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Monstrosity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Leigh Bardugo's *Six of Crows*

By Jordyn Fortuna

A Monster is an inhuman creature that demonstrates extreme levels of cruelty in an attempt to fulfill their own selfish desires with no consideration of others, thereby removing themselves from community and sympathy. A Monster is not defined by any one thing, but rather by the cumulation of their behaviors revealing an overarching disregard for humanity. This essentially means that Monstrosity is the opposite of humanity. Although it can be tempting to believe that a Monster can be known from their appearance, this is deceiving.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*¹ and Leigh Bardugo's *Six of Crows*² duology demonstrate that everyone has the potential to be a Monster. Within the worlds of these stories, the Monstrosity of the individual is defined by how a character is being perceived by the other characters around them. In reality, however, the reader is provided with the characters' motivations, which reveal the true extent of their Monstrosity. This allows the potentially Monstrous being to obtain sympathy, thereby no longer making them a Monster.

This concept is interesting to explore through the lens of *Frankenstein*, viewing the novel as a battle between the Monstrosity of the creator, Victor, and that of the creation, the Creature. Although culturally the Creature has become the designated Monster of the story, Monstrosity also resides within Victor. Monstrosity is also seen throughout *Six of Crows* and *Crooked Kingdom*, which can be thought of as one entity for the purposes of this paper, in the characterization of each of the Crows.

¹Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2013).

²Leigh Bardugo, *Six of Crows: Collector's Edition* (London, UK: Orion Children's Books, 2018).

The duology follows Kaz Brekker, a resident of the undercity known as the Barrel, as he works with a team of criminals. The other members include Nina Zenik, a Grisha Heartrender and trained spy; Matthias Helvar, a druskelle (also known as a witch hunter) with heavy prejudices; Jesper Fahey, a sharpshooter with a gambling addiction; Wylan Van Eck, a munitions expert and son of a merchant; and Inej Ghafa, who uses her acrobat training to be a spy. They each demonstrate varying levels of Monstrous qualities while fighting against greater threats to society than themselves. Although they do this for selfish reasons, it does ultimately benefit others, thereby gaining the reader’s sympathy and bringing into question the extent of their Monstrosity.

Potential in *Frankenstein*

There is often a thin, subjective line separating Monsters from the rest of the world. Cohen even goes so far as to ask “Do Monsters really exist? Surely, they must, for if they did not, how could we?”³ Monsters do not need to be fantastical creatures that only exist in the darkest shadows; everyone is someone’s Monster. The worst Monsters never look like Monsters and can blend in with society: “These Monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place.”⁴ Morality is important to look at through the responsibility of the creator.

In *Frankenstein*, this presents itself through viewing Victor as the real Monster of the story. Despite being the reason for the Creature’s existence, Victor rejects his child, focusing their relationship around shame. Hatch points out that “Frankenstein’s shame is complementary to the Creature’s: where the parent’s absence shames the child, the child’s presence shames the

³Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minnesota, Mn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 20.

⁴Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 20.

parent.”⁵ Victor is afraid of what his obsession has created, and ashamed of the being he had once hoped would bring him glory.

This neglect creates issues because the Creature is both rejected by humanity in general, but also by the person who chose to bring him to life. His lack of a parental figure is problematic because “children want to be or be like their parents, and do this through imitation, with more or less successful results.”⁶ Victor’s absence in his life leaves the Creature with no one to imitate, and yet he still unwittingly ends up taking on his creator’s worst qualities. As a living representation of Victor’s Monstrosity, he eventually imitates this aspect of his father-figure because it is the only side of him that he is able to know.

Unfortunately, Victor views himself as the victim of the Creature’s existence. Ganz says that “Victor never learns from his mistakes; to the end of his life, he remains obsessed with destroying rather than caring for his offspring.”⁷ He never accepts responsibility, only briefly considering behaving as a creator when the Creature petitions him for a mate, but he does not follow through on this agreement.⁸

Victor also neglects to educate his child in the concepts of morality and sympathy for humanity. The Creature is forced to attempt to learn about these crucial concepts alone and although he may gain some knowledge, “Knowledge is not the same thing as understanding, . . . and reading about vice does not bring a child to a full comprehension of it.”⁹ The Creature is able

⁵James C. Hatch, “Disruptive Affects: Shame, Disgust, and Sympathy in *Frankenstein*,” *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 1 (Jan 2008): 39.

