

A Comparative Study of Empathy and Rejection in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Martha Wells' *Compulsory*

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دراسة مقارنة للتعاطف والرفض في روايتي فرانكشتاين لماري شيلي والإلزامي لمارثا ويلز

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ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تحليل موضوعي التعاطف والرفض في روايتي فرانكشتاين لماري شيلي (١٨١٨) والإلزامي لمارثا ويلز (٢٠١٨). ويركز البحث على تصوير مشاعر الرفض والتهميش والألم النفسي لدى بطلي الروايتين. لا تتوافق هاتان البطلتان مع معايير المجتمع لكونهما ليستا بشريتين. وانطلاقاً من نظريات كين حول التعاطف والآخرية، تحلل الدراسة العلاقة بين التعاطف والرفض والتماهي مع الهوية الإنسانية. هذا بحث نوعي يعتمد على التحليل النصي الدقيق كأسلوب رئيسي لجمع البيانات. وتشمل مصادر البيانات مقاطع مختارة من الروايتين تُظهر حالات التعاطف والرفض الاجتماعي والقبول والتماهي مع الذات. من الواضح أن كلا من مخلوق فرانكشتاين والروبوت القاتل من رواية "إجباري" ليسا عضوين معترف بهما تماماً في المجتمع، على الرغم من إظهارهما للمشاعر والوعي الذاتي ومراعاة الآخرين. تُسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على كيف يؤدي الرفض إلى مشاعر الاغتراب والعزلة واضطراب الهوية، بينما تُعدّ التعاطف أداة لردم الهوية والاعتراف بالآخرين أخلاقياً. على الرغم من كونهما نتاجاً لحركات وحقب أدبية متباينة، إلا أن العملين يُقدّمان تحليلات مقارنة للتمييز والإقصاء. الكلمات المفتاحية: التعاطف، الرفض، فرانكشتاين، إجباري، ماري شيلي، مارثا ويلز، الأدب المقارن، الخيال العلمي، الأدب القوطي، الهوية، الآخرية.

Abstract

In this study, the themes of empathy and rejection are analyzed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Martha Wells' *Compulsory* (2018). The research focuses on the portrayal of the protagonists' feelings of rejection, marginalization, and emotional pain in these novels. These protagonists do not fit into the norms of society because they are not humans. Based on Keen's theories of empathy and otherness, the study analyzes the correlation between empathy, rejection, and identification with being human. This is a qualitative research using close textual analysis as the main data gathering technique. The data sources include selected passages from the selected novels that show cases of empathy, social rejection, acceptance, and self-identification. It is evident that neither the Creature from *Frankenstein* nor Murderbot from *Compulsory* are fully recognized members of society even though they display emotions, self-awareness, and consideration of others. This study highlights how rejection leads to feelings of alienation, isolation, and identity confusion, whereas empathy serves as a tool for bridging gaps and recognizing others ethically. Despite being products of distinct literary movements and eras, the two pieces offer comparable analyses of discrimination and exclusion.

Keywords: Empathy, Rejection, *Frankenstein*, *Compulsory*, Mary Shelley, Martha Wells, Comparative Literature, Science Fiction, Gothic Literature, Identity, Otherness.

1. Introduction

Empathy and rejection are considered to be some of the main concepts examined in literature due to their influence on human relationships, identities, and social inclusion. Empathy implies the process of understanding the emotions and experiences of other people, whereas rejection denotes exclusion or alienation from the social group or the refusal to accept someone into a community (Lahnala et al., 2022, p. 3). It is common practice in literature to explore the relationship between these concepts by showing that the lack of empathy contributes to isolation, pain, and confrontation. It is widely accepted in modern research that empathy is crucial for understanding the experience of marginalized people and engaging ethically with them (Sharma et al., 2020, p. 2).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Martha Wells' *Compulsory* (2018) offer literary depictions of empathy and rejection despite the fact that they belong to distinct literary epochs and genres. In *Frankenstein*, the Creature undergoes consistent rejection due to his outward appearance and social standing, resulting in both pain and aggression. Modern scholars have pointed out that Mary Shelley's book reveals the importance of empathy as a moral force in human life and the consequences of its absence (Faubert, 2023, p. 318; Hernández Rodríguez, 2025, p. 45).

