A strange 'mesh'

An exploration of the 'strange stranger' through fiction

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Abstract

This thesis examines the social, cultural, and mental aspects associated with the ecocritical phenomenon that is the 'strange stranger', as presented by Professor Timothy Morton. Naturally, the theoretical work of Timothy Morton will be emphasised, alongside that of other relevant theorists, in relation to three works of fiction in which the 'strange stranger' plays a central part.

Trough the aid of the novel, *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*, the play *The Tempest*, as well as the short story, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', this thesis aims to examine the nature of the concept of 'strange stranger'. The focus will be on three separate encounters with these uncanny beings, stressing their social, cultural and psychological aspects. The text will furthermore examine the definition of humanity, addressing alleged prerequisites related to the condition in relation to the non-human. As a natural extension of this, the relationship between authentic nature and the artificially constructed concept 'Nature', the latter long associated with the 'strange stranger', will be explored.

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Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

The concept of the 'strange stranger' refers to a social and cultural phenomenon, in which one segment not only perceives another element as strange but also lacks the frame of reference required to normalise this strangeness. The 'strange stranger' overall proves extensive notion, not merely addressing peculiar plants and rare breeds of animals but existing well beyond the realm of ecocriticism. In retrospect, one finds the phenomenon applicable to myriad previously examined texts, providing them with additional meaning, exploring notions of species, class, science, and morality.

This initial chapter intends to present a comprehensive overview of the thesis. There will be a short presentation of the primary texts of the thesis, proceeded by establishing the terminology and theoretical work on which the text will base its later literary analysis. Furthermore, there will be a description of methodology, a brief chapter outline and, finally, a presentation of the problem statement.

My texts and the 'strange stranger'

This thesis will explore theoretical work whose arguments will be exemplified through references to literary texts. I intend to accomplish this by exploring three works of fiction: a novel, a play, and a short story: *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) by writer and essayist Mary Shelley (1797–1851), The *Tempest* (1611) by poet and playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616), and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) by sociologist and writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935).

The selected texts all occupy all a vital place in modern Western hypercanon, through continuous republications, critical interpretations, and academic studies. They provide three distinct interactions with the 'strange stranger', while also contributing to a greater comprehension of the subject as a whole.

From previous studies, I was already familiar with the primary texts of this thesis but viewed through Morton's ecocritical perspective, they gained additional significance, resulting in fascinating new interpretations. The primary texts offer insight into three different encounters with the 'strange stranger'. The project will make use of critical editions of the

primary texts, with foreword and commentary, which hopefully will provide insight into the work. Furthermore, this text will also consult different editions of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to achieve a comprehensive presentation.

Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus

Novelist Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was born in 1797 to progressive philosopher William Godwin and champion of women's rights, Mary Wollstonecraft. Young Mary Godwin enjoyed an eccentric but happy childhood, allowing her the opportunity to develop her mind. Recognised for her perseverance and intellectual pursuits early in childhood (Sunstein 1991, 58), Mary Godwin's literary talents grew to encompass complex and controversial ideas as she grew into adulthood. Her narratives express conflicting oppositions and subject matter which defy traditional definition:

> [H]opes and anxieties; and she often saw in traditional opposites – birth and death, pleasure and pain, masculinity and femininity, power and fear, writing and silence, innovation and tradition, competitiveness and compliance, ambition and suppression – things that overlapped and resisted borders and definitions (Hunter 1996, viii).

This approach is reflected in the novel, *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) which address the manner in which we receive new and foreign life forms; how we define the human being in contrast to the non-human, as well as contemplating the peculiar nature of the not-quite-human (Morton 2016, 144):

> *Frankenstein* is a work that questions and undermines all kinds of differences between categories, not by completely eliminating them, but by multiplying differences – that it might be possible to produce a wide variety of different sorts of ecocritical readings of Mary Shelley's novel (Morton 2016, 147).

Through her narrative, Shelley presents several conflicting yet equally valid viewpoints, the phenomenological landscape of the novel depicting fear, revulsion and grief, in addition to calm, logic, awe and wonder (Morton 2016, 144). Romanticising neither Victor Frankenstein nor his creation, she instead encourages her readers to entertain perspectives beyond their own.

The themes of the novel provided potent source material for several literary interpretations, resulting in what wrongfully came to be thought of as 'hideous progeny. This belief led to the text being largely overlooked by first-wave ecocriticism, because, as we will

later explore, variance and monstrosity are often challenging to differentiate (Morton 2016, 147).

The Tempest

Utilising one of the most substantial vocabularies ever employed by an author, William Shakespeare incorporated engaging details and complex language into his works. Resultingly, his plays remain more frequently performed than those of any other playwright (Shephard 1998, vi-vii). Moreover, he was privy to a unique sense of freedom, as the English drama had only just developed as an art form. As such, there were no strict rules, theories, or established authorities regarding its nature, allowing the dramatist the opportunity to experiment in terms of both language and themes (Durham 2010, 91).

Intrigued by the workings of the human mind, Shakespeare chose to convey its intricacies continuously. Consequently, *The Tempest* presents a compelling drama as well as a character study regarding human nature. The continued appeal of the play, mainly, lies in its portrayal of the psychological motivation and cultural influences of its characters (Smidt 2019 and Salhi 2017, 18):

Set on a desolate island, *The Tempest* chronicles the journey of the wizard Prospero, the former Duke of Milan, and his daughter, Miranda, as the former attempts to regain his lost position. Seeking justice for himself and his child, he proceeds to rob the island's inhabitants of theirs, enslaving the native Caliban and the spirit Ariel, to secure his goal, deeming Caliban utterly alien.

The growth of ecocriticism into an acknowledged field of critical examination, incorporating a new and growing awareness of Shakespearean studies, including *The Tempest* (Estok 2011, 1):

> Ecocriticism offers to give a vocabulary to the environmental ethics and attitudes of [*The Tempest*] and to move beyond the thematicism and symbolic readings that have characterized so much of the critical work on Shakespeare's representations (Estok 2011, 13).

This manner of addressing *The Tempest* grants new insight into the physiological and social relationships found within the play, challenging established interpretations, permitting audiences to explore and contextualize beliefs associated with the 'strange stranger'. Consequently, one may recognize the way in which both Prospero and Caliban might be

perceived as uncanny strangers, addressing both the fear of the unknown and the intimately recognised (Estok 2011, 13; Gray 2020, 2).

<u>'The Yellow Wallpaper'</u>
Charlotte Perkins Gilman pursued humanist, anthropologist, and philosophical values. As such, she sought to focus on overall human concerns, refusing to elevate one segment above another, but wishing to know and address all elements equally. Gilman found that unless we acknowledged ourselves as we present, we would remain unable to become who we truly are (Schwartz 2006, viii and Lane 1999, xx).

Consequently, 'The Yellow Wallpaper' relays the psychological struggle of a young wife and mother as she is forced to endure the hardships of postpartum depression under the care of her good-intentioned but sadly misinformed husband. Growing distant from her family, as her affliction causes her to become undefinable in their eyes, the protagonist finds purpose through a connection to a woman she believes to be trapped within the titular wallpaper, allowing her to express her newfound strange strangeness.

The short story introduces the idea of the 'strange stranger' as a metamorphosis, rather than an innate condition, associated with primarily psychological aspects rather than physicality, unlike the previous texts. The text further establishes a connection between the 'strange stranger' and geographical landscape, suggesting that the narrator, like the garden, is not a part of natural space, but a constructed one made part of the confining human-made element that is 'Nature'.

Moreover, the short story furthermore examines animalistic and infantile characteristics, as well as strict masculine aspects of 'Nature', suggesting these as a defensive reaction upon encountering the uncanny stranger. However, the short story also questions whether the strangeness of such beings ought ultimately to be accepted, as demanded by Timothy Morton.

Terminology and Theory
Before proceeding to discuss the relevant theory drawn upon, I believe it beneficial to grant some insight into the terminology employed throughout this thesis. Established in the 1990s, ecocriticism is a young but vital interdisciplinary area, exploring the ecological connection between culture, literature, the environment, and science, among others:

> Ecology shows us that all beings are connected. The ecological thought is the thinking of interconnectedness. The ecological thought is […] a practice and a

process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings-animal, vegetable, or mineral. Ultimately, this includes thinking about democracy. What would a truly democratic encounter between truly equal beings look like, what would it be -- can we even imagine it? (Morton 2010, 7).

Influenced by this, the thesis will address an essential part of the literary, political, and cultural agenda. The text will be based on the theoretical work of literary scholar and eco-critic, Timothy Morton (1968-). The thesis will explore the ecocritical concept of the 'strange stranger', as presented by Morton:

How to care for the neighbor, the strange stranger […] are the long-term problems posed by the ecological thought. The ecological […] forces us to invent ways of being together that don't depend on self-interest […] They compel us to imagine collectivity rather than community-groups formed by choice rather than by necessity (Morton 2010, 135).

Thematically, Morton was influenced partly by the theories of philosophers Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), regarding 'das Fremde' and 'Mitsein', respectively (Morton 2014, 302). Heidegger proposed that coexistence is not only an essential biological aspect of life but also in the case of human beings, an inherent requirement. This crucial coexistence, which Heidegger refers to as 'Mitsein' ('being-with'), refers solely to one shared with others of its kind (Heidegger 1962, 156 and Wheeler 2011). Similarly, Husserl describes a being referred to as 'Fremde' ('the other'). An utterly alien creature, it inherently lacks everything which 'the self' values. How this 'other' is perceived is entirely subjective, dependent on how we ourselves are perceived (Yu 2006, 2-3).

The primary influence behind the 'strange stranger', however, comes from the teachings of French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). For, the foundation of the concept is adapted from the theories of Derrida concerning the 'arrivant', describing the sudden arrival of something wholly unexpected:

[The] Arrivant -- is something that visits us but that cannot ultimately be identified, anticipated, or foreseen against the backdrop of any horizon. It is something that falls upon us vertically, from an abyssal height, disrupting all our expectations -- an uninvited guest who is the only guest worthy of the name (Naas 2005, 12).

Despite its unknowable nature, this arrival, in whatever shape it may appear, is to be greeted graciously, maintains Derrida, embracing its strangeness (Morton 2010, 140 and 143 and Morton 2008, 76).

Adopting facets from these theorists, Morton describes an ecological model in which all life exists interdependently within a living network, the so-called 'mesh'. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily indicate harmonious coexistence:

> The ecological thought imagines interconnectedness, which I call *the mesh* […] Each entity in the mesh looks strange […] Our encounter with other beings becomes profound. They are strange, even intrinsically strange. […] When we talk about life forms, we're talking about *strange strangers*. The ecological thought imagines a multitude of entangled strange strangers (Morton 2010, 15).

A simple stranger appears as an individual with whom we are currently unfamiliar but whose basic structure already exists in our minds before meeting them, allowing us to recognise and understand them. In contrast, those who cannot be identified through these existing parameters are classified as a 'strange stranger':

> The strange stranger is strange all the way down—there is no way to become fully familiar with him, her, or it (how can we ever fully tell?). If we could anticipate the strange stranger in any way, we would have created a box (such as 'world') for them. The strange stranger is the guest to whom we owe infinite hospitality, whose arrival can never be predicted (Morton 2014, 27-28).

Some critics claim that the very structural integrity of human civilisations depends on the creation of subjective hierarchies, which contain a counterpart, an 'other'. This line of thought claims that all cultural units shape and retain their identities through labelling other segments 'as foreign or "*other*" through representing a hierarchical dualism in which the unit is *privileged* or favoured while the other is *deprivileged* or devalued in some way' (Cahoone 2003, 11).

Through their theories, philosophers Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) offered an explanation to this conundrum. The two argued that within the mind of all human beings, there exists a binary opposition. Through a process called 'self-othering', Fichte and Hegel describe the human psyche as perpetually battling a foreign and negative aspect of itself, identified as 'other' (Williams 1992, 42). Thus, is it possible that the resentment towards the 'other' be partially derived from a desire to transfer onto another being the dissatisfactory characteristics present in oneself?

This thinking, though possibly containing superficially similar elements, emerges as more reminiscent of 'the other' than of the 'strange stranger'. In stark contrast to the uncanny unknown, it constitutes 'a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated' (Bhabha 2004, 95). The concept, as it appears in its various incarnations, describes a manner of stereotyping, in which a dominant signifying force effectively determines the nature of another, dissimilar and supposedly lesser element, the signified. The ancient Greeks identified those of a different heritage as 'barbaros', referencing how their languages supposedly consisted of unintelligible phrases, leaving them unable to be understood. Likewise, early Chinese culture classified non-Chinese civilisations across the ocean as 'Yang-kwei', identifying them as sea monsters (Kapuściński 2008, 73-74). 'The myths of many tribes and peoples include a belief that only we are human, the members of our clan, our society, and that 'others' – all 'others' – are subhuman, or not human at all' (Kapuściński 2008, 83). The result of wrongful premises, 'the other' is illustrated in detail, perpetuating an artificial psychological and cultural reality, while the 'strange stranger' continually proves elusive and uncanny.

The 'strange stranger', however, is not a sudden or dangerous mutation, or singular, creatures, but beings which are simultaneously everywhere and everything, continually confronting the human sphere. The world made up of a multitude of such creatures -- plants, animals, insects, bacteria – even other human beings (Morton 2010, 15 and 47). Within the 'mesh', human beings are only one component, rather than the main focus. This realisation is often a harsh reality to face. As a result, when confronted with a perceived 'strange stranger', humanity tends to negate the notion of an interdependent network in favour of placing themselves outside and above the 'mesh' itself (Morton 2010, 76).

The mindset which enables us to perceive the 'strange stranger' may be perceived as akin to an infection. Unless checked by the in the form of 'Nature', fear, or indifference, this infection will proceed to spread. Morton cautions against mounting any resistance to such a development, as this mindset, by affecting us, will cause us to strengthen, rather than weaken (Castree 2012, 5). The 'strange stranger' represents an authentic, unfiltered encounter within the 'mesh', granting the opportunity for growth both as individuals and in relation to others. For, through the 'strange stranger', one perceives the world as it genuinely presents itself - whether ugly, frightening, or confusing - enabling us to address and consequently mend the potential problems that we discover.

Methodology

This thesis will first and foremost discuss works of fiction, though incorporating central ecocritical theories, to exemplify my arguments, drawing primarily from the theoretical approaches of Timothy Morton. I will analyse three separate instances in which the 'strange stranger' appears. Differing in terms of time, place and length, these interactions will range from momentary, non-verbal encounters, and short confrontations, to relationships, sustained for many years.

Specification of Problem Statement

The thesis will address the notion of the 'strange stranger', as introduced by Timothy Morton, and will examine the phenomenon as it appears in the primary texts, analysing the background and implications associated with the term. Thus, I aim to highlight and problematise cognitive, cultural, and social patterns wherein the concept of the 'strange stranger' is central.

By addressing a selection of both fictional and non-fictional texts, this thesis will explore several crucial queries regarding the circumstances of the 'strange stranger': Is the 'strange stranger' an innate condition? Will such beings always present as fragile and defenceless? What does it mean to be human? Does the human condition constitute specific prerequisites lost on other species? Where is the line between the human and the non-human? Does such a line exist? Crucial to the project is also an examination of the concept of 'Nature', a mutable realm which the 'strange stranger' is often thought to inhabit. Furthermore, the text will endeavour to determine whether our relationship to the 'strange stranger' can evolve beyond its current condition, towards a more beneficial state.

Outline of Chapters

This thesis will consist of five chapters - an introduction followed by a main analytic body and, finally, a conclusion. The first chapter will seek to present an overall introduction to the thesis, providing insight into authors and primary texts as well as the theoretical background on which the next chapters will be based.

Through Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), the second chapter will examine the ethical implications of science as well as its relationships to the natural world. Addressing the topic of anthropocentrism, this chapter will also discuss what humanity entails and why Victor Frankenstein's artificial man is perceived as a monster rather than a member of the human species. Does the human condition constitute a specific biologic, moral, intellectual, or aesthetic prerequisite lost to the creature? There will

furthermore be argued that the ultimate threat of the creature lies not in its alien nature but his human motivations.

