizes the moral dilemma inherent in scientific creation. His role as a visionary is overshadowed by his inability to foresee the consequences of his actions and take responsibility for his creation (Madsen, 2017). This contradiction reveals the dangers of unchecked ambition and the ethical considerations that accompany the pursuit of knowledge. (Wood, 2016)

C. The Creature as Innocent and Malevolent

The creature itself embodies a character paradox as it transitions from innocence to malevolence. Initially, it is portrayed as a being with a pure heart, seeking acceptance, kindness, and love. Its intentions are not inherently evil; instead, it longs for companionship and understanding. However, as it repeatedly faces rejection, prejudice, and cruelty from humanity, the creature's innocence is gradually replaced by anger, bitterness, and a desire for revenge:

"Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding"(Frankenstein, p. 129).

The paradox of the creature being both innocent and malevolent highlights the dual nature of its character. Its transformation from a well-meaning entity into a vengeful figure is not a result of its original nature but a reaction to the way it is treated by society. Every time he encounters someone new, they run away from him out of fear. This contradiction

illustrates the theme of nature versus nurture, suggesting that the creature's descent into evil is not inevitable but rather a consequence of the cruelty and rejection it experiences. Mary Shelley's use of a multi-narrative structure allows for a diverse exploration of perspectives through the experiences of Victor and his creature. This narrative technique serves to challenge the reader's assumptions about monstrosity and morality and humanizes the creature to the reader even if he is repeatedly scorned by his creator (Arain, 2024).

D. Thematic Reflection of Human Duality

The character paradoxes in *Frankenstein* reflect a broader thematic exploration of human duality. Through Victor and the creature, Shelley explores the conflicting aspects of human nature: good versus evil, love versus hatred, hope versus despair. These contradictions are central to understanding the complexity of both characters and the novel's underlying message about the human condition. The paradoxical traits they exhibit suggest that individuals are capable of both noble and destructive actions, depending on their experiences and the choices they make.

By highlighting these dualities, Shelley delves into the psychological and moral intricacies that define her characters. The character paradoxes not only serve as a narrative tool to deepen the reader's understanding of Victor and the creature but also invite a reflection on the multifaceted nature of humanity itself. This exploration of duality ultimately emphasizes the idea that every individual possesses both light and darkness within them, shaped by their desires, fears, and the world around them.

IV. Thematic Paradox

A. Creation vs. Destruction

One of the most prominent thematic paradoxes in *Frankenstein* is the tension between creation and destruction. Victor Frankenstein's ambitious act of creating life, which he believes to be a monumental achievement in science, paradoxically results in death, suffering, and the unraveling of everything he holds dear. His desire to become a creator of life leads to the destruction of his own life and the lives of those he loves.

B. The Nature of Humanity

One of the most profound thematic paradoxes in *Frankenstein* is the exploration of what it means to be human. The creature, despite being labeled a monster, exhibits human qualities such as empathy, love, and a longing for connection, which are paradoxically contrasted with his violent acts of revenge and rage. Despite the creature's hideous appearance and this thematic paradox raises questions about the nature of humanity, morality, and identity. The creature's lament on his own existence captures this contradiction:

"Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all humankind sinned against me?" {*Frankenstein*, p. 154}.

The paradox of the creature's humanity versus his monstrosity challenges the reader to consider whether it is one's actions or society's perception that truly defines what it means to be human. This duality reflects the complexities of human nature itself, where good and evil coexist within individuals. Shelley's exploration of this thematic paradox suggests that

humanity is not defined solely by appearance or actions but by the capacity for both compassion and cruelty, highlighting the moral ambiguity inherent in all beings.

Conclusion

Throughout *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley employs paradoxes in various forms— situational, character, verbal, and thematic—to highlight the complexities of her narrative and deepen the understanding of her characters and themes. The themes explored through paradox in *Frankenstein* remain relevant to contemporary discussions about technology, science, and moral responsibility. In today's world, where advancements in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and other scientific innovations raise ethical questions, Shelley's novel serves as a cautionary tale about the unintended consequences of human ingenuity. The paradoxes in the novel invite readers to reflect on the need for ethical guidelines in scientific endeavors and the potential repercussions of creating without considering the moral implications. Shelley's work urges a reevaluation of the responsibilities that come with the power to create, making *Frankenstein* a timeless exploration of human ambition and its limits.

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