

Trabajo Fin de Grado

Transgressing the Limits of Science and Art: Abjection in *Frankenstein* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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ABSTRACT

This graduate dissertation is concerned with the study of how the transgression of the limits in science and art, which are based on the boundaries nature imposes, has terrible consequences for human beings. This misdemeanour results in the appearance of what Julia Kristeva termed “the abject”. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* perfectly represent the consequences of transgressing the scientific and artistic limits respectively. This dissertation focuses on the similarities the treatment of abjection presents in both novels. It analyses the following complementary aspects: the figure of the overreacher; the main element of abjection in each novel and how it becomes a double of the main character; the association between ugliness and abjection, and the ending of both novels as being particularly relevant for the study of the abject.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo de fin de grado se concentra en el estudio de como las violaciones de los límites científicos y artísticos, basados en las leyes de la naturaleza, tiene terribles consecuencias para los humanos. Esta infracción causa la aparición de lo que Julia Kristeva denominó “el abyecto”. *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley y *El Retrato de Dorian Gray* de Oscar Wilde representan perfectamente los resultados de saltarse los límites científicos y artísticos respectivamente. Esta disertación se centra en las similitudes que ambos textos presentan en la proyección del abyecto analizando los siguientes aspectos complementarios: la figura del “overreacher”; el principal elemento de abyección y su posición como doble del protagonista; la asociación entre fealdad y abyecto, y finalmente, el final de ambas novelas, siendo este particularmente relevante para el estudio del abyecto.

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1. Introduction

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are two well-known classics that have stood the test of time. The novels were published at different points in the 19th century, 1818 and 1890 respectively. On the one hand, Shelley's text narrates Dr. Frankenstein's attempt to bestow life on a hideous monster that will haunt the protagonist. On the other hand, Wilde's novel deals with a disturbing portrait that ages instead of the protagonist. The two works share an interest in the transgression of human limits and established boundaries performed by a figure known as the overreacher (Baboni). However, due to their separate socio-cultural contexts, transgression is approached within the frame of two different realms of knowledge. In the case of *Frankenstein*, the violation affects the field of science, whereas *The Picture of Dorian Gray* contests the limits of art. Despite the differences in focus, this dissertation explores how both transgressions result in the appearance of what Julia Kristeva termed "the abject," that part of the self that cannot be integrated and that stems from the violation of the norms of what Lacan named "the symbolic stage".

Literature is a product of its time; hence, it embodies relevant ideologies or beliefs at the time of publication. In the case of Shelley's novel, the text is a product of some of the most prominent scientific theories in Europe during the early 19th century. One of them was Galvanism, a movement named after Luigi Galvani and his experiments with electricity. His research revolved around the possibility of reanimating bodies through electric impulses, which as Alan Rauch explains, raised "a hope of Galvanic restoration of the fatally ill" (238). In other words, Galvanism emerged as a scientific theory that hoped to escape the finite condition of humans and defeat death. Rauch mentions that the relevance of the discoveries was such that "Aldani even

proposed portable galvanic machines” (239). Thus, the topic of Galvani’s investigations rapidly spread, sparking Shelley’s interest, since as Houe explains, she “knew of the debates on life and electricity at the time she wrote her book” (96). Moreover, her familiarization with Galvanism and the experiments related to it, was also a consequence of her circle, that of the romantic poets to which her husband, Percy Shelley, and their friend, Lord Byron, belonged. Their set of beliefs included a strong faith in human creation which easily connects with Galvanism and its ambitious ideal of reanimating a body through electricity. In fact, the prologue of the 1831 text mentions a conversation between Mary Shelley, Lord Byron and Percy Shelley where the ideas of Galvanism and the possibility of giving life to a corpse arose. The result of that discussion was the creation of one of the most well-known characters in literature, Victor Frankenstein.