The third chapter aims to explore *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, discussing the implications of both Prospero and Caliban as a 'strange stranger'. There shall be an examination of the concepts of hospitality, dark ecology and the deceitful nature of mimicry. Additionally, the text will discuss the notion that Prospero and Miranda, in fact, require Caliban's presence to be content.

The penultimate chapter seeks to investigate the idea of the 'strange stranger' as an established human being suffering from a mental affliction, rather than a foreign figure. This chapter will address the possibility of the 'strange stranger' as a metamorphosis, rather than an innate condition. Does the relationship between the protagonist and her surroundings differ from the interactions of *Frankenstein* and *The Tempest*? Additionally, there will be an exploration of the narrator's identification with the women she perceives as crawling beneath the paper. Is all manner of uncanny strangeness to be accepted?

In the final chapter, I will attempt to summarise my discoveries, addressing the various aspects uncovered as a whole. I shall proceed to consider them critically, endeavouring to discuss what these findings entail, potentially adjusting initial assumptions.

Chapter 2
A strange reading of *Frankenstein*

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) by the English author Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851). This will be accomplished primarily by applying the theories of Timothy Morton concerning the innovative concept of the 'strange stranger'. This text will explore the novel's ethical implications of science, relationships to the natural world and presentation of the phenomenon that is 'Nature'. Addressing the topic of anthropocentrism, there will be a discussion on what humanity entails and why Victor Frankenstein's artificial man is perceived as a monster, rather than a human being. For, does the human condition constitute a specific biological, moral, intellectual, or aesthetic prerequisite lost to the creature? Is there a finite divide between humanity and the non-human, and what might be a potential solution to bridge such a gap?

First conceived in 1816, the novel was the result of a literary challenge, when the author and her future husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), spent a summer at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland, alongside the poet Lord Byron (1788–1824). While in Switzerland, Byron challenged everyone to write a ghost story. For Mary Shelley, the result was the first draft of the novel *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus*. Upon returning to England, Shelly found inspiration to expand her short story into a full-length novel, elaborating on the tale of the brilliant but arrogant Victor Frankenstein and his now infamous creation and published her text anonymously in 1818. Five years later, a second edition of the novel recognised Shelley's authorship. The third edition was published in 1831, wherein Shelley revised her manuscript and added a dedication to her late husband who had encouraged her to author the book (Haug 2009 and Briggs 2017).

The novel itself is relayed in epistolary form, its opening and ending depicted through a frame narrative, in the form of letters from the arctic explorer captain Walton, to his sister Margaret Saville. However, upon Walton's eventual discovery of the desperate and weary Victor Frankenstein amongst the arctic landscape, the main narrative is introduced, alternating between the perspectives of the titular Frankenstein and his creature.

Differing views on nature

Continual depictions of nature characterise Shelley's novel. Through the early observations of the protagonist Victor Frankenstein and his adopted sister, Elizabeth Lavenza, the author introduces differing views of the natural world:

> She busied herself with following the aerial creations of the poets; and in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home — the sublime shapes of the mountains, the changes of the seasons, tempest and calm, the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers — she found ample scope for admiration and delight (Shelley 1982, 236).

Elisabeth appreciates the pleasant scenery and calm atmosphere, yet also the summer heat and the violent and potentially threatening storms. Though aware that the forces of nature are beyond her control, she nevertheless accepts and finds joy in her surroundings (Marsh 2009, 88-89). Victor Frankenstein's observations regarding nature also come to incorporate a suspicious aspect. For Victor, nature is characterised by secrets and hidden laws, which must be uncovered:

> While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes. The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember (Shelley 1982, 236).

Shelley's protagonist admits that he has 'always having been imbued with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature', being affected with an 'unrelaxed and breathless eagerness' (Shelley 1980, 47 and 54). Nature, furthermore, is also described as defiantly opposing his continued pursuits, concealing itself behind 'fortifications and impediments' (Shelley 1980, 40) to prevent inquiring minds from gaining access to her secrets (Hutchings 2007, 184). These revelations suggest Frankenstein's eventual violation of the boundaries of nature in his pursuit of scientific advancement.

Victor comes to admire, if not envy, the great – and often destructive – power that exists within nature. This behaviour eventually takes the form of a desire, not only to reveal the secrets within nature, but also master them, ultimately culminating in his miraculous, but tragic creature. This tendency is exemplified when a young Victor finds himself quite fascinated by the force of electricity, as he watches a bolt of lightning decimate a tree:

> I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about twenty yards from our house, and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbons of wood […] the catastrophe of this tree excited my extreme astonishment; and I eagerly inquired of my father the nature of thunder and lightning (Shelley 1996, 23).

Rather than express fear, or even revel in the beauty of the sight, Victor's sole interest seems to be the sheer power which nature possesses.

Despite this early fascination and his eventual scientific studies, Victor achieves knowledge of, but little actual *understanding* of the world around him, eventually refusing to recognise his creation as part of himself and humanity. In *The Ecological Thought* (2010), Timothy Morton describes an ecological model in which all life exists depending on each other, in a network. For humans, that in the network which proves not only strange but also beyond our existing frame of reference tend to be categorised –often unfavourably – as what Morton calls 'strange strangers'. Morton perceives the world as a living network, referred to as the 'mesh', where all beings exist interconnected to one another:

> You never perceive [the *mesh*] directly. But you can detect it in the snails, the sea thrift, and the smell of the garbage can. The mesh is known through the being of the *strange stranger*. The ecological thought understands that there never was an authentic world. There is indeed an environment, yet when we examine it, we find it is made of strange stranger's (Morton 2010, 57-58).

The 'mesh' is simultaneously large and small. As we probe and scrutinise; its circumstances grow ever more obscure. It is impossible to predict who inhabits the rest of the 'mesh' prior to encountering them. Even upon confrontation, they may not present as what they initially appear (Morton 2010, 40).

Overall, when interacting, humanity tends to temper the 'strange stranger'. As we attempt to comprehend, employ, or master these beings, we effectively deny their inherent strangeness. As the text shall later demonstrate, when human beings are confronted with that which is utterly alien to them, our instinct is to immediately reject it as an aberration, as opposed to a natural phenomenon. As such, Morton proposes that the world perceived by humanity is not an authentic one. Authenticity, he suggests, means acknowledging that there

exist other beings of equal value to ours and valid perspectives other than just our own (Morton 2010, 57-58).

This, of course, is precisely the tactic of Shelley's protagonist, as he is unable to perceive the inherent value of the network around him. For Frankenstein, the natural world consists of benefits that must be exploited, but also evils that must be overcome. Influenced by his mother's premature demise, Frankenstein, for instance, perceives the concept of death, as something that must be defeated, through the creation of a new human race:

> Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world […] Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time […] renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption (Shelley 1996, 32).

Thus, Victor positions himself in opposition to the established biological structure of the world, through his desire to transcend it utilising science.

His radical and partly disrespectful attitude towards death is further expressed through his scientific approach. The young scientist begins his project by discarding traditional scientific methods, in favour of grave robbery, to secure materials. Ironically, by seeking to create a new breed of human, he also seems to devalue humanity, reducing the remains of other human beings to meaningless biological residues:

> [A] church-yard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm […] After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter (Shelley 1996, 30).

The ethics of his methods, and the purely practical consequences of his experiment, not least for the new breed itself, are, surprisingly, never considered critical by the protagonist. This may be because an altruistic motive does not drive his scientific ambitions, but predominantly an underlying desire for power and admiration. Frankenstein wishes to be praised as the creator of a new race: 'A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me,' announces Victor Frankenstein. 'No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's' (Shelley 1996, 32).

An innovative and controversial science

It is during his time at university, hearing of the wonders of modern science, that Victor's wish to transcend death is genuinely sparked. At this point, he comes to experience nature not as an obstacle, but as an enemy to his goals:

> I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being; chord after chord was sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein – more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation (Shelley 2013, 48).

Regardless, he also finds that these thoughts leave him not with a feeling of euphoria, but instead an inner turmoil, unable to calm his mind. This unease does not make the young man revaluate his project. Still, Shelley makes clear that Frankenstein is not alone in his ambitions. Through Victor's studies in Ingolstadt, the author shows that the idea of influencing nature is a common theme among human beings:

> The modern masters […] penetrate into the recess of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens […] They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows (Shelley 1996, 27-28).

Additionally, by the late seventeen hundreds, the Italian physician Luigi Galvani (1737-1798) demonstrated that dead animal tissue could seemingly be 'revived' by exposing its muscles to an electrical charge. Galvani's research was further developed by physicist Alessandro Volta (1745-1827), who proceeded to construct the first electric cell, enabling additional research within the field of electricity. During the following decades, the current scientific focus came to centre on the very essence of life. For what, sustained the life within a living creature? As a result, several scientists developed hypotheses on the topic of reanimation. Was the use of lightning a possible method of reversing death? Or, could a new human being simply be assembled from existing human parts? Invigorated by the scientific breakthroughs of the era, there was little thought as to what boundaries *should* not be crossed (Cheshire 2010, v-vi).

     Mary Shelley herself appeared to share this concern; the idea of implementing science to defy the natural order was shocking and frightening to her. In her introduction to

Frankenstein, Shelley describes having had a terrifying vision of a scientist attempting to revitalise a body of assembled parts:

> When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful must it be, for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world (Shelley 1996, 172).

For Shelly, the image of the arrogant scientist attempting to defy the natural order was a frightening one, of foreboding consequences.

Unfortunately, the horror experienced by Shelley does not translate onto her protagonist. Despite his scientific vision, Victor Frankenstein lacks foresight. The young scientist not only behaves irresponsibly during the project itself but when it becomes apparent that the result was not what he hoped, he surrenders to fear and disgust, rather than practising the logic associated with genuine scientific research. Under other circumstances and other management, such research could have been revolutionary in a positive sense. The caution and restraint over what he might have brought forth, and which should have characterised Victor's research only affects him once his project is complete:

> How can I describe my emotions at the catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? […] Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips […] I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart (Shelley 1996, 34).

Upon gaining consciousness, the body on the table somehow mutates from what was previously considered a human being – a beautiful one, even – into an undefinable abomination, horrifying its creator. Seemingly due to nothing more than a matter of

aesthetics, knowing nothing of the being's intellect or intentions, Frankenstein chooses to abandon his newly wakened creation, even as it reaches out to him. As his creation, upon waking, somehow loses his original beauty, he seemingly also loses his humanity. To Frankenstein, this leaves him horrifying in his indeterminacy, unworthy of understanding or care. Timothy Morton criticises these actions on Victor's behalf. While he recognises the spread of such behaviour among human beings, he considers it superficial and based on an erroneous perception of reality (Morton 2010, 65-67).

Overall, this blatant disregard for non-human life reflected a prevalent ideology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For, the novel was written during the Enlightenment, a time when strong scientific influences led to a prevailing belief in humanity as superior to the rest of the natural world. Humans were considered the only species capable and worthy to rule the world around it. As a result, non-humans were reduced to lesser entities, resources to be used for the advancement of humanity (Kallman 2015, 2 and Boslaugh).

As such, the creature becomes an embodiment of what Morton refers to as the 'strange stranger'. He represents an entity that proves incomprehensible, concerning both identity and kinship. Such creatures are part of our world – possibly part of us – yet remain wholly alien. Are they self-aware? Intelligent? What are their intentions? Such questions are difficult to answer, as the closer we exist in proximity to the 'strange stranger', the higher is our uncertainty regarding them (Morton 2010, 41-42). This uncomfortable indeterminacy is made evident by Frankenstein's lack of interest in gaining insights about the creature, despite his horror concerning what he has unleashed into the world, preferring instead to substantiate his original perception.

Nature over yonder

An already existing alienation of nature at least partially facilitates this disturbing development. Despite his scientific education, from the moment his vision of a new Adam is first conceived, Victor Frankenstein entirely loses his previous connection to nature, coming to perceive it only as a fascinating object to study and ultimately conquer. This lamentable development mirrors an occurrence described by Morton, in which 'nature' becomes 'Nature'. It is something beautiful (or horrible) we may observe, but never partake in, a foreign entity beyond our reach:

> [T]hinking, including ecological thinking, has set up 'Nature' as a refined thing in the distance, under the sidewalk, on the other side where the grass is always

> greener, preferably in the mountains, in the wild […] Nature, a self-contained was always 'over yonder', alien and alienated. Just like a reflection, we can never actually reach it and touch it and belong to it. Nature is an ideal image, a self-contained form suspended from afar, shimmering and naked behind glass like an expensive painting. In the idea of pristine wilderness, we can make out the mirror image of private property: Keep off the Grass (Morton 2010, 3 and 5).

This type of approach to the natural world, however, does not constitute a genuine appreciation for nature, or an honest attempt to protect and preserve it. What we perceive as 'natural' is nothing more than a momentary illusion. Things appear constant as we are unable (or, unwilling) to recognise their actual change. That which we refer to as 'Nature' is ever-changing, and strangely strange throughout. Consequently, shock and repulsion are the results, should that acceptable traditional form shatter (Morton 2010, 44 and 61). Through the creature, 'Nature', in a less-than-ideal form, descends into the human sphere. Naturally, this is an entirely unwelcome intrusion, partially due to the creature's unattractive physicality. Despite this, one suspects a more considerable concern is that the definition of nature is no longer in human hands.

Shelly reveals the destructive nature of Victor's experiment, both physically and ideologically. Through specific phrases it is progressively made clear that Victor is no longer studying science, but is instead being consumed by it: 'unrelaxed and breathless eagerness', 'tortured', 'horrors', 'my limbs tremble', 'my eyes swim', 'frantic', 'pale' and 'emaciated' (Shelley 1996, 32). These quotations depict not only Frankenstein's unchecked arrogance but also the desperation and destruction evident in his scientific venture. Through all of this, Victor furthermore chooses to separate himself from the outside world:

> [M]y eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles away, and whom I had not seen for so long a time […] I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed (Shelley 1996, 33).

Overall, the closer the narrative comes to the culmination of Frankenstein's project, the more he is portrayed, not as a devoted scientist, but as an unstable madman (Marsh 2009, 117).

The basis of the case's classification as a 'strange stranger' and Frankenstein's subsequent disgust may be tied to the fact that Frankenstein's creature could be categorised as a *product*, rather than a genuine being. The creature is assembled and animated not primarily by *human* forces, but rather by industry, technology, and science. Consequently, the novel

replaces narrative regarding creation with tales of production, even intertextually, by replacing Victor's scientific notes with John Milton's (1608-1674) epic poem 'Paradise Lost' (1667) (Montag 2000, 388).

Rather than demonstrating the vicious intent assumed by his creator, the creature instead displays innocent confusion at his state and purpose. Demonstrating a human-like intellect, he questions his origins, identity and role in the world:

> I was dependant on none and related to none. The path of my departure was free and there was none to lament my inhalation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them (Shelley 1996, 86).

Additionally, despite his unconventional birth and dissatisfying relationship with his creator, the creature still craves human contact, coming to love and admire a family of peasants:

> They loved, and sympathised with one another; and their joys, depending on each other, were not interrupted by the casualties that took place around them. The more I saw of them, the greater became my desire to claim their protection and kindness; my heart yearned to be known and loved by these amiable creatures: to see their sweet looks directed towards me with affection, was the utmost limit of my ambition (Shelley 1996, 89).

It is not a matter of mere survival, which causes him to seek human companionship; he is stronger and more durable than any of his counterparts, in no way requiring their assistance to survive. Instead, it is an instinctive desire to belong to a social group and to partake in a community, which fuels his desire.

Aesthetic requirements

Frankenstein's creature eventually grows captivated by the family of peasants he observes. His delight with this group of people, however, results in displays of prejudice towards others. This conduct appears primarily influenced by physical appearance. 'I saw few human beings beside them,' relates the creature, 'and if any other happened to enter the cottage, their harsh manners and rude gait only enhanced to me the superior accomplishments of my friends' (Shelley 1996, 75). While the evident 'beauty of the cottagers' (Shelley 1996, 75) charms him, the movements and appearance of others seemingly offend the creature, causing him to deem the peasants superior. Of course, this is the same injustice he himself faces, something which he

ironically fails to recognise. Thus, the creature, in a similar manner to human beings, seemingly possesses an inherent trait that leaves him critical of that which is unfamiliar to him, as well as aesthetically unappealing (Webster 2011, 17).