Like Wells, his *Compulsory*, a prequel to *The Murderbot Diaries*, features a security android that is perceived not as a thinking entity but simply as an instrument. Even though *Murderbot* is discriminated against and viewed as nothing more than an artificial creation, it exhibits empathy by putting itself at risk to rescue a fellow human being. As mentioned above, experts argue that Wells' work deals with topics such as autonomy, feelings, and the ethics of treating non-human entities in society (Wired, 2018, para. 4).

Comparison between the two works is important because these literary pieces show how empathy and discrimination are common both in past times and modern society. Whereas Shelley discusses the issues in question in a gothic context, Wells does it from the perspective of contemporary science fiction. Both authors manage to prove that discrimination leads to loneliness and anguish, while empathy is capable of helping people learn about each other and act morally. This explains why this research aims to analyze the similarity and differences between the empathy and discrimination portrayed in *Frankenstein* and *Compulsory*.

1.1 Problem Statement

Even though there have been several scholarly papers about empathy and rejection in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Martha Wells' *Compulsory*, very few attempts have been made at comparing and contrasting these two themes in relation to Gothic literature in the nineteenth century and contemporary science fiction. Many scholars tend to discuss issues like the alienation of the Creature in *Frankenstein* and the independence of the *Murderbot* but do not consider in depth how empathy comes into play when responding to the theme of rejection.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. Analysis of how empathy is portrayed in the novels *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Compulsory* by Martha Wells.
2. Discussion of the kinds of rejection faced by the protagonists of the aforementioned novels.
3. Identification of the similarities and differences in the role played by empathy and rejection in both texts.
4. Examination of the roles played by empathy and rejection in creating the ethical messages of both novels.

1.3 Research Questions

1. *In what way is empathy portrayed in *Frankenstein* and *Compulsory*?*
2. *Which forms of rejection have the main characters encountered in the two stories?*
3. *Which similarities and differences are present in the representation of empathy and rejection in the two literary works?*
4. *What significance does empathy and rejection have in relation to the underlying themes of the two stories?*

2. Literature Review

Issues such as empathy and rejection have become subjects of intense academic interest in recent times. These themes, especially in relation to identity development, social integration, and ethics, can help scholars understand how literary works have depicted marginalized people, monsters, artificial beings, and others. Works that have been studied for themes of empathy and rejection include, among many others, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Martha Wells' *Compulsory*. Alienation, empathy, autonomy, and the depiction of non-human

creatures have become common themes in literature related to these novels. Despite the increased academic interest in the themes of empathy and rejection, not much work has been done that provides a direct comparison between the two themes within these literary pieces.

2.1 Previous Studies on Empathy, Rejection, Otherness, and Non-Human Identities

Empathy has increasingly emerged as an interdisciplinary field of study owing to its role in enabling people to understand and react to the feelings of others. As Lahnala et al. (2022, p. 4) observe, empathy plays a key role in perceiving and understanding the point of view of the marginalized members of society. In literature, the concept of empathy can be analyzed through the way that characters, who suffer from some form of marginalization, are perceived by readers.

In recent times, it has been argued by scholars that the portrayal of empathy in literature allows readers to question existing societal perceptions regarding the marginalized members of society. According to Sharma et al. (2020, p. 5), the idea of empathy promotes ethical behavior in regards to individuals that belong to disadvantaged social backgrounds. Characters, who lack empathy in literary stories, are usually depicted as isolated from society.

Rejection is associated with theories of otherness and exclusion. According to contemporary theorists, social rejection occurs when people exclude others from social acceptance and recognition (Wesselmann et al., 2023, p. 19). In literature, characters who are rejected tend to be depicted as outsiders whose identity stems from their otherness compared to the prevailing social standards. The depiction of such characters allows literary authors to comment on discrimination, prejudice, and inequality in human societies.

Recently, literary scholars have become interested in the phenomenon of the monster again because it is associated with fear, anxiety, and exclusion. In his discussion of the topic, Aslami (2022, p. 112) suggests that monsters can be interpreted as representations of social attitudes towards people viewed as being different or threatening. Monsters cannot be taken for representatives of absolute evil; rather, they become victims of social exclusion and a lack of empathy.

