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Aiman Adeel
Bilkent University, Ankara

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As progressive authors and pioneers of their generations are penning down eminent works at the height of worker degradation, both Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Franz Kafka have expressed prominently the exploitation, and more significantly, the erasure of the working proletariat in their writings. More specifically, Shelley's revolutionary contribution to the Romantic genre, *Frankenstein*, and Kafka's poignant novella "The Metamorphosis" essentially serve as both reflections of the deplorable conditions of the working classes in capitalist ecosystems as well as moral condemnation for the rampant capsizing of the prioritization of the human condition by despotic financial output. Whilst readers have frequently connected Gregor Samsa's parallelism with the working class, Frankenstein's creature's association with the proletariat is more obscure and unscrutinized, albeit notable. Despite *Frankenstein* precluding any direct mentions of economic entities, the creature, as a laboring character who is ousted from society, echoes Marx's symptomatology of the proletariat's alienated labor. More specifically, Marx emphasizes four areas from where the working class is ostracized: the product of labor, the process of labor, the social biosphere, and the self—alienation from all of which proves essential for

the functioning of capitalistic societies (Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 29; 30; 45). Although both Samsa and the creature are outcasted from all four of these spheres, they are most noticeably estranged from the social order and an individual and unconstrained sense of self. Therefore, in this article, I will examine both Victor Frankenstein's creature and Gregor Samsa through a Marxist lens, particularly in reference to his theory of alienation. I will further explore the elements of the proletariat revolution that each character embodies in their respective novelistic landscapes. In doing so, I will argue that both characters become physical representations of the working class through their grotesque structures and social rejection, thereby portraying not only the helplessness of the working collective and the disfiguration of the human self in such constructions but also their subtle revolt against their dehumanization, thus condemning the capitalist model as a whole.

Physical differentiation and outcasting, particularly in works with the non-human proletariat engaging the human and the non-othered bourgeoisie, serves as a prominent representation of Marxist dehumanization of the working class. The creature, as a gigantic and grotesque "miserable monster" (Shelley 78), is othered from the human populations present in the novel (most of which are bourgeoisie), demonstrating how "production renders the worker both 'deformed' and 'barbaric'" (Marx 79, as qtd. in Michie 1). This physical superiority juxtaposes the creature's constant need for human approval, which he seeks from the De Laceys. He similarly embodies an existential reliance on Frankenstein, whether it be for the creation of a female creature or his subsequent revenge on Frankenstein, the absence of whom prompts the creature's suicide. In both of these circumstances, the creature safeguards the people he sought approval from, to such an extent that without his intervention, the very survival of his dependents would be put in jeopardy. This is a condition that prominently emulates bourgeois reliance on the unrecognized working classes. However, even with the physical reliance of the bourgeoisie on him, both his and laterally proletariat dependence cannot be discounted as both look towards the bourgeoisie for a concrete physical and existential definition for themselves. The proletariat constitutes "the modern working class […] [the] class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work" (Marx, *Communist Manifesto* 18). Therefore, the essence of their identity is maintained only by their service to the bourgeois cause. His provision of "firing sufficient for consumption" for the De Laceys and

sustaining Victor, who is "overcome by hunger [with] a repast" then not only exhibits both these efforts to sustain characters apathetic and even hostile to him, but also the invisibility and excusal of his efforts from the benefiters (Shelley 126; 204). Frankenstein's creature's reliance on Frankenstein, the De Laceys, and by extension, the bourgeois class is a product begotten by his creation and subsequent abandonment by Victor. Much like the working classes in capitalistic models, Frankenstein sought the creation of his vassal for his self-aggrandization, only to discard him following the achievement of his purpose. He is given life, but he is denied an identity, education, social interaction, and compassion. Therefore, it is not unthinkable that his creature's definition as an entity is intrinsically linked to Frankenstein's actions, in a way that mirrors both the proletariat condition and treatment in industrialist societies. Thus, not only is the creature's physical malformed figure a regurgitation of proletariat rejection, but his self-concept, or lack thereof, demonstrates another aspect that pulls him away from the label of the bourgeois human and deeper into the confines of the proletariat apparatus. Similarly, Frankenstein's creature's grotesque form becomes representative of the enormity of the comparably exploited proletariats, and his existential dependency on the people he toils for echoes the working class's cycle of dependency, or more specifically codependency, with the bourgeoisie.