Observing the peasants, the creature eventually comes to consider himself one of them. Though, as he suddenly beholds his own reflection, he recognises himself as vastly different from them, his shape being quite hideous compared to their lovely ones:

> I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool: at first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I become fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification (Shelley 1996, 76).

Though he soon falls prey to despair and mortification, the creature's immediate concern is one of aesthetics, namely his own lack of beauty compared to the De Lacey family.

Following this, Frankenstein's creation formulates a plan to counter his aesthetic obstacles, believing the way to endear himself to them is to demonstrate his benign motives through his intellectual capabilities:

> I formed in my imagination a thousand pictures of presenting myself to them, and their reception of me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanour and conciliating words, I should first win their favour, and afterwards their love (Shelley 1996, 77).

Though dazzled by their appearance and hopeful of their understanding, he is not entirely naïve, recognising the possibility of their rejection and what this would entail for his continued existence, as later conveyed to the elderly DeLacey:

> I am an unfortunate and deserted creature; I look around, and I have no relation or friend upon earth. These amiable people to whom I go have never seen me, and know little of me. I am full of fears; for if I fail there, I am an outcast in the world forever (Shelley 1996, 90).

Alas, human reason within the novel proves itself socially and culturally determined, and consequently flawed. Unfortunately, the creature's attempts to be accepted by the De Lacey family is ultimately met with harsh rejection. While his introduction to the elderly and visually impaired DeLacey is successful, once the younger Agatha and Felix arrive and

perceive the perplexing, unidentifiable creature before them, he is forcibly driven out. The creature himself, at one point, surmises that he cannot be human:

> I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon a courser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded their's. When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? (Shelley 1996, 80-81).

Though he cannot precisely deduce his nature, he ultimately reasons that he must be some breed of monster.

Morton denounces as such a belief. 'A monster is something seen by someone', he explains. 'Monstrosity is in the eye of the beholder […] There is no natural hierarchy to which we should submit' (Morton 2010, 65-67). Anything monstrous in the natural world reflects the 'uncertainty in the system at every point'. Every creature, in fact, is a monster, being a chimaera constructed from components of other beings. Thereby, the DeLacey family and Victor are indeed as monstrous as the creature (Morton 2010, 66).

Why *is* it that Frankenstein's creation continues to be perceived as a 'strange stranger' instead of a human being? The creature is created from human parts, by a human being with genuine knowledge of human physiology. He comes to develop a human intellect and intelligible speech. What is missing? While Safie, of a different ethnicity and unable to speak the language of those around her, is immediately *accepted*, the creature is *rejected.* Why? As the creature beholds Safie for the first time, the reason becomes apparent:

> I beheld a countenance of angelic beauty and expression. Her hair of a shining raven black, and curiously braided; her eyes were dark, but gentle, although animated; her features of a regular proportion, and her complexion wondrously fair, each cheek tinged with a lovely pink (Shelley 1996, 78).

The apparent difference between the two characters lies in the creature lacking the physical beauty Safie possesses. Likewise, the novel (especially the 1818 edition of the text) accentuates Elizabeth's beauty as a source of her worth, and indicates it partly the reason behind her family's affection for her:

> She appeared of a different stock […] Her hair was the brightest living gold, and, despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes a cloudless, and her

> lips and the moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness, that none could behold her without looking on her as a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features (Shelley 1831, 21).

Safie and Elizabeth are welcomed and revered for their physical beauty, while the creature is rejected for his lack of such. This is further emphasised at a later point in the narrative as creation and creator reunite. While Frankenstein initially experiences feelings of sympathy at the words of his creation, recognising his suffering, these emotions are tempered as he once more takes in the creature's physical form:

> His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred (Shelley 1996, 99).

Therefore, one must conclude that it is primarily an aesthetic requirement which defines the creature as inhumanity. The creature himself addresses the issue of a supposed aesthetic requirement to humanity:

> 'Hateful day when I received life!' I exclaimed in agony. 'Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance' (Shelley 1996, 88).

The creature curses Frankenstein, lamenting his fate, as he believes that, while humans are made in the image of their God, his creator instead made him physically unappealing on purpose. He concludes that his body is meant as a mockery of the human form.

The arrival of Safie amongst the De Lacey family also indirectly generates doubts on the creature's behalf, regarding not only the actions of his creator but the supremacy of humanity as a whole. Attempting to teach Safie English, Felix De Lacey reads to her from the book *Ruins of Empires* (1791) by C. F. Volney, which chronicles the history of ancient civilisations. As he listens in from a distance, the narrative has a significant effect on the creature, forcing a shocking new insight regarding the nature of human beings:

> These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings. Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike […] For a long time I could

> not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased, and I turned away with disgust and loathing (Shelley 1996, 80).

Aside from his experiences with his creator, this marks the first time the creature begins to question human nature, realising that while they do possess admirable qualities, they are also capable of great cruelty.

Ultimately, similarly to his creator, the creature proceeds to draw assumptions regarding Frankenstein's motives. This lack of knowledge on the creature's part leaves him to assume the worst of his creator's motives, believing he made him repulsive on purpose. These experiences cement the creature's resentment not only towards humanity as a whole, but towards his creator in particular:

> There was none among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? 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 (Shelley 1996, 92).

In this manner, the relationship between creator and creation is characterised primarily by a mutual lack of basic understanding, and worse, *unwillingness* to understand. In the wake of this event, Frankenstein's artificial man finally decides to respond in kind to humanity's treatment of him. Deeming human beings his enemies, especially so his creator, the creature declares war on all of humanity. Humans are now as alien to him as he is to them.

Though, perhaps, this sense of sameness sought by the human characters of the novel is a matter not first and foremost of physical *beauty*, but instead of physical *resemblance*. In the early eighteenth century, the idea of biological belonging was not primarily associated with genetic origins, but with a general, superficial physical similarity. Thus, the topic of species as linked principally to physical appearance. Rather than describing a genuine scientific concept, wherein a specific group of creatures continually reproduce, it portrays a social category monitoring the accepted connections between different individuals. Based on this system, those perceived visually as belonging to different species, cannot associate. As such, purely aesthetic concerns trump any natural and potentially beneficial social interaction. This is demonstrated through the continual fear the creature cause (McLane 1996, 975).

Evolution of humanity

Indeed, the human species is a unique lifeform, but only in the superficial sense that all species may be regarded as unique. Human beings are born out of women, rather than carefully assembled. They share a direct biological relationship to their progenitors, as opposed to having merely a clinical connection to a scientist. They grow from infancy to adulthood, instead of coming into life fully matured. Still, does this mean that human beings are just a set of specific physical circumstances? What of the mental and emotional components? Previously, humans have considered themselves the only beings capable of deeper feelings, claiming animals were mere machines in comparison (Hogenboom 2015).

In the book *The Descent of Man* (1871), the British natural scientist Charles Darwin (1809-1882), made a controversial assessment regarding humanity's origins and its relationship to the rest of the animal kingdom. Darwin believed that Man's anthropocentric worldview was based on an arrogant and ultimately wrongful assumption. The mental contrast between humans and certain highly developed animals, Darwin argues, is a matter of degree, not type. Various emotions and abilities, such as affection, recollection, focus, and logic, all of which humanity believes itself to be the sole holder of, exist in a multitude of other creatures, even within the lower animals. Despite these many qualities, Darwin finds that humanity's most outstanding quality is its potential for loving other living creatures (Darwin 2013, 80).

The expression of this quality is challenged upon facing the full extent of the 'mesh' and its 'strange stranger'. Though recognising that human beings were in a more fortunate position than other animals, Darwin nevertheless maintained a belief in humankind's descent from animals, rather than being in an exclusive position, as the creation of a deity in its own image (James 1987, 98).

What then of ethical sensibilities among non-human creatures? While possible that animals could experience feeling such as love and curiosity, the concept of morality is often perceived as an aspect so complex that it has been gifted to humankind alone, unable to be developed in any lower being. As the first scientist to discuss the matter solely in relation to natural history, Darwin found that any creature possessing distinct social instincts is indeed *bound* to develop a sense of morality. According to Darwin, social impulses cause animals to appreciate interactions with their fellows, as well as come to demonstrate compassion towards them and even perform actions to ensure their well-being.

Thus, despite beliefs towards the contrary, Man is not superior to his animal counterparts, nor the pinnacle of any biological or spiritual evolution. Though there is a sense of logic to the process of evolution, there is no endpoint. As such, humanity is not the ultimate

purpose of natural selection, endowed with a great and mysterious destiny. Though fortunate in the position granted us by biology, we are only the most recent development of evolution, nothing more (Darwin 2013, 56-57 and Morton 2010, 44).

A tragic lack of imagination

Does this mean that acceptance, if not love, would have been possible for Frankenstein's creation, under different circumstances? Despite his earlier optimism, Morton provides a sombre answer, in which the creature's very biological diversity works against him:

> Imagine living in a world of triangular creatures. A triangular scientist discovers creatures without angels. These 'smooth strangers' would be 'strange' only insofar as we don't usually encounter them in our world. But we can imagine such a creature. And if one showed up it would be a 'familiar stranger' – we would have anticipated its existence. We would need some time, of course, to get to know its smoothness. But this process would be finite (Morton 2010, 41).

Sadly, one could argue that Frankenstein's infamous creature would never have found a place amongst humanity. For, he is not merely another non-human, but the very epitome of Morton's definition of the 'strange stranger'. The creature is not merely someone who frightens or disgusts us, but 'something or someone whose existence we cannot anticipate' (Morton 2010, 42).

The validity of this argument is demonstrated when the creature encounters young William Frankenstein, after having been rejected by the De Lacey family. The creature imagines a second opportunity for affection and approval, claiming that the child's mind has yet to be tainted by the prejudice of adults. Unfortunately, to young William, as to all adults previously encountered by the creature, the latter represents something quite unfathomable, and the child proceeds to react accordingly:

> Urged by this impulse, I seized the boy as he passed, and drew him towards me. As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream: I drew his hand forcibly from his face, and said, 'Child, what is the meaning of this? I do not intend to hurt you; listen to me.'
> He struggled violently. 'Let me go,' he cried; 'monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me and tear me to pieces — You are an ogre — Let me go, or I will tell my papa' (Shelley 1996, 96).

Enraged and distraught once he realises humanity's inherent animosity towards him, as well as William's familial relation to his creator, the creature kills him in revenge, ironically becoming what the boy feared him to be:

> 'Hideous monster! Let me go; My papa is a Syndic – he is M. Frankenstein – he will punish you. You dare not keep me!'
> 'Frankenstein! You belong then to my enemy – to him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim.'
> The child struggled, and loaded me with epithets which carried despair to my heart: I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feat. I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph: clapping my hands, I exclaimed, 'I, too, can create desolation' (Shelley 1996, 97).

Overall, the creature's encounters with human beings can be said to mirror humanity's experience with 'Nature'. Beautiful – perfect, even – when observed from a distance, but potentially abhorrent and unfathomable when examined up close. Crimes which he previously found incomprehensible now appear to the creature justifiable. Delighting in the destruction he has brought, not only on humanity but indirectly on Frankenstein himself, the creature goes on to plant evidence of William's murder on the servant girl, Justine, adamant that no human escapes his wrath. To him, all of humanity is as guilty as his creator and thus, deserving of his wrath.

This development introduces a crucial point. While humanity is not the beneficiary of some inherent moral superiority, neither is the creature, despite his suffering as a 'strange stranger'. For, despite his unjust persecution and original benevolent intentions, his unjust status does not result in the creature being less prone to vice than others, his morality not somehow elevated above that of human beings.

Outside of justice

This tragic event leads to a confrontation between Frankenstein and his creature. Furious at his creation for his murderous actions, Victor wishes to kill him in revenge. Though never denying his horrible acts, the creature attempts to appeal to Victor's sense of justice, arguing that every man is owed a fair trial before being sentenced. However, this plea falls on deaf ears, as Victor does not consider him human, and therefore not worthy of human rights. Upon hearing this, the creature proceeds to condemn the seeming hypocrisy of human morality (Kallman, 25), as Victor would be allowed to kill his creation without moral or legal consequences, but the reverse would not be tolerated:

> The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! (Shelley 1996, 67).

The creature's predicament illustrates the reality that human justice is useless to him, able to establish him as the culprit, but never the victim, focusing exclusively on 'the humanly embodied subject' (Reese 2006, 54).

Further problematising Victor's finite perception of himself and his creature, Mary Shelley explores the opposition between nature and environment. Where Frankenstein believes that the social experiences of childhood and adolescence influence one's fate, the creature instead argues for determinism. The creature believes that external forces, which are more potent than himself, determine his life: 'I was benevolent and good; Misery made me a fiend,' he insists. 'Make me happy, and I shall be virtuous' (Shelley 1996, 66).

Still, if the creature understands the difference between good and evil, why does he not make moral choices? Surprisingly, despite his advanced intellect, the creature indicates that, unlike individuals raised by loving families, he is simply unable to do so: If a deed is done against him, he must retaliate. Though as he threatens Frankenstein, it appears that he *himself* rules his actions, negating the argument for determinism (Marsh 2009, 93-94). This is confirmed in the final chapter of the novel. Due to deep remorse, the creature admits that, despite his situation, he had control over his own choices and that his predicament is the result of 'an element which I had willingly chosen' (Shelley 1996, 154).

Realisations

The idea of moral responsibility, seen in accordance with biological and ecological realities, proves crucial for the outcome of the novel. An opportunity to make peace with the creature, in exchange for giving him a mate, is presented to Frankenstein. The creature, desperate for companionship, solemnly promises to cease his acts of violence, for a chance to live in peace with a female counterpart, far away from human civilisation:

> If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing of whose existence every one will be ignorant. My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal (Shelley 1996, 100).

Momentarily convinced by the creature's arguments and pleas, Frankenstein agrees to the bargain. Recognising his creation as an intelligent being, rather than the derogatory terms previously employed, Frankenstein admits his responsibility to the former. 'In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature,' he explains to Walton, 'and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty' (Shelley 1996, 151).

As he begins the process of assembling this new female creation, a disturbing thought strikes the scientist; something he should have considered before ever trying to create new life:

> Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first sympathies for which the dæmon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? […] I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as Their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race (Shelley 1996, 114-115).

At this point in the novel, Frankenstein's creature no longer functions wholly as an example of the 'strange stranger'. From his experiences with the creature, and his knowledge of human motivations, Victor predicts the outcome of coexistence between established humanity and the new breed. Should he allow the creature to multiply, this new population could come to pose a threat. Even if seeking peaceful coexistence with humanity, the two groups would eventually have to fight over resources, and given the physical superiority of the former, humanity would perish.

Due to this grim prospect, Frankenstein finally takes responsibility for his earlier abuse of science. Though aware the creature will seek revenge, Frankenstein nevertheless chooses to destroy the creature's mate, to ensure humanity's survival:

> My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature (Shelley 1996, 151).

Frankenstein's reasoning for denying the creature a mate is comparable to the principle of competitive exclusion. This concept addresses cases where two species in need of the same

resources cannot both exist if one of them has an advantage over its counterpart. Thus, *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* creates fear, not only due to its science fiction elements but also because of its understanding and presentation of key concepts in biology, ecology, and evolutionary theory (Collins).

Victor finally recognises that the threat of his creation lies not in his mystifying nature, but in his human motivations, such as a desire for companionship, offspring and a need for resources. Realising this, Victor chooses to take responsibility for his offence against the natural world, reaffirming his previously severed connection with nature:

> Even broken in spirit as he is, no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions, seems still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth (Shelley 1996, 16).

A traditional reading of the novel is that the narrative warns against self-centred human exploitation of natural structures in the name of progress. In addition to the main narrative, this is also illustrated by the frame story, namely the letters of Arctic explorer, Captain Walton. Like Victor, Walton expresses a desire to uncover the mysteries of nature and master them, to serve humanity. Like Frankenstein, he also takes a reckless approach to achieve his goals, appearing indifferent to sacrifices made in the name of progress:

> [H]ow gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race. As I spoke, a dark gloom spread over my listener's countenance (Shelley 1993, 24).