In the same manner, research done about artificial creatures in modern science fiction literature addresses issues of personality, autonomy, and emotions. As noted by Cave and Dihal (2023, p. 287), artificial characters are used by authors in science fiction literature as a means of exploring ethical issues relating to human behavior towards other living beings. These stories challenge traditional distinctions between humanness and technology and explore issues of recognition and acceptance.

Literature analyzing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has continued to concentrate on the exclusion of the Creature in the society. According to Faubert (2023, p. 319), the novel shows how the lack of sympathy and emotional understanding causes violence. Likewise, Hernández Rodríguez (2025, p. 47) proposes that the reader is urged to develop empathy towards the creature since he suffers more from the rejection by the community rather than evil in his heart.

In the analysis of Martha Wells' *Compulsory*, researchers have considered the marginality experienced by Murderbot in terms of being an intelligent, self-aware, and complex being with emotions. The story told by Martha Wells can be seen as a criticism of institutions that deprive artificial creatures of their agency and human nature. As per McCaffery (2021, p. 64), Murderbot exists in a liminal space, where it is neither completely human nor completely machine, thus providing scope for discussing many issues including those related to identity, autonomy, and social acceptance.

2.2 Gaps in Previous Research on Empathy and Rejection in *Frankenstein* and *Compulsory*

Although a wealth of scholarship has analyzed both *Frankenstein* and *Compulsory* independently, certain significant shortcomings exist. Firstly, much literature has centered on empathy and rejection in isolation without exploring their interaction. This means that the role of rejection in contributing to the process of developing empathy or its lack has not been fully explored.

Secondly, the study of the Creature and Murderbot occurs independently within distinct literary movements. While the former involves the Gothic, Romanticism, and the Monster tradition, the latter includes Artificial Intelligence, Posthumanism, and Science Fiction. This has led to an underestimation of the commonality of these characters as outsiders seeking acknowledgment and acceptance.

Third, relatively few researchers have taken a comparative approach, which can trace similarities between the nineteenth century images of otherness and modern depictions of artificial consciousness. The comparison will enable us to see continuity in social marginalization from one epoch to another.

Finally, although the topic of empathy is gaining popularity today, there have been insufficient investigations into the role that empathy plays as an ethical reaction to rejection of others. This is a serious gap in knowledge that should be addressed when studying the novels under discussion.

2.3 Theoretical and Methodological Innovations

This study adds to current knowledge about the connection between empathy, social rejection, and otherness. Previous studies have considered the mentioned phenomena separately while this paper considers the interconnection between them using two literary pieces from different epochs as samples.

Theoretical background of the study includes the contemporary empathy literature and theories of social rejection as ways of explaining how characters feel accepted, rejected, or recognized. An interdisciplinary study allows looking at the problem from the angle of ethics and emotions.

As for the method of the study, this paper uses a comparative literary analysis technique when the author explores characterization and narrative events from both stories and looks into the development of the themes and interaction between characters in each piece.

Finally, special attention is paid to the characters who are not humans. It becomes important since the posthumanist literary criticism focuses on the problems of recognition and ethical treatment of such characters.

2.4 Bridging the Gap

To fill the gaps in the field of study, the present work conducts an in-depth comparative analysis of the concepts of empathy and rejection in the works of Frankenstein and Compulsory. The focus will be on how the Creature and Murderbot undergo social exclusion, the ways in which such social exclusion affects the behavior of characters, and how this process forms their identities and interpersonal relations with other individuals.

Additionally, the paper explores the possibility that empathy may be seen as a form of resistance to social exclusion as well as the ways in which acts of empathy, including understanding and acceptance of the other, can challenge this social phenomenon. Thus, by making use of empathy and rejection, the paper will connect Victorian Gothic and contemporary science fiction.

In essence, empathy and rejection help explore humanity and otherness. The findings contribute to existing academic discussion about issues like ethical responsibility and social inclusion/exclusion.