In the same vein, Victor is also trapped by the codependent chains binding the creator-created and the worker-proletariat of the novel. Victor is consumed by creative responsibility and even guilt as he "compassionated him and felt the need to console him" (Shelley 113). These feelings are only amplified as the creature seeks freedom, as Victor is locked in a cycle of pursuit by the creature he conceived, whereby the effect of the creature on his creator is no less than the converse. Through this, Shelley depicts not only the proletariat dependency of such capitalistically-produced associations but also the innate codependency. Similarly, not only was Victor physically nurtured by the creature in their cycle of pursuit, but his identity as a creator is hinged upon the existence of the creature. This could be explained by Marx's idea of the capital as dead labor, which envisions the inherent reliance of the bourgeois identity on the proletariat presence, without which the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie is established will collapse (*Capital* 163). Within *Frankenstein*, not only did Victor face significant physical and mental deterioration in the absence of his creature, or more notably his creativity, Victor is also simply not a creator without his creation, which subtracts

from the magnitude of his—and by extension, the bourgeois—essence. Therefore, Frankenstein's existence, and even the De Laceys' survival, is no less dependent on the creature than he is on them, although both parties are essentially destructive to each other. This highlights the inherently flawed and miserable nature of capitalistic existence and serves as a strong rejection for any who may construe it to be beneficial for even the dominating party like the bourgeoisie.

Samsa, as a "monstrous vermin" with "little legs [that] obeyed perfectly," similarly reflects the proletariat's perceived hideousness and subservient attitudes (Kafka 78; 90). The repeated synecdochical "little legs" in relation to his verminous form further emphasize the proletariats' lack of agential thinking as their sustained roles alienate them so thoroughly from both society and self that they have little cognition or function beyond that which urges and compels them to work and obey. His legs being "miserably thin in comparison with his size" and tending to "flicker helplessly" reinforces this interpretation (Kafka 78). Their physical and spiritual impoverishment, despite their inhumane and physically dominant form, is concurrent with their manic actions and terror particularly in the presence of bourgeois superiors. This is illustrated by them "danc[ing] all the faster" and expressing individual (albeit similar) anxieties to Samsa at the arrival of the senior clerk (Kafka 83). This paradoxical subservience from both gigantic creatures, despite their clear terrorization of bourgeois humans who run away at the sight of them, delineates the inherent absurdity and totalitarianism of capitalism in subjugating a population superior in both strength, numbers, and morality. In this way, both Shelley and Kafka depict capitalism as not only unnatural and alienating to natural human progression but also counter-conducive and tyrannical.

Both Frankenstein's creature and Samsa are also prominently rejected physiognomically, particularly in an appraisal of their usefulness and morality, even by their family members. Here physiognomical ostracization reflects the capitalistic disregard of the proletariat, particularly when in non-working conditions. As Marx reflects in bourgeois society, whilst "capital is independent and has individuality, the living person is dependent and has no individuality" (*Communist Manifesto* 23). Thus, the creature is shunned by his creator because of his hideousness only after Victor's use of the creature is exhausted. Therefore, Frankenstein's creature, as is typical of bourgeoisie-proletariat relationships, only becomes acceptable "as long as it is invisible"