⁶Hatch, “Disruptive Affects,” 38.

⁷Melissa J. Ganz, “‘A Kind of Insanity in My Spirits’: *Frankenstein*, Childhood, and Criminal Intent,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 56, no. 1 (2022): 66.

⁸Shelly, *Frankenstein*, 171.

⁹Ganz, “‘A Kind of Insanity in My Spirits,’” 63.

to learn through observing the cottagers, but he is not able to interact with these people and be an active participant, which prevents him from obtaining a full understanding.¹⁰

Although the Creature’s humanity is brought into question, the levels of intelligence that he repeatedly displays through this vicarious education reveal that he is capable of human levels of virtue. Despite being separated from community, “the Creature, meanwhile, insists that he is of the same essential nature as humans.”¹¹ The reader is able to relate to the Creature and bring him into a kind of humanity, despite the other characters refusing to allow for this consideration:

The question we are left with: if we find the Creature to be sympathetic in his noble aspirations, pitiable in his loneliness, coerced by the terrible pain inflicted on him, and yet ‘Monstrous’ for his premeditated actions, what does that mean for our understanding of the boundaries of individual identity?¹²

The Creature attempts to be virtuous and is generally more selfless than Victor. Frankenstein only takes into account his own needs and desires. The Creature, on the other hand, tries to help those around him and is punished for it, leading him to make more Monstrous decisions. He has the potential for good, but his treatment forces him down a more evil route.

Potential is also explored through the character of Walton, whose experience bookends the novel. Within this first level of the narrative, Walton relates to Victor’s thirst for discovery and his need to push the limits of what is considered possible. His new friend’s story serves as a warning to Walton to not follow the path he is currently on because it will only lead to a destroyed version of himself. Although he contains the potential to be like Victor, he instead forces himself to learn from the other man’s mistakes.

Another important issue to consider is sympathy. If a creature is unable to learn to be sympathetic toward others, this naturally causes a lack of understanding of the value of human

¹⁰Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 115.

¹¹Josh Bernatchez, “Monstrosity, Suffering, Subjectivity, and Sympathetic Community in *Frankenstein* and ‘The Structure of Torture,’” *Science Fiction Studies* 36, no. 2 (July 2009), 208.

¹²Bernatchez, “Monstrosity, Suffering, Subjectivity, and Sympathetic Community,” 215.

lives, and therefore Monstrous behavior. When the Creature begins spying on the cottagers, he forms a kind of sympathy, which “is the birth of fully formed emotion in the Creature, a birth as miraculously inexplicable (or unnatural) as his own for sympathy requires the sense of self so that one can compare oneself with others, imagining what it would be like to be in someone else’s place.”¹³ Through his growing understanding of both his own and other’s emotions, he is able to feel human for a time, but this illusion is eventually shattered.

Another necessary aspect to consider is trauma experienced through the Creature’s upbringing. One element of this is a child’s loss of innocence in which “an individual’s perceptual world can be re-coded by pain, which annihilates subjective identity by its systematic interruption and reversal of efforts at self-extension.”¹⁴ After forming a deep sense of connection and community with the cottagers, the Creature is beaten when he first tries to speak to them.¹⁵ He still attempts to connect with humanity by saving a young girl from drowning, only to be shot in return.¹⁶ All of his kindness is then recoded into pain, encouraging him to respond to humanity Monstrously.

Potential in *Six of Crows*

These concepts of potential can also be seen throughout *Six of Crows*. Taking into consideration parental responsibility, Wylan’s relationship with his father has similar themes of neglect as the Creature’s relationship with Victor. Although Van Eck provided his son with the best education available, he failed to demonstrate correct moral concepts for him. The kindness and goodness that Wylan demonstrates are learned in spite of, rather than as a result of, his

¹³Hatch, “Disruptive Affects,” 40.