3. Methodology

This section details the methodology used to examine the concepts of empathy and rejection in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Martha Wells' Compulsory. The section will discuss the methodology used, which includes the design, techniques for gathering data, techniques of analysis and theory used in the study. The methodology ensures systematic analysis of both works of literature.

3.1 Research Design

The current study follows a qualitative comparative literary research design. Qualitative research methods are very appropriate in the analysis of literature since they emphasize the process of interpreting meanings and studying context, and not measurements (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p. 18). The analysis entails studying the ways in which themes of empathy and rejection are represented in the selected literary texts.

A comparative literary approach has been adopted to find similarities and contrasts in terms of themes of empathy and rejection depicted in two texts developed in different eras and cultural settings. As stated by Damrosch (2024, p. 37), comparative literature enables scholars to analyze common human interests in different literary practices and at the same time consider particular social and historical circumstances in which these writings were composed. Using Shelley's work and Wells' work, the study analyzes how social rejection and empathy have been depicted in the two different types of literature.

Since there are no human subjects involved in the research, no questionnaires or interviews will be conducted among any population group.

3.2 Data Collection

The data that will be used in this study have been drawn from two literary works by Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Martha Wells' Compulsory. This choice is motivated by the fact that both literary pieces contain non-human protagonists, who face rejection by society at different times but possess empathic skills and capabilities at the same time.

Primary data include excerpts from novels where instances of empathy, compassion, rejection, social alienation, acceptance, and identity are portrayed through various narratives, dialogues, conversations between characters, and interactions. Emphasis will be placed on the moments in the texts when the Creature (Frankenstein) and

Murderbot (Compulsory) interact with human characters in situations involving rejection or acceptance of their existence.

Apart from primary data, secondary data will include current scholarly sources such as journal articles and books about empathy, otherness, social exclusion, posthumanism, literary representation, and related topics.

3.3 Data Analysis

The textual data is analyzed with the help of close reading and thematic analysis methods. The method of close reading allows the researcher to analyze the language and characterization of the narratives along with themes (Barry, 2020, p. 21). Textual passages which relate to empathy and rejection are then analyzed in order to uncover their significance for the topic.

The analysis includes multiple steps. Firstly, appropriate passages are determined in relation to the thematic topics of empathy, compassion, exclusion, alienation, identification, belonging, and recognition. Secondly, selected passages are coded and classified into thematic categories in order to allow comparative analysis of empathy and rejection in both pieces of literature. Finally, similarities and differences will be compared in order to understand how each of the authors depicts emotions of empathy and rejection.

The interpretation stage of the research includes analysis of obtained results in accordance with a selected theoretical approach. This would allow understanding of how empathy serves as a reaction to social rejection and experiences of exclusion contribute to characters' development and themes in both texts.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework combines Empathy Theory, Otherness Theory, and Comparative Literary Analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the selected texts.

3.4.1 Empathy Theory

The work uses empathy theory by Suzanne Keen as a basis to explore emotions and compassion in literary discourse. Keen (2022, p. 14) states that literature inspires the identification with characters and empathic understanding of their emotions. The theory is applied to assess how the process of empathizing with the Creature and Murderbot can be achieved despite their being non-human characters.

3.4.2 Otherness Theory

The notion of otherness will be applied to the investigation of discrimination, alienation, and marginalization processes. Using otherness theory by Edward Said as well as its reinterpretations within posthumanism literature, one can discuss how some people are perceived as others because of their differences from the rest of the society (Said, 2003, p. 54; Braidotti, 2022, p. 27).

3.4.3 Comparative Literary Analysis

It is comparative literature analysis that acts as the methodology for the identification of the likenesses and differences of the two pieces of literature. This technique will allow for the investigation of empathy and rejection in different genres, eras, and cultures (Damrosch, 2024, p. 41). Through the comparison of Frankenstein and Compulsory, it becomes possible to identify some universal and changing aspects related to otherness, social acceptance, and empathy.

The use of such theories allows for a holistic exploration of empathy and rejection.

4. Results

The results of the comparative analysis of Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein and Martha Wells' short story Compulsory will be discussed in this section. In particular, the following issues will be considered: patterns of empathizing, rejection, social isolation, and identity formation. Despite differences in genre and time period between these two works, it becomes clear that they have much in common in terms of the description of the struggles of non-human characters for acceptance. Rejection plays an important role in shaping the behavior and identities of the Creature and Murderbot; empathy is presented as the force of transformation.