(Michie 3). This is also noted through the De Laceys' attitudes, as, for as long as he provided for them, he was excused as a "good spirit," but upon unveiling himself, he was attacked and discarded as monstrous (Shelley 129). Moreover, as soon as the creature demands respect and the fulfillment of Frankenstein's duty, he is deemed outrageous, emulating capitalistic revulsion of any attempts at reversing the necessitated alienation of the proletariats. Samsa, as a monstrous insect, becomes economically invalid, owing to which he loses the ability to work for his family, and more significantly, for the bourgeois class. Therefore, his idleness, momentary or otherwise, engenders his thorough exclusion from the human race. His abandonment by his manager, parents, and sister echoes this treatment of proletariats and exemplifies an allegory for disability in capitalist spheres within the novella, whereby even the appearance of non-working proletariats becomes paradoxical, unnatural, unbearable, and even devolutionary for the human species.

The engagement of both *Frankenstein* and "The Metamorphosis" with the original sin adds another layer of both representation for and rejection of the working class in a capitalist society. Furthermore, the feature of such extra-human elements in allegories of simple economic systems bespeaks the immensity and the all-consuming nature of capitalism, therefore, elevating the system, not morally, but consequentially. More specifically, the creature's self-identification with Milton's Satan and his acknowledgement as his role as "[Frankenstein's] fallen angel" when "[he] ought to [have been] [Frankenstein's] Adam" emphasize this (Shelley 103). Not only does this reflect the routine degradation of the working proletariats and their moral, social, and physical shunning by larger society, but it also demonstrates the eternal damnation of those who dare to revolt against the capitalistic status quo. Therefore, when Shelley likens the sin of Godly disobedience to the crime of questioning capitalistic subjugation, she illustrates the severity of its consequences. More specifically, for industrial structures, she actualizes capitalism as God. Additionally, Frankenstein's correspondence with Miltonic Satan instead of Biblical Satan also proves significant, as despite the similarity of both in their rejection by worldly and heavenly creatures alike, the Miltonic Satan is *Paradise Lost*'s allegorical hero and savior. Satan's emphasis on defining a freedom for angels is therefore pertinent in echoing the creature's desire for autonomical functioning. Thus, as Satan becomes the sympathetic hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost*¸ Frankenstein's creature

takes the throne as the hero of the proletariat revolution, and essentially the insurrection for humanity.

Similarly, Samsa's battering by apples, to such an extent that "the apple remained [...] as a visible memorial in his flesh" (Kafka 108), recalls the image of Adam and Eve's sin and equates the ineffably profound Biblical transgression to the capitalistically unforgivable sin of idleness. The throwing and lodging of the apple marks not only the physical point of separation and expulsion for the unproductive Samsa, but it also emulates the festering and permanent nature of society's rejection, particularly in systems such as those of capitalism, where collective worth overtakes the significance of the individual worth. Unlike Adam and Eve who physically disobeyed divine orders, Samsa's sin was idleness, which accentuates the injustice of his punishment even more than it does of the original sin. Overall, both Shelley and Kafka evoke the original sin to not only reflect the replacement of religious values with capitalistic decrees but also the curtailment of moral principles, which are primitively associated with the original sin, with a lesser model that has taken precedence in democratic societies: financial evolution.

Both creatures also face significant societal rejection, as they are not only alienated from the bourgeois social strata but also from their own class. This alienation is to such an unnatural extent that human characters like the De Laceys, the Frankensteins, and the Samsas lose even the base faculty of sympathy for them. Other than the blind De Lacey, the creature remains unpitied by everyone, from the companion of the young girl he saved and the other De Laceys to William and Victor Frankenstein, regardless of how moral his actions are towards them. This invokes the physiognomic and "phenomenological limitations of sympathy" identified by Adam Smith, which emphasize the necessity of similarity and fellowship in evoking sympathy (Britton 4). Since such characters refuse to consider the creature and Gregor Samsa as individualistic human entities, they are unable to generate any form of sympathy for both characters' misery. This develops into a symbolic delineation of the bourgeois tendency to otherize and commodify the proletariats, because of which they dismiss a humane and familiar understanding of them. Therefore, when Frankenstein demands to "[be relieved] from the sight of [his] detested form," the creature covers his eyes to allow some form of equivalent emotional exchange to take place (Shelley 117). Notably, even in this attempt to evoke Frankenstein's sympathy, the creature fulfills Victor's bidding, thereby implying the integration of these