However, Galvanism and the romantic ideals are not the only influences found in the novel. In fact, the narrative also presents traces of a philosophy known as Benevolism, which as Martin Battestin explains “was, relatively speaking, optimistic about human nature” (223). This trend draws on Shaftesbury’s ideas, the belief of humans having an inherent goodness that could be heightened through contact with nature. In fact, Battestin exemplifies this through Laurence Sterne’s beliefs that “men were [...] capable of communion, generosity and love” (257). Moreover, this trend associated beauty to purity and goodness while ugliness was linked to evil. As Aryeh Kosman explains, this may come from “what appears to be Aristotle’s claim that virtue is for the sake of the beautiful” (344). Thus, it is not strange to find the hideous creature in Shelley’s novel associated with an evil being, in contrast to his creator.

The Picture of Dorian Gray belongs to the literature of the *fin-de-siècle*, a time also known as the decadent period. This period is characterized by the growing crises

Victorian rules and society suffered, mainly due to what Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken describe as “the process of cultural fragmentation that characterizes the *fin-de-siècle*” (1). As a result, this brought a shift in the literature of the time. Various movements such as Naturalism, which focused on depicting the human nature objectively, began to make its way into the narratives. The crisis of the Victorian values also caused the development of completely opposite movements such as Aestheticism or Decadence, which were, as Christopher Nissen and Marja Härmänmaa explain, “metaphorical modes of expression” and served as “counterbalance” to Naturalism (1).

The trend of “aestheticism” is structured around the idea of art for the sake of art; hence, it meant that art should not be educational or express some moral values. Instead, art should be focused on reflecting sensations. Thus, the movement, a contrast to the rigidity of Victorian values, was often associated to decadence and corruption. Wilde, himself, became an advocate and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* perfectly embodies the ideals of this movement. Similarly, in this trend the notions of degeneration, artificiality and ruin became central. As Nissen and Härmänmaa explain, this was due to the fact that “dismay at the fast pace of [...] innovation led many adherents of these less realistic movements to reject faith in the new beginnings” (1). In other words, the attitude many advocates of these movements took towards the rapid changes taking place at that time rejected the idea of progress. Again, Wilde’s writing successfully portrays these ideals through the presentation of corrupted characters and their secret vices.

After contextualizing the two novels, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction to Kristeva’s theories of the abject, developed in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). Kristeva explains that abjection is caused by “what does not respect borders, positions and rules” (4). Basically, abjection begins to emerge once the separation from the mother takes place and the individual enters the “symbolic realm”

(13). The entrance into the symbolic brings with it “the law of the father”, a series of norms and rules that need to be followed while putting the male as the main figure of authority. It is the transgression of these norms that triggers abjection. Thus, it is not surprising that in literature abjection is often linked to the figure of the overreacher, as it occurs in Shelley’s and Wilde’s narratives. Besides, entrance into the symbolic stage also produces a “violent, clumsy” (13) separation from the mother and the female body which is associated with the bodily fluids. Both the female body and the corpse, another clear source of abjection according to Kristeva, serve as reminders of our material condition.

Another relevant aspect of abjection is its association with perversion and corruption, since it resists prohibitions and limits. Thus, as Kristeva explains “an unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law is necessary if that perverse interspace of abjection is to be hemmed in and thrust aside” (16). Furthermore, Kristeva explains that the abject is attached to the superego—an unconscious part of the self that observes, criticizes, and imposes itself. Thus, the corruptive nature of abjection alongside its link to the superego causes, according to Kristeva, the destruction of “the wall of repression and its judgements” (15). Besides, it places the ego once again at the source of those limits that the self has broken away in order to exit. Abjection becomes a looming presence to the individual that, as she explains, cannot be absorbed. Thus, its presence produces various paradoxical emotions such as fear or fascination. As a result, abjection could be understood as that element that puts the integrity of the ego at risk. Finally, the abject is key in the creation of horror, a feeling of fear and disgust anchored in the corporal, due to its association with materiality and the maternal body. Kristeva explains that once the individual feels threatened by this materiality he attempts to avoid the confrontation with the other, where abjection is placed (53-54).