4.1 Manifestations of Rejection and Social Exclusion

It is clear that the feeling of rejection plays a critical role both in Frankenstein by Mary Shelley and Compulsory by Martha Wells. The Creature in the former rejects the Creature right after its creation because of the horrifying look Victor Frankenstein endows it with, which is the first experience of rejection followed by many others in the novel. Even though it tries to find company, friendship and support, it constantly comes across the fear of people towards the unusual creature, the hostility to what it is and the violence committed towards it. Thus, its outward difference becomes the reason for the social exclusion of the Creature (Faubert, 2023, p. 320).

In contrast to the Creature, Murderbot is not treated negatively on account of its appearance but rather due to its nature as an artificial intelligence. The corporation views it as property, not an independent entity with its

own thoughts and emotions. It is limited by the social order denying it independence and personal identity, hence, it is excluded from the society, even though it has high intellect and emotional perception (Kowalski, 2024, p. 90).

From the results, it can be deduced that rejection in both stories is due to otherness. Rejection takes place as a result of the way the dominant groups perceive that the main characters are different from what society considers to be human beings. The results are in line with modern studies of otherness as being marginalized by societies in the face of those who question the existing order (Braidotti, 2022, p. 31).

4.2 Consequences of Rejection and Social Isolation

This study shows that long-term rejection results in many psychological and emotional consequences for both characters. In the case of Frankenstein, constant social exclusion results in the feelings of loneliness, frustration, and despair. At first, the Creature displays kindness and a willingness to interact with other people. However, his constant rejection makes the Creature angry and resentful. Therefore, it is evident that the character's hostility comes not from the intrinsic nature but is a result of many years of accumulated emotional distress and frustration (Hernández Rodríguez, 2025, p. 50).

However, the effects of social rejection on Murderbot from Compulsory differ in their nature. Unlike the Creature, the robot chooses not to resort to violence but to protect itself emotionally by avoiding any human contact. Moreover, Murderbot prefers to avoid socialization altogether, displaying its discomfort in relations with other individuals. Yet, the study shows that there exists a strong will for freedom under Murderbot's detached nature (McCaffery, 2021, p. 66).

Comparing the two works reveals how being excluded is a result of rejection in both stories. Yet, while the Creature chooses external ways to cope with pain, which involves acts of vengeance, Murderbot takes an internal approach and withdraws into itself emotionally. Yet, regardless of the approach, both literary figures prove how being ostracized is detrimental and show humanity's longing for acceptance.

4.3 The Role of Empathy in Character Development

The results show that empathy is a fundamental aspect in the creation of characters and the way readers perceive them. In Frankenstein, empathy appears as a moral imperative that is continually deprived from the Creature. Even when he is perceived by others as a monster, Shelley offers plenty of details regarding his feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Empathy towards the creature is promoted by narrating from his perspective and allowing the readers to share his experiences and understand his pain. This approach aims at creating an empathic connection with him despite his physical appearance (Faubert, 2023, p. 324).

Empathy emerges also in the case of the Creature who shows sympathy for other beings. For example, when he observes the members of the De Lacey family, the Creature forms an emotional bond with them and feels sorry for their hardships while trying to find solutions to help them.

Empathy becomes one of the major traits of Murderbot's personality. Despite the fact that Murderbot often declares itself as having no liking toward human relationships, its actions prove the fact that it is concerned about the welfare of other people. As it was found out, Murderbot sacrifices its own security to save an innocent worker, which implies that it is capable of feeling compassion and assuming the role of responsibility. This proves that the ability of being empathic can go beyond the physical boundaries of a body (Kowalski, 2024, p. 95).

Consequently, it is possible to argue that empathy turns into a strong tool of combating otherness. Both protagonists have empathy even though they do not receive acceptance from society.