capitalist roles within his nature, and by extension, the human fabric itself, particularly for the working class. Similarly, Samsa's family can only seem to bear him when he is not visible. In all three sections of the novella, Samsa attempts to leave his room, which constitutes a form of revolution against both his family's suppression and capitalistic oppression, only to be driven back at the end of each section. Their inability to sympathize with him, or even recognize him as family, represents the capitalistic commodification of familial connections, which can instigate a complete collapse of such relations in the absence of economic output, as it does with Samsa. Even the seemingly sympathetic Grete, who alone "had remained close to him" when he was a worker, "would fling [the window] open in haste as if she were almost suffocating" in his presence, demonstrating a physically repulsed response to her once beloved brother and implying that even their previous affectionate relationship was likely a mimicry of the transactional relationship between the provider and the provided for (Kafka 98; 100). Grete's insistence on "[not uttering her] brother's name in front of this monster [whom they] must [...] get rid of" echoes the reactions of the humans in *Frankenstein* to the creature in a complete upheaval and rejection of Samsa's humanity, despite the ties to him in "The Metamorphosis" being more intrinsic that those between the creature and other humans (Kafka 117). This portrays the capsizing of their familial values by capitalistic disquietude as well as the inherently isolating atmosphere and corrosivity towards human qualities that define capitalism. The novella's conclusion expresses this "in contrast to the moral debate of the third section, [it] introduces a false sense of closure" (Sweeney 12). Although the Samsa family is notably more filial, even unthinkably taking time off to reconvene, it is done without consideration of the emotional implications of Gregor's death. They are content, but it is clearly only possible in the absence of their economically unserviceable, and therefore burdensome son, which underscores the fragile and pretentious happiness of their, and essentially all, working-class relationships.

Both *Frankenstein* and "The Metamorphosis" also depict capitalistically-induced characteristics replacing those innately humane. This alienation from the self and its values is prominent in both the creature and Samsa, as a dehumanizing capitalistic byproduct. This is firstly exemplified by how the creature is left unnamed, only referred to as Frankenstein's creature. The lack of a concrete definition of the creature's autonomous identity reflects the ownership of not only proletariat labor, but of each of them individually

as bourgeois possessions, which voids the importance of their selves. The creature's anti-Narcissus scene whereby he beholds his "miserable deformity" in a pool and "[becomes] fully convinced that [he] was [...] [a] monster, filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" reasserts this as his self-rejection as an extension of his societal exclusion, indicating the entrenchment of capitalist teachings within him so much so that he becomes unbearable to even himself (Shelley 128). His contrasting self-comparison to the De Laceys' "perfect forms" emulates the elevated appraisal and semi-divinization of the bourgeoisie that is integrated amongst proletariats (Shelley 128). The creature's declaration of "everlasting war against the [human] species" further illustrates his categorical withdrawal from the human race and a wider reduction of his self to an inhuman entity (Shelley 149).