¹⁴Bernatchez, “Monstrosity, Suffering, Subjectivity, and Sympathetic Community,” 205.

¹⁵ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 137.

¹⁶ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 143.

father. Van Eck is greedy and selfish, and only values his son as an heir to his fortune, rather than as a human being who is inherently valuable. This is highlighted when he has another son and declares, “That child will be my heir, not some soft-pated idiot who cannot read a hymnal, let alone a ledger, not some fool who would make the Van Eck name a laughingstock.”¹⁷ This eventually forces Wylan to become a criminal, using his scientific knowledge to build explosives. He distinguishes himself from his father, though, in that he feels guilty for his actions.

Each of the Crows has the potential for goodness before darker situations arise. Kaz, in particular, begins his life with his brother, Jordie, with dreams of making it in Ketterdam. When they first arrive, Jordie says, “I’ll become a stockholder and then a proper merchant, and then I’ll make my fortune.”¹⁸ This optimism is quickly taken from them though, and after losing their money in a scam, they are left to the mercy of the streets. When Jordie dies of the plague and Kaz is left to fend for himself, he re-works his potential into something darker, and more fitting for the life in which he finds himself.¹⁹

Inej has her potential taken from her when she is taken by slave-traders and sold to a brothel, the Menagerie.²⁰ She is forced to adapt to this new reality, eventually becoming a spy and a killer. Jesper, while enrolled in university, became plagued by his gambling addiction, forcing him into a more dangerous life: “He sometimes wondered what might have happened if he’d never gone out with his new friends that night, if he’d never walked into that gambling parlor and taken that first spin at Makker’s Wheel.”²¹

¹⁷Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 475.

¹⁸Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 220.

¹⁹Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 293.

²⁰Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 204.

²¹Leigh Bardugo, *Crooked Kingdom: Collector’s Edition* (London, UK: Orion Children’s Books, 2019), 71.

Nina’s potential is hijacked by her government from a very young age as she is trained from childhood to be a soldier. She moves away from this, though, and chooses her love for Matthias over the hatred that has been ingrained in her. This decision has consequences, though, because it shifts her from one kind of Monstrosity into another as she is forced into the Barrel. Matthias’ experience mirrors Nina’s in that he is also brought up with hatred and turned into a soldier. He chooses his love for Nina, but this causes him to become a criminal in Kaz’s gang.

For Kaz, the loss of innocence presents itself through his relationship with Pekka Rollins. Through Pekka’s scam, and subsequently Jordie’s death, Kaz’s childhood was taken from him.²² Keus and Harde says that “Kaz internalizes the dangerous persona that he portrays, coming to hate his childhood innocence because it made him vulnerable and allowed him to become traumatized.”²³ Although he is driven by his hatred of Pekka’s trickery, he becomes like Pekka, leaning into his Monstrosity.

Perception in *Frankenstein*

In *Frankenstein* the Creature is perceived to be a Monster because of his appearance. Although this does not immediately cause his Monstrosity, it does eventually lead to it. The importance of physicality is even revealed with Victor because as he begins spiraling down into his own Monstrosity, he begins physically deteriorating. Rogers points out that “Victor is, significantly, called a ‘creature’ and described in an animalistic fashion.”²⁴ In his obsession, he fails to take care of both his body and his mind.²⁵

²²Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 227.

²³Kelly Keus and Roxanne Harde, “She Wished Someone Would Help Them’: PTSD and Empathy in the Six of Crows Duology,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 53, no. 1 (March 2022): 138.

²⁴Kathleen Beres Rogers, “The Monstrous Idea in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” *Literature and Medicine* 36, no. 2 (2018): 367.

²⁵Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 57.