This dissertation focuses on the analysis of abjection in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The abject is embodied in Frankenstein's creature and Dorian's portrait, respectively. The monster in Shelley's classic becomes the major source of horror in the novel. The creature emerges as both an object created by Frankenstein and as an individual that ends up corrupting his creator. Additionally, it becomes something that Victor's ego cannot assimilate and constantly rejects. Similarly, the portrait is the major representation of abjection, and hence, horror in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As it occurs with Frankenstein's creation, the painting, an artistic creation that grows old as a normal being would, transgresses the limits between the subject and the object. However, the approach both texts take towards abjection differs: Shelley frames it within the discourse of science whereas Wilde associates it with art. The analysis will explore these differences but also the similarities both narratives share in addressing abjection, so as to restore some connections between these two fields.

The analysis is structured into two different parts. The first part will carry out a close examination of Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its treatment of the abject that emerges after transgressing the limits of science. Then, the second part will turn its focus to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. However, both will follow the same structure: the starting point is the figure of the overreacher, followed by an analysis of the relationship between the abject and the protagonists, paying special attention to their condition as doubles. Then, it will discuss the binary opposition of beauty and ugliness in relation to abjection. Finally, the narrative's endings are examined focusing on those aspects relevant to abjection. Thus, the comparison between both texts, emphasising similarities and differences, will bring to light how, despite the disparity of the fields where natural limits are transgressed, the consequences are rather similar, drawing a close connection between both classics.

2. Transgressing the Limits of Science: Abjection in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

The literary archetype of the overreacher is a figure that aims to go beyond established limits, be they natural, scientific, religious, or artistic, as a way to fulfil ambition. In Shelley's narrative, Dr. Frankenstein fits the pattern. In fact, the connection is visible from the very subtitle: *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*. This choice establishes a parallelism between the protagonist and the character of Greek mythology who stole the fire from Zeus. Victor is obsessed with contributing to humanity and defying death: "what glory would attend the discovery [...] and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (28). This transgression, as it is normal in this figure, will end up dooming his life once he has fulfilled his objective. His words "I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" (40) reveal his ambitious nature. In fact, he is seeking to go beyond scientific and natural limits. However, it is also worth noting that he is not only breaking the established natural limits but what Lacan termed the "Law of the Father", since he decides to ignore his father's advice and continue to read Agrippa's books (28). As a result, this further confirms Frankenstein as a fitting example of the figure of the overreacher.

Victor Frankenstein's transgression leads him to bring to life a creature through scientific means. Galvanism appears as giving humans the possibility of going beyond their natural limits and avoiding death by using electricity. However, it is important to consider that at Shelley's time, it was believed that generating life was a right reserved exclusively for God. As a result, Victor positions himself as a kind of God-like figure: "When I found so astonishing a power placed in my hands [...] to permit me to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man" (41). Therefore, his actions do not only go against nature, but, by bringing an inanimate body back to life they are also religious

infractions. His casting life onto different parts of several corpses echoes Kristeva's ideas about the abject: "the corpse, seen without God and outside science is the outmost of abjection" (4). In the end, Victor creates a living mass that is not considered a human being, but rather a hideous monster. Since Frankenstein has violated not only the religious law but also the natural and scientific rules, the result is a monster that perfectly embodies Kristeva's definition of abjection. As has been mentioned in the introduction, Kristeva explains how the abject emerges as a result of not respecting the established boundaries or laws (4).

Once the creature emerges as the abject, it is possible to analyse him as Frankenstein's double. In fact, the monster stands for Victor's fears and repressed thoughts. Jean Raimond and Richard Watson explain that doubleness represents those aspects repressed by the individual. This idea was elaborated by Sigmund Freud in "The Uncanny" and positions the monster as "the virtual shadow of his creator" (242). For example, the murder of Elizabeth on her wedding night alongside Victor's creation of life in an unnatural manner may point out to his fears of sexual relationships. Paula Feldman suggests that Victor's eagerness to marry Elizabeth despite the Creature's warnings could be a sign of his attempt to murder her since he knew the Creature was going to be there (68). Moreover, Kristeva explains how abjection "lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (1). Thus, in the case of Shelley's novel, sentences like "There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies" (91) show that the monster becomes what Frankenstein's self cannot integrate and thus, he constantly rejects his creation, which is in fact a part of himself.