Likewise, Samsa exemplifies this eradication of self primarily through his literal self-fragmentation to a human's conscience and an insect's physiology. Similarly, even in his smallest actions, he denotes a subservience and people-pleasing characteristic common to proletariats, such as when he, "imagining that they were all following his labors with excitement, [and] using all the strength he could muster and nearly fainting, bit blindly into the key" (Kafka 87). Even in the form of an insect, his need to fulfill his role as a worker overtakes his humane self-preservation to the point of self-harm. Additionally, his room, rather than simply containing him, forms an alienation of his conscience as it becomes "a philosophical metonymy for Gregor's private mentality" within which he is trapped (Sweeney 2). The removal of his furniture, therefore, becomes symbolic of alienating his self. Alternatively, it may be argued that removing the furniture "prevented him from carrying on this senseless crawling round" and enlarged the room "with its height and freedom," distressing him because it allowed for a freedom, be it of space or the self, which he had never experienced nor had the cognitive capability to utilize (Kafka 94). Similarly, when Gregor clings to his gilded frame of the bourgeois woman, not only is he clinging to the only product of his labor that he possesses, but he is also symbolically clinging to the bourgeoisie because their removal from his life would ensure an upending of the very structures that shaped his being. In this way, Kafka illustrates both "[how] the labor produced by the worker has power over the worker himself" and the unnatural indissolubleness of the bourgeoisie from the proletariat's self (Riggs 3-4). His ecological devolution to an insect, in a capitalistic reading, further degrades the non-working proletarian self to a primitive and inferior

non-human. Although initially he had his consciousness to ground him in the human culture, after his death, he is reduced to an "it," therefore fully eradicating the humanity of his existence and thoroughly alienating him from the human label (Kafka 120).

As renowned literary figures themselves, Shelley's and Kafka's characters, and by extension, wider symbolic representations, underscore the importance and negation of language and expression in capitalistic systems, whilst simultaneously depicting them as essential means of revolution for both characters. Frankenstein's creature, for instance, born as unwitting to language as a newborn babe, lacks an initial sense of self-definition as a consequence. His later appearance as a linguistically adept character not only embodies him with a humane touch but also allows him to formulate a self-identity, albeit uncertain and malleable, as both Frankenstein's creature and his Lucifer. This establishment of a self and language becomes integral for his character, as his first words in the novel–"do your duty towards me" (Shelley 80)–are those of revolution and reformation. He demands to be restored to his status as his creator's Adam, as it is only because of his status as a creation that Frankenstein have the privilege of being denoted creator. This realization can be considered a significant byproduct brought about by the creature's interaction with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Similarly, Frankenstein's rejection of equipping his creature with language not only strips the creature from the recognition of his human and social identity but also depicts the bourgeois fear of a linguistically literate, and therefore liberal and aware working class. Shelley thus not only equips language herself to demonstrate the creature's literacy but also centralizes the creature's use of language so as to enforce the inherency and necessity of language in spearheading social revolution, so much so that the fear that the creature inspires from Frankenstein is significantly more poignant in comparison to the anxiety it evoked as a mum monster. In contrast, Gregor Samsa experiences a prominent depletion of language, not only in terms of speech but also of individual thought, which demonstrates the completion of his devolution to a pre-human species. In the few instances he speaks, his voice is described as "an uncontrollable, painful squealing which allowed his words to remain articulate literally for only a moment, then stifled them so much as they died away that you couldn't tell if you'd heard them properly" (Kafka 80). This reflects the erosion of a personal voice in capitalistic functioning as well as the defined nonnecessity of the autonomous voice of a non-worker. Samsa's silence, despite living with his

family, further demonstrates the capitalistic degradation of the social human to a machinic entity, as his verbal contribution, and by extension, value to society as a member of the working class, becomes redundant and wasteful as his economic contribution diminishes.