The Creature’s upbringing leading to his Monstrosity can be considered in terms of the fact that he is never given a name. He is only known as the Creature or the monster, and culturally has become synonymous with the name of his creator, Frankenstein. This creator neglects to fulfill the most basic parental responsibility, that of naming his child: “Victor refuses to use a name that would link his creation to any shared community or category.”²⁶ He attempts to distance himself from his creation as much as possible, refusing to do even the bare minimum of giving it an individual identity. Ironically, this attempt at separation only serves to further blur the lines between Frankenstein and his creation.

A large difficulty preventing the Creature from establishing connections and overcoming the perception bias that he encounters is the language barrier. This is significant because “in its relationship with sympathy, language figures in the novel as an assurance that an inner moral state of benevolence can be communicated to others, overriding the automaticity of the affect of disgust.”²⁷ Although there is the potential for his words to override his appearance, those he encounters do not give him the opportunity to speak. They are so overwhelmed with fear of his assumed Monstrosity based on his appearance that they do not allow him to be anything else.

This idea of perception, particularly self-perception, is deeply linked to shame, which “interrupts a visual connection between the self and the other, driving consciousness back to the self.”²⁸ The Creature appears hideous to himself as well as to others. One instance in which this is evident is when he sees his reflection for the first time.²⁹ In this moment he gains a better understanding of why he is treated the way that he is, which contributes to the forming of his

²⁶Bernatchez, “Monstrosity, Suffering, Subjectivity, and Sympathetic Community,” 207.

²⁷Hatch, “Disruptive Affects,” 39.

²⁸Hatch, “Disruptive Affects,” 38.

²⁹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 116.

own worldview. In this moment he realizes that “his face apparently can only convey Monstrousness and cannot convey to the outside the interior goodness and benevolent emotions that he possesses.”³⁰ This fills him with shame as he realizes that he is not only a disappointment to others, but also a disappointment to himself.

Although Victor is the one who determined this visual, he is also the first to reject it as hideous. He initially chose parts that he considered beautiful, but he also made his creation supernaturally large and terrifying. Victor recognizes his mistake when he first sees the Creature alive, saying, “His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God!”³¹ When he is finally successful in his endeavor to give the potentially beautiful form life, he is confronted by its actual appearance and rejects it at once:

The penetrating glance, so often a staple of gothic fiction, is here given special significance by being indicative of the power of the gothic spectacle: sightedness forces Victor to contemplate the horror, and this horror endures through the moral degradation of the creature, from the time when it is unjust to treat him this way to the time that it is just. But the gaze remains the same throughout: nothing about the gaze reflects the reality of the moral status of its object.³²

Perception is not reality. Victor’s perception should be skewed in favor of his creation given that it was he who made it, but instead he is faced with the Monstrosity of what he has done in attempting to play god.

Perception in *Six of Crows*

These same concepts of the relationship between perception and Monstrosity can also be examined within *Six of Crows*. Looking at the idea that Monsters do not always look like Monsters, Van Eck is the perfect example. He is a respected member of the community, an upstanding merchant. It is the first thing that Kaz acknowledges when they first meet, saying,

³⁰Hatch, “Disruptive Affects,” 41.

³¹Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 58.

³²Essaka Joshua, “‘Blind Vacancy’: Sighted Culture and Voyeuristic Historiography in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” *European Romantic Review* 22, no. 1 (February 2011): 58-59.

“‘You’re one of those merch crusaders always trying to clean up the Barrel.’”³³ He does not present himself as an easily labeled villain, however, he is a Monster. He attempts to kill his son, Wylan, for not being able to read. He also has his wife committed to an asylum for the crime of not giving birth to a child that he considers to be a worthy heir. These things are made worse because of his positive reputation. He is not punished, either criminally or socially, for these atrocities.