Additionally, Kristeva describes abjection as an element that "neither gives nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better than deny them" (15). Thus, it can be argued that the

Monster stands for that side of Frankenstein unable to understand prohibitions or rules since he himself already broke them to create the Creature. This can be exemplified through the monster's words "No: from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery" (128). From this point onwards, Frankenstein's creation violates the law by committing different murders with the purpose of manipulating Victor into creating a partner for him. Thus, he is a perfect representation of Kristeva's idea that the abject uses the law to its advantage. In fact, the creature constantly blames the murders on different people, as happens when Justine is charged with the murder of Frankenstein's younger brother or makes Victor responsible for Clerval's murder in the eyes of society. However, although Frankenstein presents himself as a victim, he is in fact the source of all transgressions, since he has disregarded the established law by giving life to the Creature. Moreover, Elisa Klaassen explains how "Victor mirrors the monster's cruelty when he refuses to make a female partner for his monster and tears apart the female monster's body; he refuses the monster love in the same way that the monster refuses him love in killing his wife" (12). This reinforces the idea that the Monster acts as the double of Frankenstein embodying what his creator rejected or repressed.

The association of evilness and ugliness is also linked to the representative of abjection in the novel, i.e. the Monster. *Frankenstein* draws on the tradition of Benevolism, which believes in the innate goodness of human beings and the role of nature in its preservation. It also connects beauty and goodness. From the moment in which the Monster is created it is possible to see that, despite his dreadful appearance, he shows an innate benevolence. He is in communion with nature, as shown in the following fragment: "Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens [...] I gazed with a kind

of wonder. It moved slowly but it enlightened my path” (94). The creature explains that he “could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow” and that when hearing “details of vice and bloodshed” he “turned away with disgust and loathing” (110). Besides, the Creature’s benevolence is acknowledged by himself before his rejection by his creator and by society turns him into a murderer: “Believe me Frankenstein: I was Benevolent” (91). However, his dreadful appearance marks him as an evil being. His creator states: “As I looked on him, his countenance expressed the utmost of malice and treachery” (161).

Investigating into what it is that decides whether something is beautiful or ugly, Battestin explains how from Pythagoras to Shaftesbury the ideal of beauty was attached to “the principles of harmony which underlie the order and beauty of the universe” (6-15). Thus, in order to be beautiful and by extension good, an adherence to “harmonic ratios” was needed. The creature, being an artificial being, the result of the violation of scientific limits and a combination of different limbs from different corpses, is obviously not a harmonic creation. This is why he is considered an evil being even before he shows any signs of evilness. In contrast, Victor is described as a rather handsome young man, and, by extension, as having a benevolent nature. This further confirms that the creature stands for the abject and the other. Kristeva explains how “the abject appears in order to uphold ‘I’ within the Other” (15). Victor can remain as the beautiful “I” despite his transgression while the monster carries the burden of ugliness and evil. However, even if the Monster commits terrible acts, it is important to understand that it is the rejection of society and his creator that leads him to murder.

Finally, the ending of Shelley’s narrative presents Victor as completely consumed by his obsession to defeat his monster. Moreover, through his words to Walton—“You may give up your purpose, but mine is assigned to me by Heaven, and I

dare not” (209)—it is visible that Frankenstein’s ambitious nature has not subsided. However, death reaches him before he is able to fulfil his purpose. As a result, the overreacher receives his punishment while the result of his transgression remains. It is some pages later that the creature is finally given a voice through which he expresses his repentance for his deeds while stating: “But soon, I shall die [...]. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell” (216). The necessity for the monster’s final disappearance comes from his own condition as the abject of Victor Frankenstein’s. As Kristeva points out, “the abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (1). Consequently, it is only normal that if the ego—Frankenstein in this case—ceases to exist, the abject creature also disappears. As a result, the very ending of the novel—“He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in the darkness and distance” (216)—complies with Kristeva’s idea. However, a sense of uncertainty remains as we do not witness the actual death of the creature. This is in line with Kristeva’s idea that the abject is “above all ambiguity” (9).