Frankenstein himself is horrified when he becomes aware of the captain's ambitions (Sampson and Turner, 20): 'Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you also drunk the intoxicating draught?' he exclaims despairingly. 'Hear me; let me tell my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!' (Shelley 1982, 15). The unfortunate connection between the two characters may thereby be considered the motivation behind the main narrative.

Through the novel, Shelly addresses the hubris of the human mind, which cause individuals to continually move beyond set limits for the sake of glory or childish curiosity. The author argues that potential threats to humanity lie not in the monstrous, but in the merely human. Sharing this realisation near the end of his life, Victor Frankenstein readdresses his initial worldview. The titular character realises that it was first and foremost his unchecked

ambition, primarily intended to benefit himself, rather than humanity, which is to blame for his fate:

> [I]f I were engaged in any high undertaking or design, fraught with extensive utility to my fellow-creatures, then I could live to fulfil it. But such is not my destiny; I must pursue and destroy the being whom I gave existence; then my lot on earth will be fulfilled, and I may die (Shelley 1996, 148).

The creature experiences a similar sense of self-reflection and moral insight to that of Frankenstein. Acknowledging that his miseries do not excuse his outbursts of cruelty, he anguishes over his past misdeeds:

> [I]t is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely and the helpless; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or any other living thing. I have devoted my creator, the select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration among men, to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin. There he lies, white and cold in death. You hate me; but your abhorrence cannot equal that with which I regard myself (Shelley 1996, 155).

In the aftermath of this admission, the creature, like his creator, prepares to face the outcome of his destructive choices, in the form of his demise.

Conclusion

Yet, despite the tragic outcome of the novel, there is no condemnation of ambition or scientific pursuits altogether. Instead, Shelley seems to advocate for a balance between the wonders of progress and the values of caution and rationality. The author presents the natural sciences as a neutral phenomenon; whose moral implications are governed by the human forces behind them. As such, the novel distinguishes between favourable science, which seeks an objective depiction of the natural world, and those who prefer to control the world through direct human influence. A case of the former is demonstrated by Victor's early interest in the mechanics behind lightning. When he subsequently takes advantage of electricity, intending to produce a new breed, he immerses himself in a negative science, which eventually causes not only his death but also the lives of his wife, friend and younger brother (Mellor 1989, 89-90 and Turner, 17-18).

The novel's science, though mostly fictional, nonetheless introduces a relevant question: How do we relate to the 'strange stranger'? The creation of Frankenstein's creature effectively violates the prominent barriers separating the human sphere from that of the non-human. The

details of his genetic makeup, notwithstanding, the creature displays a multitude of complex emotions, from initial displays of curiosity, love, and fear, as he stumbles through life, newly awakened and craving human acceptance. Additionally, he comes to experience sorrow and deep hatred when realising he will never achieve his desires. He even proves capable of an egocentric viewpoint, similar to that of human anthropocentrism, believing he has the right to abuse, even murder, others for the sake of his survival and satisfaction. 'My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy,' Frankenstein's creation declares, 'and when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture such as you cannot even imagine' (Shelley 1996, 153).

Recognising this, Shelley questions if sentient, non-human entities should be awarded the same fundamental rights and privileges as that of humans, providing arguments both for and against such a development. Regardless, is the divide between the two groups quite so clear-cut? Humanity is, in fact, not separate from that which is non-human. For, humanity itself is not merely 'human'. Morton argues against putting too much value on rigidly constructed physical borders between species. Our status as human beings, though integral to our physical being, is not our one defining quality. Championing the possibility of a positive relationship to non-humans, he considers this connection as a natural antidote to the destructive tendencies of anthropocentrism (Morton 2019, 122).

Descended from other animals through natural selection, humanity is a – possibly freakish – combination of various species. The spiralling shape of human ears, made stiff by cartilage, is a remnant of an earlier stage in our evolution, namely, a creature capable of pricking its ears. Likewise, the small protrusion on the upper inside of the ear speaks of tapered ears gradually made to turn inward. Our coccyx, now without any particular function, is a vestige of a tailed simian ancestor and, similarly, our cranial nerves originate from the gill arches of fish (Wilson 2018, 15 and Morton 2010, 44). Thus, humanity is not just a particular biological state, easily distinguished from the rest of the 'mesh', but something equally complicated and disturbing.

While Victor recognises his attempts to create as misguided, his salvation – both for his actions against humanity, as well as the creature itself - seems to be the belief that he remains righteous while his creation is inherently evil. Consequently, once he recognises the human aspects of the latter, as well as his own misdeeds, the creature essentially ceases to appear as a 'strange stranger' and his demise becomes imminent.

The novel's emphasis on the physical is not solely a matter of biology, but also one of aesthetics. For, within the novel, beauty is a matter of distinction, not only between humans and

non-humans but *within* humanity. As the creature comes to admires the family of cottagers, considering them more physically appealing than other humans, so the cottagers, in turn, revere the character of Safie for her great beauty. As such, physical appeal influences the character's position in the biological hierarchy of the novel (Heymans 2012, 122). This quality is implied as indicative of a person's moral inclinations, as well as their social and cultural value, almost to the point where their individual motivations appear irrelevant.

Whether one considers him human or non-human, the character of Frankenstein's creature nevertheless brings the concept of 'Nature' into focus. It ceases to function as 'That Thing Over There'. If one begins to view nature as more than a distant and abstract object, considers human waste, the lives of the animals we consume, or the fate of a failed and discarded laboratory experiment, the world you inhabit begins to appear smaller. As such, the overall consequences of our choices grow more evident, making us question our actions, morals and integrity. Thus, *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* asks us to examine certain established attitudes:

> You think you are ethical? You think you are the wisest, smartest beings on earth? Can you love and treat kindly a being as ugly as me, as uncertain in his status as a person as me? Can you forgive another being's violence, you who executed and torment in the name of justice and reason? (Morton 2010, 112).

Unfortunately, we tend to place ourselves in a safe power position at the top of the biological hierarchy, where we remain untouchable, where we know and master everything. A more constructive ecocritical alternative would be to promote an honest approach, acknowledging the shortcomings of our capacity and understanding, concerning both a world of 'strange strangers', but also humanity itself (Morton 2010, 95)

Through the divided structure of her narrative, the author grants readers access to the thoughts and motivations of not only Victor Frankenstein, but also his tragic creation, as they come to revaluate their perspectives of themselves and the other. Thus, Shelley encourages her audience to seek out perspectives and truths beyond their own, arguably envisioning the 'strange stranger' as an initial vehicle towards achieving just this. Her plot suggests actively *engaging* with such strangers, rather than passively observing, the latter being the cause of the ultimate misfortune of both protagonists.

Both Morton and Shelley encourage their audiences to accept that which is different *as* different, rather than immediately translating it into monstrosities (Wilson, 15-16). We need not necessarily love, but respect and care for the uncanny strangers we encounter. Though, if

we are to indeed accept and exist alongside 'strange strangers', we must acknowledge them not just as creatures worthy of our respect and care, but as a part of us, recognising ourselves as just as strange.

Chapter 3

An examination of *The Tempest*

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the play *The Tempest* (1611) by English poet and playwright William Shakespeare (1564–1616), addressing the 'strange stranger'. It will explore dark ecology, the implications of physical appearance, hospitality, as well as the deceitful nature of mimicry. Additionally, a potential psychological aspect of our relationship with the 'strange stranger' will be examined: Do Prospero and Miranda require Caliban's presence in order to be content? Caliban and Prospero will both explored as examples of the 'strange stranger". There will, however, only be a brief discussion of the character of Ariel, as I do not find him central to my overall argument.

The play was initially penned and performed in 1611and subsequently, published in The play was initially authored and performed in 1611, then published in 1623, alongside thirty-five other dramas, in what came to be known as the First Folio, under the title *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies; Published according to the True and Original Copies* (Charry, 2013: 26). Throughout the play's five acts, Shakespeare narrates the story of Prospero, the previous Duke of Milan, who was unjustly robbed of his position before the events of the narrative take place. After finding shelter, alongside his young daughter, Miranda, on a solitary island inhabited solely by the native Caliban and the spirit Ariel, Prospero struggles to regain his lost power and position, establishing dominion over the island's inhabitants in order to do so.

The play appears to adopt the structure of the Italian *commedia dell'arte,* which was a popular style in England during the creation of *The Tempest.* Usually set on a lost island, this type of performance tended to include a fool and his accomplice, found in Stephano and Trinculo, and a lustful and deformed character, similar to Caliban. Additionally, there was often a lovely young woman and her scheming father, capable of magic, reflected in the characters of Miranda and Prospero (Vaughan, 1999: 12).

Despite its many otherworldly aspects, the inspiration behind the play is traditionally associated with reports of dramatic shipwrecks as well as the efforts made to colonise foreign nations. Shakespearean scholar Edmond Malone (1741–1812) maintained that the narrative of

The Tempest was significantly affected by stories of European settlers' ongoing struggles with the realities of 'The New World'. Furthermore, reports of the wreck of the sailing ship *Sea Venture* on the coast of Bermuda in 1609 and the ultimate transformation of the islands into a British colony are supposed to have influenced the text (Lindley 2007, 30-32; Forbes). Based on these observations, the text will argue for a reading of Caliban not as an aquatic sub-creature but as a man of colour, whose presence proves to be both unexpected and uncanny

The darkness of Caliban

What basis, then, is there for audiences to consider Caliban a man of colour and not merely a misshapen sea monster, as indicated by previous examinations of *The Tempest?* The background of his mother Sycorax, being an inhabitant of the African country Algiers, prior to her banishment, creates a clear indication of Caliban's heritage. This, of course, is a second-hand reference, believed by Ariel and communicated to Prospero without any definite proof. Dutch scholar Albert Kluyver (1888–1956) suggested that the character's name was derived from Romani language, which had spread across England for a century before the creation of *The Tempest.* Kluyver explained that the word 'Cauliban' translated into English as 'black' or objects linked with blackness. Thus, when Prospero refers to Caliban in derogatory terms such as 'earth', 'mud', and 'dirt', he may not have necessarily been commenting on the character's state of dress or his supposed immoral behaviour but rather addressing his actual skin colour (Vaughan, 1993: 33–34, 51).

Based on this, a significant number of academic texts argue for Caliban's existence as an 'other' in the narrative as opposed to a 'strange stranger'. These literary explorations tend to be informed by postcolonial theory, addressing British imperialism, and argue for reading *The Tempest* as an allegory for the consequent colonialism. Through these interpretations, Caliban emerges as part of a binary, defined as a lesser racial segment by the supposedly superior Caucasian colonialist:

> [F]or the colonist, the Negro was neither an Angolan nor a Nigerian, for he simply spoke of 'the Negro'. For colonialism, this vast continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals – in short, the Negro's country (Fanon 1994, 38).

This perspective regarded the subjugation and even the potential extinction of all coloured races to be natural, a part of the evolutionary betterment of humankind.

Still, the threat posed by Caliban within the play is found to be associated with the uncanny unknown rather than being a matter of the character belonging to a specific, displeasing ethnicity, as the nature of his racial heritage remains ambiguous to the other characters throughout the play. As shall be demonstrated at a later point in this chapter, neither the wizard Prospero nor the later arrivals to the island are able to devise a decisive classification for his person. If this were not the case, the danger Caliban posed would be easily neutralised, his background and motivations quickly deciphered and thus easy to anticipate. In any case, this is a preposterous and fortunately outdated notion. Timothy Morton cautions that no such thing as a biological race exists beyond a racist creation – something that never provides an accurate reflection of reality (Morton 2012, 69).

By choosing to adhere to the theory that Caliban is indeed a human being, one might observe a small spark of recognition in Prospero's part concerning Caliban, enhancing the horror associated with the broader unidentifiable aspect of him, for the 'strange stranger' proves mystifying in that he, she, or it appears both strange and familiar. Indeed, 'their familiarity is strange, and their strangeness is familiar' (Morton, 2010: 277):

> Even if biology knew all the species on Earth, we would still encounter them as strange strangers, because of the inner logic of knowledge. The more you know about something, the stranger it grows […] The more we know about life forms, the more we recognise our connection with them and the stranger they become (Morton 2010, 17).

Echoing the relationship between Frankenstein and his creation, part of the threat posed by Caliban is possibly the dread of the utterly unfamiliar blended with recognisable aspects:

> [Y]ou come across this being who looks exactly like you […] So you have this paranoia—the default condition of being conscious […] So, when I meet this kind of stranger, I'm reminded of myself and that throws me into an uncanny loop […] I can't check in advance who these guys are. I just have to allow them to exist, which means that in the end, one of the people that I have to allow to exist is me (Morton 2013, *The Brooklyn Rail*).

Thus, Prospero is, perhaps, subconsciously fearing that he might be perceived in the same manner by someone else.

A strange creature

The first act of the play opens several years after Prospero and Miranda first took shelter on the island. During this time, as Prospero managed to secure the role of master of their new home, father and daughter encountered an inhabitant of the island, the being Caliban. An interpretation of Caliban's nature is relayed before the character is even introduced, before he himself has the chance to do so, as Prospero announces the circumstances of the character's birth:

> This damned witch Sycorax,
> For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible
> To enter human hearing, from Algiers
> Thou know'st was banished
> […]
> This blue-eyed hag was hither brought with child,
> And here was left by th' sailors.
> […]
> the son that she did litter here,
> A freckled whelp, hag-born -- not honour'd with
> A human shape (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2. 263-284).

In labelling his mother a witch and referring to him as something without a human form, Prospero remains unable to articulate precisely what type of a creature Caliban is. There exists no context through which they can discover Caliban's mother, Sycorax, who is long deceased. Any references to his father ('the devil himself' [Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.320]) are dubious at best, and no other party is able to offer any new information on the subject.

Likewise, audiences themselves are never provided with an exact description of Caliban's appearance or details regarding his background. Caliban himself further strengthens this image by announcing his separation from other creatures inhabiting the island, referring to himself as his 'own king' (Shakespeare 2007, 1.1.343; Butler, 2016; Lupton, 2000: 2). This could suggest that Caliban, as a person of colour, represents something unfathomable in the eyes of the European Prospero, the latter having likely never encountered or heard of someone of his background (Vaughan 1993, 10).

   Besides the interactions with Prospero and his daughter, Caliban's status as a 'strange stranger' is strengthened by the reactions of other characters upon meeting him. 'What have we here – a man, or a fish?' Trinculo questions. 'Dead or alive?' (Shakespeare 2007, 2.2.23–24). As the jester inspects Caliban further, he continually switches between various possibilities, attempting to classify Caliban as either a 'man', a 'fish', a 'poor-john', or a 'monster' (Shakespeare 2007, 2.2.23–28; Seth 2017, 108). His first reaction is not that

Caliban belongs to a particularly inferior ethnicity or even that he is monstrous. Instead, he experiences an apparent difficulty in classifying the character and lists several possible identities without ultimately being able to apply any of them to Caliban.

Refusing even to attempt to identify him, Alonso takes this observation even further and merely declares that Caliban is 'as strange a thing as e'er I looked on' (Shakespeare 2007, 5.1.287). Although Trinculo (and possibly Prospero before him) thoroughly scrutinised Caliban's form to create a frame of reference through which to identify him, the former must first strive to establish a closer connection with such 'strange bedfellows' (Shakespeare 2007, 2.2.35; Seth 2017, 109).

Considered 'the most elusive of Shakespeare's creations', the amorphous aspect of Caliban's nature has generated a long-standing predicament in terms of both dramaturgical and analytical explorations of *The Tempest*. Being unable to determine the kind of creature they were examining, critics have questioned whether the character might be an entirely fantastical creation taken purely from Shakespeare's imagination rather than being based in reality (Wilson 2018, 146 and 172).

The state of humanity

Arguably, the indeterminacy associated with Caliban is also apparent within another character: Ariel. Ariel's sex, physicality, birth, and lineage all elude specification within *The Tempest*:

> It should come as no surprise, then, that Caliban […] has received so much more critical attention than his […] counterpart. Ariel seems too flimsy and whimsical to grasp and hold up to the light of critical examination (Reynolds and Thompson 2003, 191).