Kaz has physical elements to his Monstrosity, in particular his use of a cane. Although some might consider this a fault, Kaz incorporates it into his Monstrous persona. He frequently uses his cane as a weapon, which adds to the imagery surrounding Dirtyhands:

It became a declaration. There was no part of him that was not broken, that had not healed wrong, and there was no part of him that was not stronger for having been broken. The cane became a part of the myth he built.³⁴

Kaz’s physical image is also dominated by his gloves. Although there is a practical reason that he wears them, to prevent skin-to-skin contact, it also adds yet another element of mystery around his appearance. In his refusal to show outward fear from these potential weaknesses, he instead instills fear in the hearts of those who see him: “Brekker’s hands were stained with blood. Brekker’s hands were covered in scars. Brekker had claws and not fingers because he was part demon.”³⁵ He may be physically separated from those around him, but he finds a way to use it to his advantage, rather than allowing it to be considered a defect.

This visual factor is one contributor to the dehumanization that is present throughout the Crows’ lives. Inej is initially reduced to something less than human against her will and is seen as an animal at the Menagerie. The brothel made it so that “Each girl was known by her animal

³³Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 46.

³⁴Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 428-429.

³⁵Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 63.

name—leopard, mare, fox, raven, ermine, fawn, snake.”³⁶ She is only known as the Lynx and her individual identity is taken away from her. After she escapes this situation and begins working for Kaz, she intentionally remains distinct from humanity. She forms her own Monstrous persona with the Wraith, which allows her to have a feared reputation, while also distancing herself from the deeds she is forced to commit.

This also occurs between Nina and Matthias when they first meet. After the shipwreck that forces them to band together for survival, they do not exchange names, instead referring to each other as witch and witch hunter, refusing to acknowledge each other’s humanity. The issue of species, though not as prevalent as in *Frankenstein*, actually does appear here given that the Fjerdans, Matthias’ people, do not believe Grisha are human. Druskelle view Grisha as even lower than dogs; they are demons that deserve no amount of sympathy. Matthias tells Nina that “dogs know loyalty, at least. Fidelity to the pack. It is an insult to the dog to call you one.”³⁷

One example of the influence of self-perception and shame is Matthias. The Monstrous acts that he commits through being a druskelle are a consequence of his upbringing and something that he comes to be ashamed of. This type of shame differs from the Creature’s in several keyways. Primarily, Matthias is ashamed of his actions, whereas the Creature is ashamed of his appearance. Although they are both taking on personal responsibility for a wrong that belongs more with their creators, Matthias had more of a choice in what he comes to be ashamed of. Also, the Creature’s shame leads him further into his Monstrosity because he realizes that he cannot change his appearance and will always be seen as a Monster. Matthias’ shame, on the other hand, leads him away from his Monstrosity because it is something that he believes he can

³⁶Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 148.

³⁷Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 183.

rectify: “Unnatural. The word had come so easily to him, a way to dismiss what he did not understand, to make Nina and her kind less than human. But what if behind the righteousness that drove the druskelle, there was something less clean or justified?”³⁸

Within the discussion of perception, it is important to recognize that although these physical elements contribute to the Monstrous image, they are not in and of themselves markers of Monstrosity: “Scholars, nevertheless, commonly assume or imply that deformity and Monstrosity are the same, and that deformity is a quality intrinsic to the individual, rather than a physical difference that prompts a negative response within sighted culture.”³⁹

It is a common misconception that a person’s heart or intentions can be recognized in their appearance. Kaz uses this sighted bias to his advantage, because he wants to be seen as a Monster and therefore is able to make himself appear more visually Monstrous. It is damaging for the Creature, though, because he wants to be seen beyond his physical aspects, but is unable to find anyone able to overcome their sighted bias. This necessarily leads to a distinction between perception and reality.

Reality in *Frankenstein*

Victor’s Monstrosity, and the reality of his character, presents itself through his obsession. His only thought is making a name for himself as a progressor of scientific thought. Although this obsession could have been focused anywhere, “what makes science so enticing is indeed the promise of the inexhaustibility of its own ends.”⁴⁰ He believed that he could control life, taking the power of a god into his own hands. Although other people cautioned him against

³⁸Bardugo, *Crooked Kingdom*, 291.

³⁹Joshua, ““Blind Vacancy,”” 49.