3. Transgressing the Limits of Art: Abjection in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The violation of the artistic limits in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* brings analogous consequences to those generated by the scientific infraction in *Frankenstein*. In the case of the late-Victorian narrative, the figure of the overreacher is present through the character of Dorian. Stefan Pantović explains that “Dorian transgresses greatly under the influence of Lord Henry, and takes the part of an overreacher, a person who aspires to reach beyond the possibilities of an ordinary man” (9). Gray is obsessed with his beauty and youth as a consequence of Lord Henry’s words: “youth is the one thing worth having” (24). Thus, those ideas trigger in the young man a necessity to preserve his youth despite the natural limits. The extent of this obsession could be illustrated by, for example, his hyperbolic words: “When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself” (28). Furthermore, once his wish is granted, he states, “Like the gods of the Greeks, he would be strong, and fleet, and joyous” (103). This statement equals Dorian to the position of the divinity echoing Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Victor’s actions and words.

However, it can be argued that his character is not the only representative of this archetype in Wilde’s novel. In fact, Basil Howard, the creator of the portrait, somehow also aims to transgress the established boundaries. This becomes visible during one of his first conversations with Lord Henry: “I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden to me before” (13). These words could be understood as a way of placing Basil beyond the human capacity, resembling, thus, Victor’s utterances in Shelley’s narrative. Nonetheless, in this case, instead of turning to science, these two figures turn to art for the fulfilment of their out-of-reach aspirations. As a result, it is through Basil’s painting that Dorian is able to commit an infraction of the established boundaries by wishing: “If it were I who was to be always young and the picture that was to grow old” (28).

Consequently, as has been argued in the first part of the analysis and following Kristeva's approach, this defiance of the human limits by the overreacher triggers the abject.

Consequently, like the creature, the painting appears as the major embodiment of abjection in Wilde's novel. As has been discussed previously, Kristeva points out that abjection emerges when borders and rules are not respected. She defines it as "the in-between, the ambiguous" (4). Thus, when the portrait begins to shift into a dreadful image that represents Dorian's self, it becomes an ambiguous element, both object and subject since it seems to be alive. Hence, it is transformed into the abject. Furthermore, as Kristeva explains, abjection may, among other reactions, "fascinate desire" (1), which is what Dorian first experiences when confronting the initial changes of the portrait. After Sybil's death, Dorian returns to his home to realize that his painting had "a touch of cruelty in the mouth" (87). His reaction, although at first somewhat wary—"He had uttered a mad wish [...] Such things were impossible. It seemed monstrous even to think of them" (88)— shifts towards fascination as "He wondered, and hoped that some day he would see the change taking place before his very eyes, shuddering as he hoped it" (101). The captivating effect of the portrait contrasts with Victor's constant rejection of his creature.

However, it is worth mentioning that as the painting becomes more hideous, Dorian's reaction starts to shift matching that of Frankenstein in Shelley's novel. He states: "I never really liked it. I am sorry I sat for it" [the painting] (204). This statement points to his rejection of the object, drawing a connection with Victor's own regret of having created the monster. However, the initial opposing reactions towards abjection might be the result of the separate fields each creation represents, since it is not until the very end that the portrait equals the hideous appearance of the creature. Moreover, as an

artistic object, Dorian is able to hide the painting, something which is not possible in the case of Frankenstein and his creature, a living being. Furthermore, another possible explanation for this difference could be the influence of Aestheticism in Wilde's novel. This trend defended the idea of art having as its only purpose evoking emotions, which is what the portrait does to Dorian.

The portrait is to Dorian what the Creature is to Frankenstein, the only difference laying in that the painting is an artistic object. However, as it occurs with Frankenstein's monster, the painting becomes a double of its creator in this classic. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Dorian's portrait, as an artistic object, seeks to reflect the model itself which strengthens the idea of doubling, whereas, Frankenstein's creature, as a scientific creation, does not reflect, as clearly his condition of Victor's double. Dorian mentions how the portrait turns into "the most magical of mirrors" and "as it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul" (103). These words explicitly mark the position of the portrait as his double. Already on the first pages, the connection becomes apparent to readers, since Dorian tells Basil about destroying the portrait: "It would be murder" (29). This comment foregrounds the dynamic developed throughout the novel between Dorian and the painting.