By virtue of this, Ariel should logically be regarded as a 'strange stranger' but is somehow never perceived in this manner by either of the protagonists. It is possible that Prospero might have previously read about beings such as Ariel, leaving him knowledgeable about them, but this is never once mentioned in the narrative. Instead, it appears that Ariel is thoroughly identified by his (forced) servitude to Prospero and his subsequent desire to earn his freedom, with any factor outside this seemingly irrelevant.

As his mother, Sycorax passed away before the beginning of the narrative; it is impossible to ascertain her nature fully. The protagonists perceive Caliban as fundamentally different from themselves, in both appearance and conduct, and are unable to acknowledge

the possibility of him being one of them. Thus, the role of the 'strange stranger' solely befalls Caliban. Similar to Frankenstein's creature, through workings beyond his control, Caliban is left to be the only one of his kind. Like the former's ire towards Frankenstein, he also comes to resent Prospero and Miranda for their cruel treatment of him.

Nevertheless, Caliban's strangeness is temporarily negated as Miranda, upon first laying eyes on Ferdinand, proclaims that the young prince is the third *man* she has ever seen:

> This
> Is the third man that e'er I saw; the first
> That e'er I sighed for. Pity move my father
> To be inclined my way (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2. 443-446).

As it has been determined that Miranda has no memory of her life in Naples, Caliban and her father must be the two men she is referring to.

Regardless, this indirect claim on Caliban's behalf is soon negated, for, in the third act, Miranda effectively retracts her previous statement, informing Ferdinand that he and her father are the only two men she has ever seen. This suggests, perhaps, that Miranda's previous comment regarding Caliban was simply about being him *male*. In contrast to her suitor, Caliban appears as something horrible and undefinable and thus is not worthy of affection (Vaughn 1993, 11):

> Abhorrèd slave,
> Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
> Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known. But thy vile race --
> Though thou didst learn -- had that in 't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
> Deservedly confined into this rock,
> Who hadst deserved more than a prison (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.351-362).[1]

Miranda explicitly states that Caliban's miserable fate is entirely due to his nature, which prevented him from appreciating their charitable efforts to better him.

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[1] This speech is often attributed to Prospero, but my edition of *The Tempest* presents it as spoken by Miranda.

For all that both Prospero and Miranda demonstrate a general distaste for Caliban, the primary source of his current enslavement seems to be from a singular event. The reason given for Prospero's change of conduct, after an initial period of attempting to educate his new acquaintance alongside his daughter, is Caliban's supposed attempted rape of Miranda. The audience, of course, never witness this event and are only ever given Prospero's account of its occurrence:

> Thou most lying slave,
> Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us'd thee,
> Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodg'd thee
> In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
> The honour of my child (Shakespeare 2007, 1. 2. 345-349).

Caliban, when prompted about the event, does not state that he sought to force, hurt or even dominate Miranda, but notes that the fact that he regrets that they were interrupted, as he wished to populate the island with 'little Calibans' (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.351). Does this immediately suggest rape? Or was his intention imbibed in a tender moment with the woman he cared for, hoping that she would reciprocate his romantic feelings? As Miranda herself never explicitly mentions the incident, the truth is difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, while an unidentifiable alien creature might easily be associated with sexual depravity (and a great many other sins), once one chooses to view the character of Caliban as a man, this assumption ceases to be quite so obvious.

Whilst not discernibly marking his skin, as in the case of Frankenstein's creation, Caliban still carries with him distinct traces of his history, cementing his link to a larger collective, despite his status as a 'strange stranger'. 'Strange strangers' as a segment are arguably singular, not belonging to any specific species, race, or category. Nevertheless, they cannot be considered independent beings and function instead as amalgamations of other such peculiar strangers, all of whom partake in defining their biological structure, their brain patterns, and even their cellular makeup. In this sense, they are unique, 'greater than the sum of [their] parts' (Morton 2010, 277).

A question of form

Rather than ever question the validity of his approach, Prospero concludes that his efforts to educate Caliban in the manner of the civilised westerner have failed not due to any failings on

his own part, but because Caliban's status makes him unsuited to the pursuit of human
virtues:

> A devil, born devil, on whose nature
> Nature can never stick; on whom my pains
> Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
> And, as with age his body uglier grows,
> So his mind cankers (Shakespeare 2007, 4.1.188-192).

Likewise, her upbringing by Prospero causes Miranda to adhere to this particular conviction,
believing that a person's appearance must indeed mirror their inner self. Unlike
Shakespearean figures such as Falstaff and Richard III, whose bodily anomalies were
associated with disability and sickness Caliban's supposed physical divergence is instead
linked to the cultural structure of corporeal aesthetics (Wilson 2008, 148). This is indicated as
the reason Miranda falls in love with Ferdinand, convinced that his handsome features must
be a reflection of his beautiful soul, initially believing him to be a divine spirit:

> What is't? A spirit?
> Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,
> It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.
> […]
> There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple.
> If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
> Good things will strive to dwell with 't (Shakespeare 2007, 1. 2. 408-410 and
> 456-458).

This perception of Miranda's persists throughout the play. In the final act
of *The Tempest*, upon seeing the other survivors of the shipwreck, she is quite delighted:

> O wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world
> That has such people in 't (Shakespeare 2007, 5.1.181-184).

She assumes them all to be noble men and regards humanity to be entirely pure and kind due
to their aesthetically pleasing appearance. Still, Miranda is not alone in these assessments; the
same naïve view is also demonstrated by Ferdinand, as he, in turn, gazes upon her:

> Admired Miranda,
> Indeed the top of admiration, worth

> What's dearest to the world.
> […]
> O you
> So perfect and so peerless, are created
> Of every creature's best (Shakespeare 2007, 3.1.38-49).

The young prince considers her to be a perfect being due to apparently nothing more than her exceptionally appealing appearance. This perspective is thus revealed as a potential 'human' characteristic rather than one attributed solely to Miranda due to her sheltered upbringing.

An examination of Prospero

Nonetheless, if Caliban is to be so readily examined, one must also take into consideration the nature of Prospero. Previous to the emergence of eco critique and post-colonialism, Anglo-American audiences tended to consider *The Tempest* a metaphor regarding creation. In such a reading of the play, Prospero was viewed as an omnipotent, benign father figure and faultless creator, guiding the narrative by the aid of his magic. This view seems to be an oversimplification of both Shakespeare's protagonist as well as the overall text. Beginning with the first scene's false storm, Prospero continues to exploit, manipulate, and abuse other characters according to his wishes throughout the play (Singh 2016).

Overall, Prospero's actions are surprisingly reminiscent of those reportedly attributed to Sycorax. Since after arriving on the island with his child, he, through his magic, forces servitude on both Ariel and Caliban, in order to secure his own goals, threatening them with physical torture should they fail to do his bidding:

> Fetch us in fuel; and be quick, thou'rt best,
> To answer other business. Shrug'st thouh, malice?
> If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly
> What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,
> Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar
> That beasts shall tremble at thy din (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.365-371).

Jacques Derrida indirectly touches upon the meeting between Prospero and Caliban in the book *Acts of Religion* (2002). Here, he introduces two variants of social reception, namely, conditional and unconditional hospitality. The first type of hospitality will be discussed here, in relation to Prospero, while the second will be explored later in the text in relation to Caliban.

Conditional hospitality demands that any newcomer is in some legal manner deserving of the hospitality he or she receives. Likewise, the hospitality given is defined based on the terms of the person providing it and not the person seeking it. This is presented through specific qualifications such as identity and origin. This idea suggests that hospitality is not awarded to someone completely unknown, as those offering hospitality accommodation might be unable to anticipate how the receiver will behave (Rafn 2013; O'Gorman 2006, 52).

Within the new structure of power created by Prospero, Caliban – a symbol of the threatening unknown– is certainly not welcome. The island's original ruler is thus labelled as what Derrida refers to as a parasite, a being whose very presence is considered illicit and liable for banishment. Should a newcomer not have the preconceived rights to hospitality, they will indeed be marked as such. Without the benefit of hospitality, these beings, who would otherwise be guests, are reduced to something illegitimate, prone to punishment in the form of banishment (Derrida 2000, 59).

Furthermore, as much as Prospero laments how his brother cheated him out of power and position in his native Milan, his interaction with Caliban when it comes to hospitality, proves that the former Duke is actually guilty of the same crime. Relying on magic and his own cunning, he effectively usurps the ownership of the island he and his daughter are shipwrecked on from its native inhabitant, Caliban. Although he is naturally fearful of his master's magic, Caliban nevertheless acknowledges his claim to the island through his mother, the witch Sycorax:

> This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou tak' st from me. When thou cam' st first
> Thou strok 'st me and mad' st much of me; wouldst give me
> Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
> That burn by day and night
> […]
> Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o' th' island (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.332-345).

Caliban expresses his resentment towards Prospero for denying him his birthright, believing that Prospero has been deceitful and only pretended to care for him in order to steal the island from him with the aid of magic once he realised its potential:

> I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that
> by his cunning hath cheated me of the island.
> […]
> I say by sorcery he got this isle;
> From me he got it (Shakespeare 2007, 3.2.37-47).

Thus, although he realises that he would remain under the control of another master, Caliban rejoices the prospect of escaping Prospero's rule:

> Ban, ban, Ca-caliban
> Has a new master -- get a new man.
> Freedom, high-day, high-day freedom, freedom, high-day, freedom!
> (Shakespeare 2007, 2.2.160-162).

In the end, the magician's cruelty overshadows the prospect of re-entering servitude.

Eco-critic Jonathan Bate (1958 –) maintains that Prospero's motive is one of enlightenment and humanity, as he seeks to liberate the native inhabitants of the island by providing them with insight into themselves. Bate further argues that Prospero's approach unintentionally results in his misuse of those around him (Bate 2000, 77–78).

I am inclined to disagree with this conclusion. I find that Prospero's motives do not present any relation to the liberation or well-being of anyone but himself. His exploitation of his surroundings is not an unfortunate occurrence and was by no means initially intended to serve Ariel and Caliban, as Bate suggests. Instead, it is the result of a calculated move on Prospero's part to ensure that they do his bidding; the entirety of *The Tempest*'s plot is a scheme by the mage to have his wishes fulfilled.

The effort to portray Caliban as an alien being whose nature appears to be incomprehensible ultimately proves counterproductive, as the play reveals the 'strange strangers' to be as complicated as any human character, capable of fear, anger, and sorrow. Prospero, however, bound by destructive social and cultural systems and continuing to be fuelled only by a need for position, power, and racial supremacy, is the one presented as truly limited.

Fortunately, the tradition of awarding a nearly divine dimension to Prospero's character started to diminish due to the growing importance of Caliban's character in the aftermath of the decolonisation process of the 1960s and 70s. Postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* opposed the play's original interpretation that sought to draw a line between nature and art, allowing Prospero alone to incorporate the values of culture, kindness, and intellect. Thus, as the populations of Africans and the Caribbean recognised the nationwide liberation movement

of the late 50s, they began to reinterpret Shakespeare's text, championing Caliban's right to autonomy as well as to the island he inhabits (Singh, 2016).

A change of perspective

Unfortunately, the narrative primarily belongs to Prospero, more so than Caliban, highlighting the wizard's views and interpretations of events. As such, Caliban is never permitted to transcend his position as an alien oddity. This traditional interpretation of *The Tempest proves* quite restrictive, because:

> The strange stranger isn't just a blank at the end of a long list of life forms we know (aardvarks, beetles, chameleons…the strange stranger). The strange stranger lives within (and without) each and every being (Morton 2010, 17).

Contrary to what characters such as Victor Frankenstein and Prospero would perhaps like to believe, everyone has the potential to be a 'strange stranger' to someone else. This living network that is the 'mesh' is not an existing structure into which the 'strange stranger' suddenly arrives but rather an ecosystem that is entirely comprised of such beings. 'Since we cannot know in advance what the effects of the system will be', Morton explains, 'all life forms are theorizable as strange strangers' (Morton, 2010: 268).

Still, as demonstrated, this coexistence often results in disconnect and discord, as opposed to harmony. Though, given the all-encompassing nature of the 'mesh', it is entirely logical to argue that to *Caliban*, Prospero might likewise constitute a 'strange stranger' (Morton 2010, 46-47).

Caliban's overall experiences with the 'strange stranger' prove somewhat different from those of Prospero. The former experiences a sudden encounter with alien beings, having a different appearance and holding beliefs and cultural practices he could never have fathomed. Additionally, it quickly becomes apparent that his belief system is juxtaposed with those of the newcomers. These factors appear irrelevant to Caliban, as he happily introduces two strangers to the wonders of the island, perfectly content to share the delights and secrets of his home with them, unable to recognise the underlying convictions of the former Duke:

> I loved thee
> And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile --
> Cursed be I that did so! All the charms

> Of Sycorax -- toads, beetles, bats -- light on you!
> (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.337-341).

In the end, his motivation becomes similar to that of Prospero as he wishes to regain what he unjustly lost due to the betrayal of someone he trusted. Nevertheless, his initial reaction is akin to what Derrida describes as unlimited hospitality.

The counterpart to limited hospitality, this concept appears in the form of a seemingly utopian approach that does not scrutinise or even question the identity of newcomers. This entails a sense of absolute openness, ignoring external factors such as legality and duty. Any new arrivals are given unlimited access to all that can be offered, no matter how small or how extravagant, including oneself. The provider, however, expects nothing in return (Derrida 2000, 77).

Caliban's welcome of Prospero and Miranda appears to be the ideal conduct upon encountering a new presence. Still, as Caliban comes to experience it, the prospect of unconditional hospitality is not a feasible construct:

> The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality
> by right, with law or justice as rights […] This unconditional law of
> hospitality, if such a thing is thinkable, would then be a law without
> imperative, without order and without duty. A law without law, in short
> (Derrida 2000, 25 and 83).

This type of interaction will lead to ruin for the party that so graciously (or naively) offered unconditional hospitality. The consequence of this approach is the loss of personal space, home and nation – something to which one has no choice to but agree. Although Derrida describes this sacrifice as intolerable, he maintains that it is unavoidable if pure hospitality is to be pursued (Derrida 1999, 71).

Thus, it would ironically appear that it is Caliban's openness and regards towards Prospero and Miranda that ultimately drives a wedge between himself and his new companions. Regardless of Derrida's persuasions, this constitutes an unwise method of greeting the 'strange stranger'. Had Caliban instead practised an intermediate between the two versions of hospitality, opting for a polite, yet conservative approach, his misfortune could have been averted. However, it also merits consideration that having led a solitary existence prior to his initial encounter with Prospero, this possibility would likely not have occurred to him. The concept of private property based on moral and societal standards pertaining to physical intimacy and gender would be entirely foreign to his character. Likewise, the notion

of his actions robbing someone else of their honour would never occur to him in the manner it does to Prospero. Thus, he is left entirely unaware of the damning consequences awaiting him at the hands of the 'strange stranger' (Chaudhury, 2009: xxxviii).

The not-quite-so-strange Miranda

Despite her status as his daughter, Miranda is not portrayed as Prospero's equal but rather someone beneath him on a constructed cultural and social hierarchy. The second scene of the first act illustrates just this. It portrays a meeting between Prospero, Miranda, and Prince Ferdinand. Upon encountering the new arrival, Prospero immediately puts into motion a charade with the aid of his magic, where Ferdinand is threatened and humiliated while Miranda looks on. Finally speaking out of fear for the young prince, Miranda begs her father to spare him:

> O dear father,
> Make not too rash a trial of him, for
> He's gentle, and not fearful (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.465–467).

Her father's reply is harsh:

> What, I say,
> My foot my tutor?
> […]
> Silence! One word more
> Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What,
> An advocate for an imposter? Hush! (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.467–476).

Despite the fact that it is part of a larger scheme to unite Miranda and Ferdinand, Prospero's comment nevertheless reveals a sad truth regarding his relationship with his daughter. Miranda is the 'foot' of the operation, while her father functions as its 'head', and the thought of Miranda advising him is preposterous to Prospero. Though Prospero undoubtedly loves her, his daughter is never offered the opportunity to share her father's magical skills; she is instead lied to and manipulated by him. She is expected to follow his directions rather than voice any opinion of her own (Leininger 2013, 224-225). Similar to the manner in which he treats Caliban, she is first and foremost a vehicle to ensure the execution of his plans. Like Ariel and Caliban, Miranda is Prospero's property, his 'rich gift' (Shakespeare 2007, 4.1.8).