⁴⁰Roberto Del Valle Alcalá, “Monstrous Contemplation: Frankenstein, Agamben, and the Politics of Life,” *Textual Practice* 32, no. 3-4 (April 2018): 615.

pursuing this form of science, he continued down the path, never stopping to consider the implications of creating life out of death, but instead obsessed with the idea of proving that he could. He neglects all other aspects of his life, reducing himself to what he believes to be scientific potential. In actuality, he is taking on aspects of Monstrosity.

Upon completing his creation Victor is no longer captivated by his ideals of scientific advancement and glory. He flees from the Creature and acts out against the living representation of his own Monstrosity. This reaction shows that “Victor’s response to the creature is irrational and indicates a diseased imagination. Shelley also illustrates that, like many mental illnesses, obsession turns the sufferer inward.”⁴¹ Victor is too self-centered to see beyond his own desires, and he is unable to consider what is best for humanity.

This concept of actual rather than perceived Monstrosity can also be explored through the idea of the Freudian Doppelganger. This concept is “associated with evil and the demonic,”⁴² and is essentially a visual representation of the darkest parts of the mind. Within the context of *Frankenstein*, this can be understood thinking about the Creature as Victor’s Doppelganger. He is the conclusion of his creator’s obsession and isolation. He kills only as a result of Frankenstein’s neglect and refusal to accept responsibility. When the Creature has finally reached the limit of what he will passively endure, he says, “I too can create desolation; my enemy is not invulnerable; this death will carry despair to him.”⁴³ He takes on the darkest aspects of his creator and appears as a physical manifestation of Victor’s Monstrosity.

⁴¹Rogers, “The Monstrous Idea,” 366.

⁴²Dimitris Vardoulakis, “The Return of Negation: The Doppelganger in Freud’s ‘The Uncanny,’” *SubStance* 35, no. 2 (2006): 100.

⁴³Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 144.

Reality in *Six of Crows*

One instance of the Freudian Doppelganger in *Six of Crows* is Kaz as Pekka Rollins. Kaz is determined to get revenge on Pekka. Every action that he takes revolves around the idea that he will tear him down “Brick by Brick”, a phrase that emphasizes his obsession. He is a reflection of the worst parts of Pekka, because the positive aspects of his humanity have been neglected in favor of pursuing vengeance. Pekka acknowledges this when he says, “The problem was that the creatures who had managed to survive the city he’d made were a new kind of misery entirely.”⁴⁴ Kaz has become Pekka’s shadow, the embodiment of the consequences of his actions.

Kaz’s reality is revealed through the community that he forms with the Crows. As they all grow closer in this community, they move further away from their Monstrous tendencies. Although they come from vastly different backgrounds, they sympathize with one another because they have ended up in the same place. They are all of the same species; they are all Crows, they are survivors. They band together because they recognize that “That was how you survived when you weren’t chosen, when there was no royal blood in your veins. When the world owed you nothing, you demanded something of it anyway.”⁴⁵

As Kaz begins feeling a romantic connection with Inej, he begins attempting to differentiate between his Monstrous persona, Dirtyhands, and his actual self: “The harbour wind had lifted her dark hair, and for a moment Kaz was a boy again.”⁴⁶ This mindset also allows him

⁴⁴Bardugo, *Crooked Kingdom*, 536.

⁴⁵Bardugo, *Crooked Kingdom*, 460.

⁴⁶Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 430.

to dissociate from the Monstrous actions he is forced to commit to protect those he cares about:

“Dirtyhands had come to see the rough work done.”⁴⁷

Conclusion

Part of gaining the reader’s sympathy and distancing oneself from potential Monstrosity is through feeling guilty about one’s actions. This is a large part of Victor’s problem. He is constantly searching for ways to deflect the blame away from himself. Ganz says that “the problem, Shelley shows, is that Victor does not act on his guilty feelings.”⁴⁸ He does not do anything to rectify the situation he created, making him fully responsible for the actions he claims to be a victim of.