As it occurred in *Frankenstein*, the portrait represents Dorian's fears and those aspects of himself he rejects. Critics like Marshal Lewis Johnson argue that "The Gothic doubling of Dorian's image with the portrait [...] allows the novel to explore homosexual development in a way that is detached" (106). Homosexuality was considered taboo at Wilde's time due to the rigid Victorian standards. It is then only natural that the painting, as the abject, becomes the reflection of it, since as Kristeva points out, "abjection persists as exclusion or taboo" (17). Furthermore, connecting the portrait with homosexuality further proves that as an element of abjection, the painting

acts as a mirror for the protagonist's repressed self. However, the mirroring of Dorian by the artistic creation does not stop there. Like the doubling in *Frankenstein*, the portrait becomes a mirror for Dorian's major fear, his finite condition as a human being. This idea is expressed through descriptions such as: "misshapen body" (124), or Lord Henry's "our limbs fail, our senses rot. We degenerate into hideous puppets [...]" (25) by highlighting the negative portrayal of the natural signs of age. Therefore, as the signs of age and corruption deform painting, Dorian's rejection of it increases.

Similarly to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Wilde's writing also addresses the link between beauty and goodness in contrast to the connection between ugliness and evilness. However, unlike the former, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* does not rely on the Benevolist tradition. In fact, Dominic Manganiello explains that "*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is at once an attack on dualism [...] and an exposure of the aesthetic attempt at reconciliation as a widening of that split" (25). In other words, the text focuses on demonstrating how the quality of being aesthetically pleasant cannot guarantee purity or morals. In the novel, the artistic object, although hideous, has not committed any crime, unlike the creature in Shelley's narrative. Therefore, the painting acts as a reminder that Dorian is the real monster. Throughout the pages of the novel, the painting is described as an "evil and aging face on the canvas" while Dorian is "the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass" (124). The contrast between these descriptions shows the hideous aspect of the portrait as the representation of evilness while Dorian's fairness and youth stand for the notion of purity, as this sentence shows: "those who had heard the most evil things against him, [...] could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him" (123-124). However, the reader is aware that the dreadful appearance of the painting is just a reflection of Dorian's corrupted nature behind his "look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world" (124).

Therefore, Wilde's artistic approach towards the interaction of these dichotomies contradicts the traditional association between beauty and goodness that still comes through Shelley's narrative. Moreover, as Kristeva explains "the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject [...] by the same token purifies [...]" (17). Wilde's choice of the painting as the main element of abjection, might exemplify how art aims to purify Dorian's corruption since, at first, it was supposed to be Dorian's "visible emblem of conscience" (89).

Finally, the ending of the novel also invites a comparison between Wilde's and Shelley's texts. In the final pages, Dorian decides to take "the knife that had stabbed Basil Howard. [...] As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant" (212). However, the very ending of the novel describes how "lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress [...] It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was" (213). Thus, as the narrative draws to an end, Dorian's life is terminated by "the abject", i.e. his portrait. Kristeva explains how "the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject" (5). In other words, since the portrait was an abjected part of Dorian, it is only normal that if he attempts to destroy it, the result is his own ruin. Therefore, it is not strange that, as it occurs in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the remaining figure at the end of the narrative is that of the embodiment of abjection. This becomes even more visible in the closing words of Wilde's novel: "When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty" (213). There are no longer traces of abjection in the portrait, whereas in Shelley's narrative the Creature never loses his condition as the abject. Aside from this difference, the ultimate consequence of both acts of transgression is the death of the

overreacher and the end of his god-like pretensions, no matter whether they affect the limits of science or of art.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, after closely analysing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it is visible that both narratives present several similarities in their treatment of abjection, despite their different focus on science and art. Both novels feature human beings that attempt to go beyond the natural limits imposed on them. They also violate the limits established by what Lacan calls "The Law of the Father. As a result, the abject emerges, causing destruction, and dooming the protagonists' lives. The overreachers are condemned to fail. Dr. Frankenstein dies before he can get rid of the monster he created, the embodiment of the abject in the novel. Dorian Gray kills himself when he attempts to destroy his portrait and the abject returns to him. What their egos could not integrate ruins both characters in the end. The novels also explore the classical association between beauty and goodness and ugliness and evil, preserving the beauty of their protagonists and projecting ugliness onto their abject doubles.

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