4.4 Comparative Findings: Similarities and Differences between the Creature and Murderbot

The comparison of the two protagonists highlights some similarities that are quite noteworthy. To begin with, the two are marginalized members of their societies since they are regarded as inhuman beings. Secondly, they are faced with consistent discrimination that bars them from social acceptance and recognition. Thirdly, the two exhibit great emotionality, self-reflection, and empathy despite social discrimination against them.

It is also noteworthy that there are some similarities in regards to empathy and identity development. The two individuals develop their identities within human communities. It is their interaction with people and the way they view and treat the two characters that shape their identities.

However, there are also differences in regard to this. The Creature actively looks for friendship and intimacy; on the contrary, Murderbot prefers being independent and engaging less socially. In addition, the Creature ends up in tragedy, as the process of isolation results in aggression and fatal consequences. The plot of Murderbot,

conversely, is much more positive and focuses on empowerment, rebellion, and recognition in an oppressive society.

Another interesting difference found concerns the way the characters represent humanity. Shelley uses the Creature in order to examine different concepts of humanity within the framework of Gothic literature. On the contrary, Wells explores the character of Murderbot within the framework of posthumanism and the issue of distinguishing between humans and artificial intelligence. However, both authors conclude that empathy is the key criterion for evaluating humanity.

5. Discussion

The current section analyzes the results obtained in the previous section in terms of the theoretical background used for the research, among which is Suzanne Keen's Empathy Theory, Otherness Theory, and comparative literary studies. This analysis illustrates how empathy and alienation work as intertwined mechanisms affecting the formation of personality, social relations, and morality in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Compulsory* by Martha Wells. Moreover, according to the research results, regardless of the difference between the novels' genres, historical background, and storytelling methods, the two works question the common understanding of what it means to be human.

5.1 Empathy as a Mechanism of Human Connection and Ethical Recognition

Another important discovery made by the research is that empathy operates as a mechanism that allows connection and ethical recognition to take place. Indeed, according to Keen (2022, p. 16), empathy gives people an opportunity to comprehend the experiences of other individuals and, consequently, become morally engaged in social interactions. The results found in the paper corroborate the theoretical framework by showing that both the Creature and Murderbot demonstrate empathy even though they belong to the group of beings perceived as non-human.

As for the Creature in the novel *Frankenstein*, his interaction with the De Lacey family shows great emotional intelligence and sympathy towards other people. His attempts to help the family can be regarded as his desire to engage in social interactions and make connections with others. As a result, one can say that empathy is not conditioned by the way that people look; what is more important is whether one is able to comprehend and respond to other people's needs. (Faubert, 2023, p. 324).

Likewise, in *Compulsory*, Murderbot continuously shows its caring attitude towards humans even though it claims to favor solitude. The robot's choice to protect an innocent worker at the expense of its safety proves that its ethical duty does not necessarily depend on what it is supposed to do as a robot. That is in line with recent posthumanist theories according to which emotional and moral intelligences cannot be viewed solely as human attributes (Braidotti, 2022, p. 36). In other words, Wells implies that empathy may appear in those forms of consciousness that have never been considered people before.

These conclusions are also in keeping with previous literature that sees empathy as the core of ethical recognition and acceptance into society.

5.2 Rejection, Otherness, and the Construction of Identity

The findings also suggest that rejection is a crucial factor influencing the development of the identities of both of the protagonists. In accordance with Otherness Theory, social identities are formed based on the concepts of inclusion and exclusion; the former refers to acceptable members of society, while the latter refers to those who are considered outside the social definition (Said, 2003, p. 55). For both of the novels discussed above, the protagonists become "others" due to their inability to fit the existing social definition of humanity.

The identity of the Creature is shaped mainly in response to other people's actions towards him. While at first he did not have any self-denigrating attitudes, constant rejection made him internalize the views of others. The idea of his own identity is linked closely to the hostility shown towards him. This finding confirms Hernández Rodríguez's assertion (2025, p. 51) that the Creature's transformation is caused by social exclusion rather than inherent evil.

The same happens in the book "*Compulsory*." Murderbot operates in a society where corporations view the artificial lifeforms as instruments that have no independence at all. This lack of acknowledgment affects the way Murderbot sees itself and interacts with humans. Nevertheless, Murderbot rejects its social identity assigned by the society around. The desire to obtain autonomy is a way of defining one's identity independently from other people's labels (McCaffery, 2021, p. 68).