Still, belonging to the same ethnic background and being his offspring, Miranda's actions, beliefs, and origins are all easily deciphered by her father. This intimate understanding of his daughter allows Prospero the ability to manipulate her emotionally skilfully. This constitutes a radically different approach to the one the wizard takes with Caliban, as the latter's inherent threat as a 'strange stranger' lies in the fact that the wizard cannot fully comprehend him.

Dark Ecology

In the book *Dark Ecology* (2016), Morton furthers his theories regarding the 'mesh'. He argues that non-human segments form an integral part of human existence, beyond merely physical and social aspects, informing the basis of our reflections and reasoning. This type of ecological awareness brings with it a rather bleak outlook, forcing humanity to perceive the world in its current state, regardless of how confusing or horrifying this might be. This line of thought does not seek a modest reassessment of current human civilisation but instead demands a fundamental review of our way of life. It desires human beings to find value in all manner of life, explaining that biological diversity is inherently beneficial.

Through the notion of ecognosis, Dark Ecology creates what is, perhaps, an ideal meeting between the 'self' and that which we find to be 'strange strangers'. Ecognosis entails growing familiar with what is decidedly strange while also accepting that this strangeness will never cease. Its innate balance defines this breed of ecology, namely, its ability to hold both negative and positive facets (Daw 2018, 22).

Consequently, Prospero's conduct with regard to Caliban stands in stark opposition to the very goal of Dark Ecology, as he refuses to acknowledge the potential of a world beyond his limited vision. His behaviour is instead reminiscent of humanity's continued misuse of the natural world (Morton 2015; Morton 2016, 159; Dutta 2014, 102–103).

Furthermore, despite Prospero's claim to his temporary refuge, Caliban, as a native to the island, is connected to its nature in a way that Prospero and Miranda are not. Prospero relies on magic to secure his goals and Miranda, in turn, depends on her father. Conversely, Caliban can interpret the nature of the island intuitively and is aware of all that it has to offer:

> Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,

> That if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open, and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me
> […]
> I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
> And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts,
> Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
> To snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee
> To clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee
> Young scamels from the rock (Shakespeare 2007, 3.2.127-134 and 2.2.144-149).

The primitive habitat, which serves as nothing more than a barely adequate temporary shelter to father and daughter, means everything to Caliban. This perception regarding their surroundings is not limited to father and daughter alone. Instead, it is eventually shared by their fellow Europeans, exemplified by the experiences of the character Alonso on the island:

> O, it is monstrous: monstrous
> Methought the billows spoke and told me of it,
> The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,
> That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced
> The name of Prosper
> (Shakespeare 2007, 3.3.95-99).

Fearing nature as it invades his sense, Alonso finds the natural phenomena created by Ariel to be monstrous. Thus, Caliban's inherent connection with the place of his birth also denies him the community of his fellow human beings.

Futile attempts at sameness

Essentially only permitted to express himself on Prospero's terms, Caliban's character is symbolically rendered mute. Consequently, Caliban mocks Prospero and Miranda's attempts at educating him, seeing no value in it: 'You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse', he rages. 'The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!' (Shakespeare, 2007: 1.2.363-365). Caliban, as a 'strange stranger', is robbed of the fundamental right to declare his person, leaving readers and audiences with only the subjective observations of Prospero:

> To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the
> morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture,

> to support the weight of a civilisation […] A man who has a language
> consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language
> (Fanon 2008, 8-9).

Caliban's version of events is never allowed to come to light, as Prospero's view proves more beneficial to the former Duke's immediate survival and comfort:

> **MIRANDA**   'Tis a villain, sir,
> I do not love to look on.
>
> **PROSPERO**   But as 'tis,
> We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,
> Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
> That profit us. What ho! Slave! Caliban!
> (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2. 310-315).

Miranda, likewise, rationalises the reduction of Caliban to a state of servitude. She insists that both she and her father attempted to educate and civilise him, but since he betrayed them, Caliban deserves no better (Singh, 2016).

If presented with the opportunity, would Prospero honestly wish to be informed of an alternative mode of coexistence with the island's native inhabitants – one that is based on understanding and mutual respect? It is likely that the answer would be in the negative. This is related to the fact that, despite their apparent fear and disgust at his alien presence, Prospero requires Caliban's presence to maintain their happiness and mental well-being.

The situation between Caliban and his master is partly reminiscent of the concept of mimicry. Caliban is made to take part in a practice, wherein Prospero, through his authority, seeks to better him through example, requiring him to mimic the ways of his master in the hopes of being accepted. This approach chooses to remove the threat posed by the indefinable 'strange stranger' through domestication rather than physical eradication. Despite this, mimicry is a decidedly deceptive and destructive process, assuring subjects of their eventual acceptance, despite resulting in the opposite outcome, in order to preserve the status quo of the authoritarian party.

A different outcome would endanger the current power structure, robbing the wizard and, to a lesser extent, his daughter of a sense of mental well-being. Our psychological sense of self-preservation requires that we regard ourselves as 'normal'. There can be no such standard of comfortable and reassuring normalcy if there is no counterpoint in the form of the

'strange stranger'. Thus, Prospero is caught between the conflicting domains of the dissatisfactory real world and a utopic dream (Bhabha 2008, xxxiii).

In the book *Hyperobjects* (2013), Morton elaborates on this subject. 'Not only do [we] fail to access [strange strangers] at a distance,' he explains, 'but it also becomes clearer with every passing day that 'distance' is only a psychic and ideological construct designed to protect [us] from the nearest of things'. This 'distance', being truly tangible, is simply a 'defence mechanism against a threatening proximity' (Morton 2013, 27–28).

Conclusion

While it remains quaint and obedient, or silent and easy to overlook, the 'strange stranger' poses a few problems. The moment it confronts us, however, whether directly or indirectly, requiring something of us – worst of all, forcing us to face our less-than-ideal qualities – it becomes a negative issue. We are currently not in a position to foresee the nature of the 'strange stranger', to know exactly 'who' or 'what' they (and occasionally, we) are. The ecological thought seeks an interconnectedness, wishing to generate neither blind adoration nor immediate rejection, but a genuine and profound intellectual openness. This desire means accepting the gap between 'us' and 'them' and creating a foundation of empathy and equality. Equality entails harmony, which, in turn, involves beneficial meetings between all those who exist within the 'mesh' (Morton, 2010: 46, 80).

Overall, Prospero and his daughter experience an ambivalent motivation, suffering discouragement in their inability to neutralise the threat posed by Caliban's strangeness but also contentment due to having contained the character through the aid of magic. While the supernatural abilities and ambition of Prospero are, to some extent, admirable, his overall agenda, which influences his use of these qualities, limits any opportunity for greater cultural and social awareness. Despite his ultimate realisation of his goals and attainment of supernatural skills and knowledge, the initial belief system held by Prospero, based on an unrealistic view of nature, remains. In the end, Shakespeare's protagonist comes to no new insights regarding either himself or Caliban during the play.

Unlike Shelley, Shakespeare appears to consider the 'strange stranger' in a purely negative light. Whereas Shelley imagines the 'strange stranger' to be an integral part of a journey towards a larger truth, Shakespeare believes it to be a culmination of uncomfortable and dangerous uncertainties. Here, the aesthetic element discussed in the previous chapter once again appears relevant. In the cases of Miranda, Ferdinand, and Caliban, physical appearance is foregrounded as indicative of inner qualities. The beauty of Miranda and

Ferdinand suggests their noble and virtuous qualities, while Caliban's convoluted physical presence mirrors a corrupted interior. Throughout *The Tempest*, Caliban's appearance is continually liked to various grotesque animalities, with observers being unable to determine what unsavoury creature his mystifying biology favours. Ultimately, the dramatist emphasises the strangely uncanny nature of the character as a legitimate reason to loathe, fear, and enslave him, imagining him as incorporating a multitude of possible threats.

Regardless of Shakespeare's intentions, by emphasising the category-defying characteristics of the character, the narrative has come to urge its audiences to critically consider not only the division between the human and the non-human but also the ideology surrounding categories that we cannot comprehend (Butler 2016).

As a reader, one ultimately comes to realise that what makes Caliban genuinely threatening to his masters is not only his innate strangeness and his obvious contrast to Prospero and Miranda, but also his likeness to them. Even if he were a mutated, amphibious creature, there is no denying the fact that his displays of humanity through both his eloquent speech and emotions. The idea that this displeasingly odd entity carries something human – something of them -- within him is most likely horrifying to Prospero (Morton 2010, 112).

Caliban himself experiences several remarkable transformations throughout *The Tempest*. He proceeds to grasp the language of his captors, engages in abstract thinking, and eventually forms his own choices. The culmination of this development comes in the form of the character's show of remorse in the play's final act. When Prospero grants Caliban forgiveness for his murderous plans as well as his previous loyalty to Stefano, Caliban replies that he will not repeat such lapses in judgement (McGrath 2013, 44–45).

Despite these significant developments, the character's journey proves unlike that of Victor Frankenstein or his creation, as it does not truly culminate in any new stature or insight but rather diminishes them, causing him to submit to the supposed wisdom and benevolence of Prospero and accept Prospero's view concerning his inherent strangeness:

> **PROSPERO** He is as disproportion'd in his manners
> As in his shape. Go, sirrah, to my cell;
> Take with you your companions; as you look
> To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.
>
> **CALIBAN** Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter
> And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
> Was I, to take this drunkard for a god
> And worship this dull fool! (Shakespeare 2007, 5.1.289-295).

Thus, the is reason to question this argument, as it appears doubtful that Caliban has indeed grown and learned anything of consequence, leaving himself unable to transcend the role of the 'strange stranger'.

Chapter 4
Uncanny strangers behind 'The Yellow Wallpaper'

Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) by American humanist and novelist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), by exploring its protagonist as a 'strange stranger'. This chapter will examine masculine aspects of 'Nature', the opposing animalistic and infantile characteristics associated with women. Does the relationship between the protagonist and her surroundings differ from the interactions of *Frankenstein* and *The Tempest*? Additionally, the idea of the 'strange stranger' as a metamorphosis, rather than an innate condition, will be addressed, emphasising the narrator's connection to the women behind the wallpaper.

'The Yellow Wallpaper' was initially published in the *New England Magazine*, followed by a publication in book form seven years later. Though incorporating autobiographical elements, the text was primarily read as a Gothic tale of horror and considered the best among Gilman's works of fiction (Kupier, 2011). Relayed through a series of ever more convoluted journal entries, the text itself chronicles a young woman's gradual descent into madness, due to her apparent onset of postpartum depression. Her only sense of escape comes through associating her plight with that of a woman she believes is trapped behind the titular wallpaper.

The narrative of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is influenced by Gilman's own experiences at the hands of American neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell (1829-1914). Mitchell prescribed Gilman a so-called 'rest-cure' (Gilman 1935, 96). Not primarily a means to ease psychological trauma, Mitchell's methods were instead intended to force the sufferer to adhere to defined social and cultural conventions through punishment. This was based on the argument that lack of progress resulted from patients' refusal to follow instructions, succumbing instead to their inherent destructive impulses. Mitchell believed that continued sensory deprivation and boredom would ultimately make patients less likely to refuse his instructions, finally allowing themselves to be cured. Despite Mitchell's strong convictions, his approach did little to genuinely contain the growing cases of mental illness (Little 2015, 23-24).

Stranger danger

'The Yellow Wallpaper' presents a narrative written in epistolary form, portraying the private journal entries of a young wife and mother as she battles both psychological and social forces. The story begins as the young woman is recuperating in a mansion rented by her husband for the summer. She is made to reside in an unpleasant former nursery decorated with the titular yellow wallpaper. The wallpaper itself carries significant negative implications regarding the identity of the protagonist, the latter immediately finding its presence abhorrent:

> The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.
> One of those sprawling, flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin. It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough constantly to irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions. The colour is repellent, almost revolting: a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.
> It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others. No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long (Gilman 1997, 3).

Though at first glance merely an unappealing piece of cloth, the wallpaper also comes to function as a representation of the limited sphere allotted the 'strange stranger' and the reluctance of the surroundings to let the strangers transcend it.

Miranda was raised from infancy by the wizard Prospero, who exerted full control over his daughter, rendering her essentially a vessel for his own wishes; however, the protagonist of Gilman's short story was not quite so unfortunate. The narrator, while not her husband's social equal, was most likely permitted to exist comfortably by his side as his wife. Be that as it may, it is indirectly made known that a development has occurred before the beginning of the narrative, through which the narrator has become the 'strange stranger'.

Through vague references to a baby, readers are able to infer that she is suffering from postpartum depression, an ailment which had yet to be accurately diagnosed during Gilman's lifetime. Hence, the narrator is no longer definable according to the existing convention. Despite her affliction being one linked exclusively to women, the basis for the protagonist's transformation into the 'strange stranger' is not one based on biological sex. The idea of gender arguably functions as a method of stabilising the necessarily ambiguous and broadly

diversified realm of sexuality. The 'strange stranger', however, fundamentally erodes the concept of gender binaries. Thus, her newfound strangeness lies not first and foremost in an unexplainable deviancy from established humanity, as was the case in the two previous chapters, but instead in a sudden deviation in thoughts and conduct, leaving her equally undefinable.

Unlike Caliban and Frankenstein's creature, men and women are also of the same species, raised alongside each other, and, unlike their relationship to the rest of nature, can communicate adequately with one another. Additionally, the protagonist and her husband are presumably of the same nationality and social background. Is it not, then, logical to assume that such closeness would provide understanding, mitigating the strange strangeness?

Unfortunately, these conditions do nothing to curb the onset of the 'strange stranger'; quite the opposite, Morton insists:

> This stranger isn't just strange. She, or he, or it-can we tell? how? -is Strangely strange. Their strangeness itself is strange. We can never absolutely figure them out. If we could, then we all would have is a ready-made box to put them in […] Their strangeness is part of who they are. After all, they might be us. And what could be stranger than what is familiar? (Morton 2010, 41).

The more familiar we are with someone, the stranger they grow. For, proximity itself does not breed familiarity, but gradually reveals strangeness (Morton 2010, 41). The short story characterises the protagonist more and more as alien to her surroundings, a being whose natural inclinations and actions are dangerous in their unpredictability.

This reality soon becomes apparent; the protagonist immediately loses her agency due to her new status:

> John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.
> […]
> And what can one do?
> If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to?
> My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.
> […]
> But what is one to do? (Gilman 1997, 1-2).

Against her wishes, she is confined to bed rest as part of her husband's plan for her recovery.

Nevertheless, despite her misgivings and own personal wishes, the narrator initially makes a conscious effort to suppress her emerging strangeness. As such, she describes her tendency of 'tak[ing] pains to control [her]self', containing her 'whim[s]' and discontent when conversing with family members. The only occasion in which she describes herself as succumbing to her growing inner turmoil is during an attempt to engage her husband in 'a real earnest reasonable talk' (Gilman 1997, 2, 4 and 7; Pinsent 2017, 57). This effort ultimately proves futile. 'Strange strangers' will always retain their strangeness despite our efforts; this is not something which can be forced away, no matter how great the desire to do so (Morton 2013, 124).

One should also note that the treatment received by the narrator from her family does not stem from the latter's ill will, but from misinformation. During the time of Gilman's diagnosis, the prevailing belief amongst medical professionals was that such suffering stemmed from an illness referred to as neurasthenia. Coined in 1869 by the American neurologist George Miller Beard (1839-1883), neurasthenia supposedly resulted from highly evolved brains engaging in overly taxing mental activities. The disease itself was thought to be the cause of multiple symptoms, such as depression, insomnia, anxiety, hysteria, and hallucinations, leaving the sufferers appearing both unreasonable and unpredictable (Stiles 2012).

'Masculine Nature'

The narrator's husband seeks refuge from this terrible unknown by immersing himself in what to him is a source of familiarity, namely what Morton labels 'Masculine Nature'. A source of logic and authority, 'Masculine Nature' is described through clear contrasts: it is outgoing, not introverted; it is virile, not subdued; it is healthy and robust, continually rejecting disability or weakness. Built on a framework of limited authoritarian perspective, 'Masculine Nature' perpetually favours certainty and fears the unknown and ambiguous (Morton 2010, 81-82).