The Creature also bears responsibility, but he, unlike his creator, does manage to gain the reader’s sympathy. Ganz notes that “while the novel acknowledges the horror of the Creature’s violence, it refuses to condemn him. Shelley repeatedly emphasizes the Creature’s lack of understanding and criminal intent.”⁴⁹ Although the Creature has the appearance of an adult, he is still essentially a child. He does not have a fully formed understanding of what is wrong, particularly because he has had no one to teach him. This then leads back to Victor’s Monstrosity, rather than that of the Creature.

The Monstrosity that is seen in the Creature is a result of the other characters’ refusal to allow him human dignity. Part of this is not allowing him to gain sympathy: “He [Victor] insists that he alone is the innocent sufferer; he denies the Creature’s right to sympathy or justice.”⁵⁰ For the reader, this has the opposite of Victor’s intended effect. Instead of making himself the hero,

⁴⁷Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 485.

⁴⁸Ganz, “A Kind of Insanity in My Spirits,” 61.

⁴⁹Ganz, “A Kind of Insanity in My Spirits,” 55.

⁵⁰Bernatchez, “Monstrosity, Suffering, Subjectivity, and Sympathetic Community,” 209.

his neglect causes him to be portrayed as the villain. The Creature attempts to feel sympathy for other people that he encounters, and therefore deserves the same courtesy for himself. Victor’s desire to dehumanize his creation only serves to reveal the capacity for humanity that the Creature has.

Within *Six of Crows* the idea of guilt can be seen through Inej. She does not attempt to deflect the blame away from herself, but takes full responsibility for what she knows is wrong. Where Victor has placed himself in bad situations, Inej bears no fault for her circumstances. She may commit atrocities, but she does so in order to survive. Also, similar to the Creature, she is a child. She does what she feels she has to, but she feels guilty and attempts to do right by her victim’s souls:

Was she innocent? She regretted the lives she’d taken, but she would take them again to save her own life, the lives of her friends. She’d stolen. She’d helped Kaz blackmail good men and bad. Could she say the choices she’d made were the only choices put before her?⁵¹

This trauma can also be seen throughout the PTSD that both Kaz and Inej struggle with. Keus and Harde mention this, saying, “Kaz and his ever-present gloves illustrates how people living with PTSD might develop avoidance behaviors.”⁵² This aversion to human touch is something that he tries to overcome, but he cannot rid himself of it. This detail gives the reader insight beyond the persona that Kaz displays publicly, contributing to the sympathetic nature of his character.

Inej attempts to help him move forward from his trauma, but it has become the only thing that he knows. This makes sense given that “people living with PTSD commonly redefine themselves by their trauma.”⁵³ He does not know how to function without it, nor does he know

⁵¹ Bardugo, *Crooked Kingdom*, 458.

⁵² Keus and Harde, ““She Wished Someone Would Help Them,”” 137.

⁵³ Keus and Harde, ““She Wished Someone Would Help Them,”” 137.

who he is beyond it. Part of his fear in gaining feelings for Inej is that he realizes he cannot move past his trauma. He tries, for her sake, and he does make progress, but it makes him feel weak and vulnerable.⁵⁴

Inej has her own PTSD to deal with, which is part of why she is the only one that is able to make any progress with Kaz. The main difference between her and Kaz is that she desperately wants to move beyond it. She also clings to her religion to help her cope with her trauma, where Kaz has nothing to believe in other than himself.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Leigh Bardugo’s *Six of Crows* both reveal the complexities surrounding the idea of Monstrosity. Although what makes a Monster can be highly subjective, a person’s appearance is not enough to reach an accurate conclusion about their character. Within the world they exist in, a character may be perceived as a Monster by others, but if they are able to gain the reader’s sympathy, they can be seen beyond their harmful actions. This does not excuse their behavior, but serves to explain their motivations in a way that reveals their humanity.

These ideas are important to consider given the vast difference a change in perspective can make. Although it may be tempting to believe that Monsters do not exist in real life, they do. They may not appear as supernatural beings, but they expose themselves through their cruel actions. The ability to discern between reputation and reality in order to uncover a person’s Monstrosity begins by recognizing that everyone has the potential to be a Monster.

⁵⁴Bardugo, *Six of Crows*, 460.

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