Thus, it can be concluded that rejection is not only a societal phenomenon but also an essential factor in forming one's identity. In both stories, it becomes evident that people define their identities based on the reactions and

expectations of those around them. In other words, social exclusion plays a critical role in developing awareness, resistance, and agency.

5.3 Responses to Rejection: Alienation, Resistance, and Self-Definition

Another significant discovery pertains to the differing ways the protagonists react to being rejected by others. While both protagonists undergo rejection, it is done in different ways, illustrating the differences between the settings and ideologies behind the two works.

Rejection results in the feeling of alienation in the Creature of Frankenstein, which soon escalates into feelings of vengeance. Unable to get acceptance and a companion, he ends up rejecting the society that rejects him in return. Such a scenario is typical of the gothic genre due to its emphasis on psychological distress, isolation, and conflict. The tragedy of the Creature shows what happens when empathy and recognition are denied to the marginalized (Faubert, 2023, p. 326).

Conversely, Murderbot responds to rejection with resistance rather than revenge. Even though the protagonist tries to isolate himself from society, it pursues independence and freedom instead of taking revenge for rejection. It is because of modern concerns about artificial intelligence, agency, and freedom. In his work, Wells presents resistance as a means by which marginalized people can become autonomous and fight the oppressors (Kowalski, 2024, p. 97).

The differences between the reactions illustrate the importance of historical context in the interpretation of literary works depicting exclusion. Shelley's nineteenth-century story depicts rejection as tragic and destructive, while Wells' twenty-first century tale focuses on strength and self-definition. Still, both stories reveal that rejection has a tremendous impact on personality development and social behavior.

Indeed, the evidence corroborates modern-day theories of social exclusion that suggest that persistent rejection typically leads to either psychological problems or social withdrawal on the one hand and aggression and resistance on the other, depending on specific conditions and opportunities available to a person (Wessermann et al., 2023, p. 22).

5.4 Comparative Implications: Reimagining Humanity through Empathy and Otherness

It is evident from the comparison that both texts fundamentally reject conventional notions of humanity through the assertion of empathy over biology as the determinant of ethics. Despite being labeled as non-human, both the Creature and Murderbot exhibit attributes often associated with humanity in terms of sensitivity to emotions and ethical considerations.

This study highlights the implications of posthumanist literature, which rejects boundaries between humans and non-humans and promotes a more inclusive view of personhood (Braidotti, 2022, p. 41). Shelley prefigures this notion by providing a creature who surpasses many characters in emotional capacity. On the other hand, Wells takes these ideas further into a technologically advanced world where even machines can exhibit empathy.

The comparison also highlights the importance of empathy and rejection throughout literature. Although there is an almost two-century-long time frame separating the two novels, their main themes are alike in that they focus on prejudice, rejection, and belonging. The significance of these themes implies that the problem of how to treat individuals who differ from us is still crucial today.

Additionally, the analysis shows that empathy is a possible way out of the dilemmas posed by difference and rejection. Unlike rejection, which generates alienation and hostility, empathy fosters comprehension, tolerance, and ethical considerations. As a result, both literary works call for increased attention towards socially marginalized people and rethinking what defines a person's humanness.

6. Limitations

As all other types of literary criticism, the current study is bound to have a number of weaknesses that need to be discussed. First of all, the study is limited to analyzing two works of literature by Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, and Martha Wells, Compulsory. These texts are very rich in the aspects related to empathy and rejection; however, it is impossible to generalize the results of the investigation for all Gothic or science fiction texts because various works have various representations of the discussed topics.

Finally, empathy and rejection were chosen as the only themes of the investigation. Though these texts include a number of interconnected themes such as autonomy, technology ethics, power, trauma, loneliness, identity development, and social belonging, they are analyzed only to the extent that they help understand the concept of empathy and rejection better.

Third, this is an exercise of qualitative textual analysis and interpretation. According to Creswell & Creswell (2023, p. 186), there will always be subjectivity in interpreting texts since researchers interpret texts through

certain theoretical approaches. Even if efforts have been done to provide justifiable textual support for interpretations, alternative interpretations of the texts under discussion might still be feasible.