As it were, the *mesh* is composed of precisely this, encompassing variables, uncertainties, and strangeness at every turn:

> The mesh is vast yet intimate: there is no here or there, so everything
> Is brought within our awareness. The more we analyse, the more ambiguous
> things become. We can't really know who is at the junctions of the

mesh before we meet them. Even when we meet them, they are liable
to change before our eyes, and our view of them is also labile (Morton 2010,
40).

Overall, 'Masculine Nature' is presented as a wholly unrealistic and arguably weak undertaking (Morton 2010, 16, 82 and 84). However, perhaps their efforts indicate an unconscious fear of their own potential strangeness. Because personhood always implies a sense of strange strangeness, all beings in some way compromised:

It has to do with doubt, confusion, and scepticism […] it has to do with delight, beauty, ugliness, disgust, irony, and pain. It has to do with consciousness and awareness. It has to do with ideology and critique [… it has to do with ideas of self and the weird paradoxes of subjectivity […] The strange stranger is involved in a shifting zone of aesthetic seeming and illusion (Morton 2010, 2 and 18).

The inherent peculiarity of 'strange strangers' may be what initially separates us, but potentially, it is also part of how we connect. Previous to entertaining the idea of mutual respect and recognition, there must first exist patience and openness (Morton 2010, 73, 80-81 and 85), a prospect that seems challenging, at best.

Thus, the horror evident in Gilman's short story is, not only a result of the mental decay of the protagonist, but also an indication of where the crippling fear of the unknown and undefinable might lead.

Little women

Upon the narrator being observed by her husband and family, her new strangeness becomes not only noticeable but also frightening in its uncertainty. The problem lies not primarily in that she is mentally unstable, but in that it causes her to elude definition. Seeking to remedy this, John attempts to exchange the disturbing reality of his indeterminable spouse for existing archetypes with which he is familiar. Thus, he becomes torn between forcing unrealistic animality and pathetic infantilism onto his wife, unable to define her as she actually presents. Though, since both classifications he attempts to apply are external constructs rather than fundamental aspects of the narrator's nature, John is ultimately unsuccessful in this endeavour.

The infantilism construct entails exchanging the potential threat of the unknown woman for that of an easily comprehended and controlled childlike figure. The initial page of the short story introduces this theme, with the protagonist announcing that her husband laughs at

her beliefs. She tries to reassure herself by claiming that this is to be expected in a marriage. This theme continues, even after the protagonist herself is sealed away. At one point, Gilman describes John caring for his wife as an imitation of a father putting his child to bed: 'dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed,' relates the narrator, 'and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head' (Gilman,1997, 7). As her family fears her thoughts, the opinions of the vocaliser are conveniently made invalid through this infantilisation:

> '[Y]ou really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know.'
> […]
> 'Better in body perhaps—' I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.
> 'My darling,' said he, 'I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?'
> So of course I said no more on that score (Gilman 1997, 8-9).

When she attempts to engage her husband in a serious conversation, expressing a wish to leave the confines of the house to visit relatives, her childlike state is similarly alluded to:

> I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with [John] the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.
> But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there (Gilman 1997, 7).

This is revealed to be a pattern. For, when the narrator wishes to continue her writing, the fear, not of something concrete, but of the unknown 'fancies' she might express, her husband censures her immediately:

> John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.
> I think sometimes that If I were only well enough to write a little it Would relieve the press of ideas and rest me (Gilman 1997, 4).

The same outcome occurs again when she seeks to escape the unpleasant room containing the yellow wallpaper. The protagonist attempts to persuade her husband to replace the yellow wallpaper, feeling it is worsening her condition. After initially considering the request, John asserts his dominance by refusing his wife's request. He claims that any altering of the wallpaper would only result in likewise having to change the 'heavy bedstead', the 'barred windows', as well as the 'gate at the head of the stairs' (Gilman 1997, 4), arguing that she is giving into immature and fanciful behaviour (Ghandeharion and Mazari 2016, 120-121). Having silenced his wife on the matter, John happily labels the protagonist 'a blessed little goose' and later a 'little girl' (Gilman 1997, 4 and 8).

Additionally, readers will note that unlike the other characters, the protagonist remains nameless through the majority of the story, being primarily associated with her illness rather than with any real form of individuality. Apart from a brief mention near the end of the story, it seems that only those who can be defined and understood can be awarded names and identities; 'strange strangers' cannot.

Aside from the unreliable observations of the protagonist, Gilman never grants her readers insight into the private thoughts of John or his sister. As a result, a genuine assessment of their character is challenging to produce. The depositing of the focalizer in the former nursery, by her husband – and by extension, her brother and sister-in-law – may not be an expression of resentment or cruelty, as the former comes to believe, but rather one of genuine concern. Despite their possible concern, one could argue that neither John nor any of the other characters surrounding her, ever truly address the protagonist herself, but rather it is the established non-threatening version of her they attempt to project.

The non-human woman

Continually voicing her concern that her health is not improving; John likewise continues to rebuff his wife's worries. 'Bless her little heart!' her husband exclaims, speaking to her as though she were his adolescent daughter rather than his adult wife. 'She shall be as sick as she pleases' (Gilman 1997, 9). Proceeding instead to mention the possible deterioration of her mental state, John chastises the protagonist so fiercely that she drops the subject entirely (Treichler 1984, 64). At this point, John simultaneously addresses both of types he attempts to transfer onto his wife: the helpless and childlike being and the wild, possible dangerous being.

Overall, the short story makes constant references to a frail, unstable and potentially dangerous female biology, which must be carefully managed, lest it causes the narrator to give in to destructive tendencies. These associations leave her connected to the more

unsavoury aspects of 'Nature'. It also allows those labelled as 'strange strangers' to sympathise with likewise subjugated beings, whether human or non-human, strengthening their ability to understand and rectify this conduct (Otto 2014, 17).

Gilman herself addresses the connection between the protagonist and the construct that is 'Nature'. The protagonist comes to note the lovely garden belonging to the house she and her husband are staying in, which initially appears to offer a moment of reprieve from an otherwise dreary situation:

> There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them […] Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees (Gilman 1997, 2 and 4).

Though traditionally considered both lovely and recreational, the idea of the garden also contains accounts of displacement and brutality. The space of the garden is the result of the manipulation of biological material to create aesthetic ideals, as well as the forcible removal of undesirable flora and fauna to preserve this ideal. The idea of the garden creates a series of potentially troublesome queries: does nature belong to humanity, or does humanity belong to nature? Is nature beyond human control and, thus, should it be feared? If so, does this apply to the protagonist as well? Overall, the garden and its unavoidable comparisons to the natural sphere beyond generates an uncomfortable realisation regarding the boundaries of human power and influence (Alexander 2013, 2-3 and 5).

This seems to be at least partially realised by the narrator herself. She finds that the garden provides an opportunity for freedom from her confinement and the disturbing yellow wallpaper. Yet, by observing 'hedges and walls and gates that lock' (Gilman 1997, 2), she seems to register on a subconscious level that the garden, like the attic room, is an area of restriction. Still, as long as she does not *consciously* perceive the difference between the human-made garden and the wild and authentic nature, the former continues to suggest the possibility of liberation (Schweninger 1996, 38).

Similar to the garden being viewed as an attempt to re-establish wild nature under cultural control (Schweninger 1996, 25 and 31), John's medical advice is designed to reshape his unidentifiable wife into a predictable version. Thus, the protagonist, like the garden, presents not as part of natural space, but as a carefully designed cultural one, part of the confining human-made element that is 'Nature'.

It has become clear that all which qualifies as 'Nature' is to exist at a safe distance, outside of the space considered purely human. However, as demonstrated by Gilman, 'Nature' functions not merely as an abstraction, but it is entwined with physical space in addition to psychological and communal structures (de Cisneros 2016).

In this case, to be regarded as 'Nature' means forfeiting individuality to prevent the looming threat of the unknown. Physically and socially restrained, the protagonist becomes void of individual significance (Plumwood 1993, 4). This careful separation of human life from that of the authentic natural world suggests what Morton considers a tragedy of 'Nature' (de Cisneros,2016).

A strange man

The protagonist strives to harmonise her obvious need for external stimuli and the weight of her family's demands. This struggle is illustrated through her declining relationship with her husband. Ironically, as her mental state further deteriorates, she begins to perceive her husband as a 'strange stranger' himself. Though initially respectful of his profession and confident in his good intentions, the narrator nevertheless expresses doubt regarding his judgement of her health:

> John is a physician, and *perhaps* -- I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) -- *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.
> You see, he does not believe I am sick! […] I take phosphates or phosphites — whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again.
> Personally, I disagree […] Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, could do me good.
> […]
> John does not know how much I really suffer (Gilman 1997, 1 and 3).

This uncertainty gradually develops to the point where she distrusts him, no longer able to determine his motives:

> John is so queer now that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room!
> […]
> I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me […] He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind. As if I couldn't see right through him! (Gilman 1997, 12-13).

The indeterminable strangeness which John perceives in his wife, she now likewise observes within him, leading her to develop a somewhat antagonistic attitude towards her husband. This development is reflected in how she references her husband, her words growing ably less intimate over time. Her initial 'dear John' goes on to become only 'John', followed by 'young man'. This culminates on the final page of the short story, where John finally emerges to the narrator as an unknown man, whose actions she does not understand: 'now why should that man have fainted?'(Gilman 1997, 7, 8-15; Pinsent 2017, 62).

Mirror images

The narrator's relationship with the wallpaper echoes the gradual progression of the narrator from compliance to rebellion. The cloth seemingly evolving as defiance within the narrator grows (Brooks 2017, 103). Notably, this development is made apparent through a change in language patterns. The narrator's initial journal entries portray clear markers: limited topics, characterised by exclamation marks, intensifiers, italics, and a recurrence of the phrase 'What is one to do?' (Gilman 1997, 1).

Additionally, her articulation appears submissive, as when she refrains from voicing her complaints regarding her room to her husband, noting that 'I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim' (Gilman 1997, 4). This approach is contrasted with entries near the culmination of the story. Announced by the statement 'Life is much more exciting now than it used to be' (10), the narrator begins expressing confidence and enthusiasm, and greater use of nominative-case pronouns. The protagonist herself depicts this process as something akin to healing physically, owing to the influence of the yellow wallpaper, seemingly neglecting that only recently she pleaded with her husband to allow her to escape it (Pinsent 2017, 58-59).

Her articulations also validate some of her family's concerns. The initial journal entry is made up of thirty-nine individual paragraphs, illustrating the protagonist's difficulty in continually focusing on one topic. This tendency is continued throughout the remaining narrative. Among the changes in the subject are eight occasions when the protagonist turns from considering her family or physical wellbeing to instead examining the yellow wallpaper. Although his medical conclusions are misconstrued, this indicates that John is possibly correct in the assumption that should the wallpaper be altered, his wife will likely go on to obsess over another object (Pinsent 2017, 58).

Her obsession becomes apparent as she continually traces the details of the paper, deciding that she 'will follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion' (Gilman 1997, 6). Eventually, this dedication leads her to observe a shape within the cloth:

> This wallpaper has a kind of subpattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in a certain light, and not clearly then. But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just so -- I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.' (Gilman 1997, 5-6).

This imagery, one might argue, functions as a reflection of the manner in which her surroundings perceive the narrator: a strange figure, threatening due to her indeterminacy.

This development also coincides with a sudden change in the sleeping routine of the narrator. Readers are introduced to an alteration in the pattern of the wallpaper that is dependent on the time of day. '[B]y daylight,' she reveals, 'there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.' Whereas during the night, 'in any kind of light, in twilight candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight […] the woman behind it as plain as can be' (Gilman 1997, 9-10). During the day, the wallpaper comes to represent a rejection of her family's authority. At night, however, through some remnant of their control is still evident, she is allowed an opportunity to express her otherwise negated strangeness. In the wake of this, the state of the protagonist becomes intimately linked to the time of day (Pinsent 2017, 60).

As her illness gradually progresses, so do the complexities and allure of the paper, to the point where the protagonist begins to perceive not just a solitary figure, but several women trapped within it:

> There are things in that paper which nobody knows but me, or ever will.
> Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.
> It is always the same shape, only very numerous.
> And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern.
> I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here! (Gilman 1997, 8).

The sight of these creeping women frightens her, not because she believes they intend to do her harm, but likely because, through them, she subconsciously begins to perceive her social circumstances.

Through its secret patterns, discernible only to the protagonist, the creeping women are revealed to be imprisoned by bars (Ghandeharion and Mazari 2016, 124). She observes that the inhabitants are able to escape the wallpaper momentarily, only for its pattern to strangle them, turning them upside down, making their eyes go white. The literal death of these women suggests the symbolic demise of the protagonist in her current predicament (Treichler 1984, 73).

While in daylight, the wallpaper appears 'tiresome and perplexing' (Gilman 1997, 11), during the nightly hours, the protagonist is able to observe a solitary woman, not merely trapped, but shaking the bars of the pattern, attempting to escape its hold:

> I didn't realise for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but ow I am quite sure it is a woman.
> By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still.
> […]
> The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!
> Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.
> Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.
> And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads. They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down, and makes their eyes white (Gilman 1997, 20 and 12).

Against the myriad of figures seeking to break free, one woman continues to stand out. Being frequently observed by the narrator, both inside and outside of the wallpaper. This woman's experiences appear to mirror those of the narrator:

> I think that a woman gets out in the daytime!
> And I'll tell you why—privately I've seen her!
> I can see her out of every one of my windows!
> It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight
> […]
> I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once (Gilman 1997, 12).

The narrator observes this woman finally (though temporarily) leave the confines of the bedroom, descending into the garden and beyond, as the protagonist herself so wish to do:

> I see her on that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden. I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines […] I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind (Gilman 1997, 12-13).

Through her actions, the protagonist comes to find that escape from the wallpaper, and by extension, her own domestic prison is indeed possible.

A change in character

This event reveals the protagonist's deepening connection to the women in the wallpaper, as the former acknowledges that she, too, creeps about in secret. The narrator is caught in a bind: One option is to give in to her deteriorating mental state and gain a sense of self-determination, unable to be silenced by those around her. Alternatively, she could reject this new and frightening reality in favour of the constricting, though secure ensnarement of domestic life (Brooks 2017, 102-103). The choice is made when the protagonist rejects the company of her sister-in-law for that of the woman behind the paper:

> John is to stay in town overnight, and won't be out until this evening.
> Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.
> That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight, and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.
> I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper (Gilman 1997, 13).

The protagonist finally determines that she is not merely an observer, but that she, too, originates from behind the shackles of the yellow wallpaper: 'there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?' (Gilman 1997, 14).

Upon finally severing her emotional connection to her husband and sister-in-law in this manner, effectively embracing her status as a 'strange stranger' rather than seeking to subdue it, the narrator proceeds to experience increased energy, as well as an improved mood (Pinsent 2017, 62):

> I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was. John is so pleased to see me improve. He

> laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of the wallpaper. I turned it off with a laugh. I had n intention of telling him it was because of the wallpaper [..] I am feeling ever so much better (Gilman 1997, 10-11).

Her new unity with the women in the wallpaper leaves her with a new sense of community to the desperately crawling figures. She is no longer solely observing the woman in the wallpaper but joining the figure in a mutual quest for freedom. She goes on not to envision herself not merely as one amongst the many women, but as having become one with this particular woman. Though she will not outwardly admit this for fear of others intervening:

> I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much. There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes (Gilman 1997, 13).

Through this merger, the protagonist is subconsciously attempting to overcome the conditions which have symbolically imprisoned her.

Her assimilation with the woman behind the paper is never openly stated, but instead conveyed syntactically through contrasting statements: 'This bedstead is fairly gnawed!' the protagonist declares, soon followed by the statement: 'I bit off a little piece [of the bedstead] at one corner'. Furthermore, the narrator declares that if the woman behind the wallpaper 'does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!', which likewise corresponds to the following sentence: 'But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope' (Gilman 1997, 14; Treichler 1984, 73).

Having found this new sense of unity and belonging, the protagonist finds she now prefers the confines of her bedroom to the garden outside:

> I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!
> It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!
> I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.
> For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.
> But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way (Gilman 1997, 14-15).

