

Free essay on monstrosity in blade runner and frankenstein

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Introduction

Monstrosity is a term used to describe an unsightly object or creature with malformations, something that is excessively big or something evil.

Monstrosity is the quality and nature of being monstrous. It is what is unacceptable as natural by a particular culture. This means that the criteria used to label something as being monstrous can change over time. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is arguably the best depiction of the term monstrosity. He tells her story through two characters, Victor Frankenstein and the Monster, whereby the humanity of the two is constantly questioned (Anders 1). On the other hand, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* challenges the definitions of what it means to be human. There is the ever-present monstrosity but it is not as pronounced as that in *Frankenstein*. This is because it exists more in character rather than in appearance. This essay discusses monstrosity in *Blade Runner* and *Frankenstein* as a cultural construction and in terms of how mutable this construction is.

Blade Runner and *Frankenstein* are two of the most notable works that explore the themes of humanity and monstrosity. *Blade Runner* is a 1982 classic in which Ridley Scott creates an interplay between the human and the non-human and how these dominant polarities interact with monstrosity. In the film are human-like beings known as replicants which are depicted as the monsters in the story. These replicants are assigned a lifespan of four years to keep them in control. In a similar storyline, *Frankenstein* represents a monstrous creation by Victor Frankenstein which is made up of different body parts from dead people. The Monster kills people whom Frankenstein loves and falls out with his creator (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*). The most

evident similarity in both works is that they involve creations which act contrary to their initially intended roles

The first reason why the monstrous is a mutable cultural construction (as displayed in the two works) is that there is role-reversal. For example, in Frankenstein, Victor Frankenstein is the human creator of the monster.

However, in modern pop-culture, people refer to the monster as

Frankenstein. This is because Frankenstein is more monstrous than the

actual monster in many regards. This is the depiction of the monster within

(Anders 1). This is shown when Frankenstein says that his enthusiasm, while

creating the monster, was tempered by anxiety rather than art. This sense of

inevitable doom and lack of freedom of will shows that in man there is a

monster within. Victor Frankenstein's ambitions and desires come to life.

This depicts the monster as physical representations of these desires and

ambitions. After creating his monster, Frankenstein dreams about Elizabeth

being dead. When he awakens, he meets the monster and shortly

afterwards, the Monster kills Elizabeth. Frankenstein's monstrous traits come

to the fore when he resorts to total hatred against the monster. This

closeness between human nature and monstrosity is also evident in

Bladerunner. The "monsters" in this film resemble humans. The replicants

are remarkably human-like and are a representation of human ontology

(Dick 43). Curiously, the protagonists in this film display monster-like

characteristics, showing a role-reversal between the hero and the monster in

the film. This role-reversal is evident in the slogan of the company that

manufactures the replicants, "more human than human". Another instance

in the film where monstrosity is shown in the human characters is when

Deckard, Gaff and Bryant refer to killing the replicants as “retiring them”. This is because using the words “kill” or “murder” would be tantamount to admitting that the replicants had a degree of autonomy or humanness (Dick 33).

Secondly, the perception of monstrosity changes severally in both works. In this regard, the cultural construction is portrayed as being mutable. This means that the perception of monstrosity is a cultural construct that can change and depends on the particular culture. This is seen in both Blade Runner and Frankenstein. In Blade Runner, replicants are shunned from society. They are hunted down and killed by police operatives known as Bladerunners if they attempt to come back to earth from slave colonies. However, the cultural construction of replicants as being monstrous changes soon after Bladerunner Deckard kills a harmless replicant. This replicant is depicted as being very attractive and almost innocent, serving to further blur the line between humans and replicants. For example, one replicant is so close to being human that specialists implant human memories into her. Deckard, a bladerunner eventually realizes that he could be a replicant. He begins to view fellow replicants differently and to empathies with them. Batty (a replicant) saves Deckard (a bladerunner) from death. Coupled with his enjoyment of life and readiness to show mercy depicts this replicant as being more human than the actual human beings (Anders 1). This changes the perception of those around Batty and they begin to change their cultural construction on monstrosity. This shows that the notion of monstrosity as a cultural construct can change.

Thirdly, in both Frankenstein and Blade Runner, the creatures are products

of reason (culturally constructed as being “ virtuous”) but end up being “ vicious”/ monstrous after they are abandoned by “ irresponsible science”. Frankenstein provides a metaphor for monstrous science which may be applied to modern times. What may be regarded as progression in science and labeled “ virtuoso?” may eventually change to something monstrous. Frankenstein, in his ambitions strives to create a human and challenge nature. His ambitions to create a living creature may be admired. However, the resultant creature, even as an embodiment of his success, proves to be a monstrosity because it is compared to the societal constructs on what a human being should look like. Further, when the monster kills Elizabeth, even its creator, “ Frankenstein” turns against it. This means that his perceptions on the monstrosity he had created changes. In Blade Runner, replicants are creations of Dr. Terrell which have human characteristics but are regarded as monsters since they are not completely human. They are initially created as marvels of science but later prove to be a menace.

Conclusion

Blade Runner and Frankenstein are both works which examine the themes of humanity and monstrosity. Both of them depict human creations which work contrary to the manner in which their creators initially intended. This results in a comparison between these creations and human beings using cultural constructs. In both works, these cultural constructs are mutable. These changes are visible in three ways. First, there is role-reversal. In role-reversal, humans are viewed as having monstrous traits while the monsters are viewed as possessing human traits. This is particularly evident in Blade

Runner when Batty acts human by showing compassion and the craving for life while the humans kill an innocent replicant. Secondly, there is a change in the perception of monstrosity in both works. Thirdly, in both Frankenstein and Blade Runner, the creatures begin as products of reason but end up as monsters. The initial and final perceptions of the monsters in both cases are not the same.

Work cited

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