In addition, this study adopts Empathy Theory, Otherness Theory, and comparative literary analysis as the main analytical theories. Other possible critical theories which can be adopted in studying the characters and themes explored in this paper include trauma theory, psychoanalysis, feminist criticism, ecocriticism, and disability studies among others (Barry, 2020, p. 28).

Lastly, it is important to recognize that this study will not explore all the works written by both Mary Shelley and Martha Wells. It only examines two selected books; *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Compulsory* by Martha Wells. Hence, findings drawn from this research cannot represent all literary works of the two authors. Nevertheless, the study is significant in contributing to existing debates about the themes of empathy and Otherness in relation to human identity in both Gothic literature and science fiction.

7. Future Research

There are many avenues of further research suggested by the results of the current study. Firstly, scholars can take the comparative approach even further and analyze other literary works, including representations of artificial entities, monsters, robots, cyborgs, and similar beings found in various Gothic and science fiction books. This may help to understand the connection between empathy, marginality, and identity better.

Secondly, there are many themes identified during the study that might be considered in separate analyses by future researchers. Some of them include issues like belonging, autonomy, trauma, emotional intelligence, loneliness, self-determination, and ethical responsibility.

In addition, the scholars may use different theoretical frameworks for the selected literature works. Posthumanist theory can help to examine more closely the differences between human and non-human, and trauma theory is likely to provide insights into the psychological implications of social rejection and ostracism (Braidotti, 2022, p. 44). Moreover, scholars might study how disability studies and affect theories relate to the topic at hand.

The future research may also focus on comparative analysis of *Frankenstein*, *Compulsory*, and other modern stories about artificial intelligence and genetically designed humans. Comparative analysis can help determine the evolution of representation of otherness in literature because of technological advances, scientific discoveries, and cultural shifts.

Finally, it would be reasonable to use an interdisciplinary approach that will include literature study combined with psychology, sociology, philosophy, or artificial intelligence research. Empathy, identity, and social exclusion are very complicated concepts, and modern literary research acknowledges the significance of multiple perspectives to understanding them (Lahnala et al., 2022, p. 7).

8. Conclusion

This research attempted to analyze themes of empathy and rejection in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Martha Wells' *Compulsory* using the techniques of comparative literature analysis based on Empathy Theory and Otherness Theory. It has been revealed that both works feature protagonists that do not belong to the category of humans and experience rejection because of the differences between themselves and the existing definitions of humanness. Regardless of the dissimilarities in genre, historical background, and storytelling style, the novels show many parallels regarding marginality, self-construction, and empathic capacity.

It was found out that rejection has an immense impact on the experiences of the Creature and Murderbot. Social marginalization results in alienation and isolation among other negative effects. At the same time, it can be said that both of the protagonists exhibit remarkable capacities to empathize with others, feel compassion, and act responsibly. They defy the preconceptions of the society that rejects them and prove that empathy is possible beyond socially accepted boundaries of humanness.

In addition, it was shown that empathy operates as a way of making connections. In line with Keen's concept of empathy as an apparatus of emotion (Keen, 2022, p. 18), the two works prompt the readers to relate themselves to outcast heroes and question their preconceptions that are based on physical characteristics, background, or social standing. Through this mechanism, Shelley and Wells force their audience to see that the marginalized have their personhood and humanity.

As for the theory of Otherness, it appears that in most cases, exclusion arises not from the properties of the oppressed but from socially created conceptions (Said, 2003, p. 58). The Creature and Murderbot end up being the Others in societies where they fit no roles and conform to no norms. As such, their stories reveal the inadequacy of such social structures.

Conclusively, the research reveals that empathy and rejection are interdependent issues that play a key role in shaping identity, social inclusion, and ethics. Whereas rejection leads to estrangement and strife, empathy paves way for comprehension, recognition, and inclusion. By the portrayal of the Creature and Murderbot by Shelley and Martha Wells respectively, it becomes clear that acceptance and empathizing are essential factors in the creation of identity and humanity. The significance of these issues lies in their ability to show how empathy can be used in addressing prejudice and exclusion among other social problems.

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