This is not to say that both works serve to only illuminate the conditions of the working class; both also feature a subtle but prominent revolution against this status quo. Frankenstein's revenge against his creator constitutes his revolution and is considerably more overt and discussed prominently by scholarship than Samsa's own. His demands of companionship, whether from Frankenstein or from the creation of an independent female creature, exemplify a proletariat awareness and assertion of the bourgeois recognition of their autonomous and social identity. Although the tale concludes with his alleged suicide, the situation cannot be deemed entirely hopeless. The creature's realization of Frankenstein's tyranny represents the first and often the most difficult step to actualize in social revolutions. His utilization of the linguistic crafts to evoke sympathy from characters such as the blind De Lacey, and more extensively the audience, demonstrates him enacting a lasting and expansive change from his previously subservient position. The blind man's recognition of "there [being] something in [his] words which persuades [him] that [the creature is] sincere" serves as strong evidence of the fact, as with this man constituting the only character as blind to the creature's physiognomy and his social class, he becomes the only character that has the ability to see the creature's humanity and to sympathize with his revolution (Shelley 147). Even that singular acceptance forms a minuscule hope for proletariat revolutionaries as it symbolizes a gradual and eventual abandonment of such socially stringent denotations, which embodies a stronger flame of optimism for a receptiveness for working class seditions. His vengeance may, even predict the violent eruption of working-class collectives throughout history, which were facilitated largely by linguistic revolution followed by physical deterioration, conflict, and anarchy.

Conversely, Samsa's revolution is significantly more nuanced. If to be charted, readers can conclude two prominent methods through which Samsa rebels: the attempts to leave his room despite being pushed in, and the forceful retention of his gilded frame. The former, unlike Frankenstein's depiction of collective revolutions, emulates Samsa's desire to push through capitalistically enforced boundaries to participate in familial and social interactions. The latter is particularly significant in the reclamation

of a specific individualistic identity owing to the gilded frame he crafted, despite it being of a bourgeois woman. It can be read to represent not only the protection and possession of his own labor but also shows glimpses of Samsa's artist, and therefore, his inert, human personality. Thus, his initial creation of such a piece was, in the first place, a pre-canon revolt against capitalistic enforcers. Furthermore, his insistence to hold onto it even after devolution was indicative of his human spirit maintaining its meaning even after being discarded by society. Although his story also cements in death, Samsa's subtle instances of revolution cannot be considered redundant, nor the ending entirely devoid of hope. The Samsa family's grief and acknowledgment of Gregor's deterioration, as well as their forceful expulsion of the demeaning gentlemen from their home, depicts the prioritization of family over financial profit. Although their happiness may be argued to be fragmented and superficial, these actions show a decisive acceptance of Gregor's plight, signifying a minute but pertinent seed of change that lasts past Gregor's death.

Both Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Franz Kafka have conceived profound multi-dimensional works that cannot be reduced to simply one interpretation which serves as a critique of capitalism and its pervasive nature. Shelley and Kafka, as staunch liberals of their centuries, would reject not only the order of capitalism but also the corrosion of the human entity and exploitative policies that accompany it. Although Shelley herself wrote *Frankenstein* long before Marx gave voice to his ideas, it is imminent that her parents' anti-structuralist policies, and in particular, William Godwin's stringent rejection of the principles of accumulation of excessive wealth in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, inevitably forms not only the basis, but also the context for her own uniquely and formidably liberal assertions through Frankenstein's creature. Similarly, Kafka's own repetitive rejections of authoritarian systems that strip humane existence piece by piece echo his condemnation of capitalism through Gregor Samsa. This is why, by centralizing their characters as grotesque rejects, they paint the portrait of not only the working classes' diminishment but also the condition and treatment of the mutineer. However, whilst both Shelley and Kafka deal with similar subjects, they have each done so in different and nuanced elaborations. Shelley's creature remains a representation of the wider working class, the sympathy towards whom prompts a broader critique of capitalism. On the other hand, Kafka's vermin becomes someone steadily reduced to a

shell of himself, who urges an intrinsic reflection of capitalistic values rather than a revolution. Nevertheless, the emphasis of both impels an overhaul of constraining and oppressive financial structures through characters readers would find difficult to sympathize with, thereby promoting a more holistic and humane treatment of otherized individuals. Regardless, even the presence of those minute flames of revolution in Shelley's and Kafka's and Marxist literature serves a most profound function: to emphasize the inevitability of the human spirit in recoiling against oppressive structures, not only towards masses, but more prominently towards those that attempt to suppress the human essence.

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