It is possible she now acknowledges the garden as an oppressive, artificial structure, similar to her own confinement.

Moreover, having recognised the creeping women as a part of herself, the protagonist claims control of her, rather than allow her husband and sister-in-law to find her. Though finally gaining a measure of autonomy as she reimagines herself as the woman behind the wallpaper, her new identity echoes aspects of her struggles and status as a 'strange stranger'. Both the animalistic and childlike states forced upon her are present in the movement she takes on; her continued crawling reminiscent of both infancy and animality.

Despite her deteriorating mindset, the protagonist nevertheless appears to retain a sense of concern for her surroundings. She seemingly does not believe her emancipation needs to come at the subjugation of her counterparts. In spite of her claims that John (and his sister) are responsible for her imprisonment, she appears not to hold them in contempt. Instead, she wishes to share her accomplishment with them, demonstrating to them her new autonomy through the capture of the woman in the paper:

> I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till
> John comes.
> I want to astonish him.
> I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman
> does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her! (Gilman 1997, 14).

Unfortunately, the unity and understanding the narrator had hoped for do not come to pass. John is instead left uncomprehending and consequently horrified at the recent development in his wife; she has become an embodiment of the 'strange stranger' in both mind *and* body:

> 'What is the matter?' he cried. 'For God's sake, what are you doing!'
> I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.
> 'I've got out at last,' said I, 'in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled
> off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!'
> Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my
> path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! (Gilman 1997, 15).

The man who previously held such sway over his wife is reduced to an unconscious body on the floor. The protagonist proceeds to creep over his prostrate form, symbolically moving beyond his desperation for definition (Ghandeharion and Mazari 2016, 124 and Treichler 1984, 67).

At this point, it is worth noting that there exists some disagreement regarding the identity of 'Jane' – whether it is the given name of the protagonist or it refers to her sister-in-law, being a shortened version of 'Jennie'. Given the developing identity of the protagonist, wherein she ultimately rejects her previous social role, in favour of joining with the woman from the wallpaper, I am inclined to support the former claim.

Conclusion

Attempting to transcend her restrictions, the narrator chooses to act on her impulses rather than the instructions of her husband. Unfortunately, this development further leaves her surroundings with no frame of reference through which to understand her. Overall, the circumstances of the 'strange stranger' take the form of a process, rather than an already existing fact. As Morton states, the potential for the 'strange stranger' is always *present,* but in this case, does not begin to assert itself until the protagonist's mental illness takes hold.

Within the context of 'The Yellow Wallpaper', the protagonist as the 'strange stranger' emerges as unrecognisable, unidentifiable, but is forced to be associated with both primal and infantile aspects to cover up this horrible unknown unsuccessfully. The notion of the animalistic is countered by the vision of a fragile creature, requiring assistance from her surroundings.

While Gilman's narrator, unlike Caliban or Frankenstein's creature, inhabits a place in human society, this does not allow her to evade the position of 'strange stranger. This fact, viewed in relation to the previous portrayal of Caliban, Prospero and Miranda, further supports Morton's claims regarding the universal role of the 'strange stranger'. Humanity is immersed in the *mesh* rather than existing beyond it.

Though, though suffering much of the same abuse, unlike Caliban and Frankenstein's creature, Gilman's narrator entertains none of their malicious intents or thoughts of retribution. Instead, she appears primarily driven by a desire for freedom, welcoming a coexistence with her husband and his peers. Only when no such outcome is apparent, her husband fainting in shock at the sight of her rather than delighting at her accomplishment, does she disregard him.

This reaction, of course, could be due to a lack of coherent, rational thought on the narrator's part, leaving her unable to entertain the complexities of such plans. Alternatively, perhaps, the reaction stems from the background shared by the protagonist and her husband, something which neither Caliban nor Frankenstein's monster ever truly experienced. Rather

than enabling a sense of sameness, the mutual background and physical proximity between husband and wife, sadly does not translate into a sense of unity and understanding.

Conveyed through a decidedly shorter narrative, Gilman's portrayal, similarly to that of Shelley, suggests that the 'strange stranger' is functioning as an integral part on the journey to a more authentic reality regarding our surroundings. She makes apparent that this requires a more in-depth understanding, as opposed to suppression. The narrative, however, through the actions of John and Jennie, emphasise that good intentions alone are not sufficient to accomplish this.

However, despite their central role, readers are never granted insight into the private thoughts of either John, his sister, or their brother-in-law, leaving only the subjective beliefs of the protagonist. This, in addition to the protagonist's ever-decaying mental capacity, raises the question of whether her observations – especially later ones – regarding their nature and motivations are accurate.

Can a 'strange stranger' ever be made to conform? Be defined? Be made to submit to logic and reason ultimately? These questions serve as evidence of what Morton describes as a human tendency of attempting to tame 'strange strangers'. For, through a wish to decipher such beings, we effectively attempt to rob them of their inherent strangeness. Resultingly, Morton places great value on the ability to perceive our strange counterparts as they genuinely are, yet allow them to remain strange (Castree 2012, 169).

Morton furthermore expresses a potentially controversial, though not surprising view. A desire to classify life according to vulnerability and deficiency, rather than solely pursue strength and health. He claims such an approach could prove beneficial for establishing an overall sense of unity within the 'mesh', for in 'weakness is solidarity with strangers'. Although unconventional, this task should not prove insurmountable, as the world around us already consists of a sequence of disability, fragility, and uncanny mutations (Morton 2010, 71, 114 and 8).

Championing the idea of permitting flaws, fragility, and puzzling differences, permitting the 'strange stranger' to retain its inherent uncanniness, would indeed prove beneficial concerning the predicaments depicted in the two previous chapters. In this instance, however, Morton's view could prove disastrous.

The concluding announcement of the protagonist brings victory yet also encompasses a sense of dread; her strangeness presenting as both positive and negative. It portrays a challenge of the known and accepted. Opposing the diagnosis proposed by her husband of a 'temporary nervous depression' (Gilman 1997, 1), she has pursued her project to the point

which her deviancy supposedly surpasses sanity (Treichler 1984, 67). The strangeness demonstrated by the narrator is the result of a temporary mental affliction, as opposed to a constant and integral part of her nature. Moreover, though her affliction causes the narrator to pursue a sense of autonomy, it also leaves her unable to determine reality from imaginings, potentially hurting herself and those around her.

Overall, her victory is a brief one; her new strangeness not accepted nor aiding her desire for lasting freedom. Her display has not defeated John; it merely left him unconscious. Once he regains consciousness, his actions will likely leave the narrator facing drearier circumstances, perhaps at the hands of the feared Weir Mitchell (Treichler 1984, 67). As such, her strange strangeness should be understood, certainly, but managed through proper medical treatment, rather than left to develop freely

Of course, the interaction narrated through 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is brief, and the direct interaction between husband and wife briefer still. Therefore, if provided sufficient time, could John not learn to understand his wife without medical intervention, as her strangeness lessens over time? Sadly, though admirable, such an effort would prove futile. For, even if John were given the time and opportunity to study his wife thoroughly, the outcome would remain the same:

> As anyone who has a long-term partner can attest, the strangest person is the one you wake up with every morning. Far from gradually erasing strangeness, intimacy heightens it. The more we know them, the stranger they become. Intimacy itself is strange (Morton 2010, 17).

If we were to gain intimate knowledge of all existing beings in the 'mesh', we would nevertheless continue to perceive them as 'strange strangers', as such detailed knowledge would make them appear all the more bizarre, rather than familiar (Morton 2010, 17 and Morton 2013, 124). Indeed, even if they existed openly among us for millennia, a genuine understanding of the 'strange stranger' might never be achieved, and we would likewise never recognise the limit of our comprehension, not realising whether there was more for us to know. 'We wouldn't know what we did not know about them' (Morton 2010, 42).

Ultimately, despite the development and (at least momentary) freedom of the protagonist by the conclusion of the story, settling the plight of 'strange strangers' and, by extension, 'us', requires reforming the social conditions of both. However, while conformity is out of the question, coexistence and cooperation remain possible. As everything within the

'mesh' is not only connected but interdependent, there indeed exists a strong incentive for mutual care (Miles 2013 and Morton 2010, 35).

Is it then possible for John to love his wife? Loving the strange stranger has an extreme, unquantifiable, nonlinear trait. The prospect itself may seem preposterous – threatening, possibly even disgusting in their strangeness – but simultaneously the notion is universal, even plausible, as uncanny strangers exist next to us and can even be us. The possibility of eventually loving the 'strange stranger', in a sense, becomes inevitable (Morton 2010, 79).

Chapter 5
Conclusion

This thesis was undertaken with the overall intention of exploring the circumstances of the 'strange stranger' as it appears in three works of fiction: the novel *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, the play *The Tempest* (1611) by William Shakespeare, as well as the short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Through these texts, this thesis has attempted to examine and discuss the nature and circumstances accompanying the various instances in which the 'strange stranger' appears, seeking a greater comprehension of the phenomena.

Ultimately, the concept of the uncanny stranger is both more fascinating and perplexing than one might initially believe. A natural - and entirely wrong – reaction is to assume the 'strange stranger' to be a strictly non-human phenomenon, restricted to obscene creatures beyond the human sphere. This soon proves not to be the case, the 'mesh' introducing a plethora of 'strange strangers', both appealing and disgusting and both human and non-human. Likewise, exploration of the 'strange stranger' is not limited to obscure categories of biology and politics but addresses crucial topics concerning social and cultural norms, as well as ecological equality (Gaard 2010, 659).

Indeed, one cannot see, hear, smell, or touch the world without encountering some form of the 'strange stranger', whether one realizes it or not. The living network that makes up the 'mesh' is simultaneously large and small: everything is intimately connected, nothing being 'over there'. Nevertheless, it is impossible to foresee what or whom we will encounter next. Nothing in the 'mesh' is static, including our perception of others (Morton 2010, 40).

Variations amongst the uncanny stranger

Thus, it is no surprise that the criteria for what constitutes such a stranger varies from instance to instance, from community to community, from individual to individual, depicting no specific, overarching quality by which to perceive them, apart from their inherent strangeness. Resultingly, the distance between 'strange strangers' and their surroundings also differ in intensity. While Victor Frankenstein avoids any contact with his creation, loathing the latter for his very existence, Prospero, though resentful and vary, see the practical use in Caliban.

Initially endearing himself to the native man to secure domain over the island, he then proceeds to keep Caliban nearby as a slave. The narrator of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is intimately integrated into the lives of her husband and sister-in-law. As such, their desperate toil to subdue her new behavioural patterns is one based on genuine affection. Still, within these instances, the essence of the encounter remains the same: the alien qualities of the 'strange stranger' are perceived as incomprehensible, causing fear and provocation, leaving them unwanted.

Still, in the three cases described in this thesis, the 'strange stranger' is arguably a human being and should ideally be identified as such. Within two of the narratives, however, this is not the case. While Prospero is adamant in his belief that Caliban is a 'strange stranger' a perplexing, non-human entity, John, for instance, would likely recognize the character as a human being (though not acknowledge him as an equal). Likewise, Victor Frankenstein might feel sympathetic to Jane's suffering, due to his unconventional mindset and resulting emotional trauma, rather than outright condemn her uncanny new conduct.

There exist apparent discrepancies relating to the classification of humanity. Rather than a set category, it proves a highly subjective project, depending on the viewpoint of the one performing the classification. Consequently, each instance of affirmation or denial of humanity within the first two texts effectively blurs the line between human and non-human, rather than solidifying it.

Thus, the current classification of 'human' may be considered an artificial construct, an oversimplification, which does not take into consideration the actual circumstances of the subject in question. Humanity implies individuals, as well as any symbionts and prosthetic limbs. It includes various forms of bacteria, virus, and technical devices. As such, the term 'human' incorporates a multitude of meanings and cannot be correctly defined within the current restrictive framework. 'Human' is an accumulation of organism and materials, creating a creature which, ironically, cannot be directly perceived by humanity itself (Morton 2019, 40). Though, perhaps, a defining trait of humanity *is* the confrontation with the 'strange stranger'? Something which all the protagonists of the three narratives experience (Morton 2010, 113).

That is not to say that 'strange strangers' are always helpless, noble, or kind creatures, perpetually troubled by forces beyond their control. The narratives explored in this thesis have demonstrated that these beings may also present as strong, determined and capable. Frankenstein's creature, despite admirable intentions, upon realizing that he will never be accepted by humanity, gives in to anger and violence, deliberately destroying innocent people.

Similarly, Caliban's unjust mistreatment at the hands of Prospero ultimately leads the former not to value and seek out kindness elsewhere but, instead, to adopt a cruel and vindictive persona himself. Additionally, Jane eventually manages (if only briefly) to transcend her social restraints. In these ways, these characters reveal a multitude of aspects, showing themselves to be capable of both despair and compassion, as well as cruelty and cunning, the same as any other sentient being.

Consequently, our awareness of 'strange strangers' is not, as a rule, beautiful, fascinating, or even comfortable, often leaving us glimpsing something we would prefer to have remained hidden. In encountering such beings, one is forced to address not only the entity itself, but also several scientific, moral, and social uncertainties: How is the 'strange stranger' different from us? How might it be similar? Can we escape him/her/it? Could the 'strange stranger' be human? What does it mean to be a human being? (Morton 2010, 58-60).

Confronted with such thoughts and experiences, we might have an immediate instinct to ignore 'strange strangers', due to their disconcerting natures, as well as our own potentially shameful reactions to them. Still, engaging in an artificial performance in which supposedly none of us has such beliefs or feelings, would be counterproductive, resolving nothing, allowing the issue to continue to fester beneath the surface. As the biological sphere that is the 'mesh' continues to evolve, and discoveries are continuously made, there are bound to be a profusion of uncanny strangers gradually emerging. As such, it is pointless to attempt to overlook the presence of these beings to secure our own comfort (Morton 2010, 58).

Psychological aspects

Still, the 'strange stranger' addresses not only a confrontation between an established, accepted segment and an utterly alien one but also, seemingly, certain psychological aspects. Victor, Prospero, and John all experience fear and horror, but also gain a sense of purpose and importance when confronting their respective 'strange strangers'. This notion of pride and objective manifests through these characters seeking to protect their immediate family or the world at large from the threat of the 'strange stranger', removing or tempering this supposed menace. Additionally, these three men all perceive themselves as the only ones able to perform such a task, by virtue of their magical, scientific, or medical knowledge.

Victor Frankenstein comes to believe that he has created an abomination, seemingly due to nothing more than the uncanny appearance of the creature, and wishes to destroy his creation. This belief is ultimately condoned by the realization that coexistence between the existing humanity and this new breed of beings will end in the former's extinction. Thus,

Frankenstein's initially unjustified fear and hatred of the 'strange stranger' transcends into a courageous mission, wherein he sacrifices his happiness and well-being to secure the continued existence of his race:

> In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards my fellow-creatures had greater claims to my attention (Shelley 1996, 151).

Rationalizing his previous arrogance, to Frankenstein, it is a preferable alternative to seeing himself as a corrupt scientist without human compassion for his creation.

Similarly, Prospero is most likely engaged in what he believes to be a noble quest for justice. By seeking to regain his previous position as Duke of Milan, he is securing not only *his* future but also that of his child. As such, he is quite justified in using his magic to ensure his ultimate goal, including punishing others for thwarting his plans, especially one he does not even recognize as human:

> For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
> Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
> Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
> All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch'd
> As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
> Than bees that made 'em (Shakespeare 2007, 1.2.481).

Furthermore, the justification of Prospero's journey towards reclaiming his previous glory relies partly upon measuring his own worthiness against others – particularly Caliban. The sorcerer seemingly requires the presence of an unappealing 'strange stranger' from which to distinguish himself and thus deserving of his dukedom. While Prospero's goals would likely have remained the same, his sense of entitlement might have lessened, if his island home did not include the presence of Caliban.

Likewise, John of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' believes himself to be selflessly fighting to see his wife restored to health, dedicating both his time and effort to counteracting her illogical impulses (caring for the couple's newborn child all the while):

> He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction. I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me (Gilman 1997, 2).

Thereby, John's refusal to acknowledge Jane's opinions supposedly stems from a belief in his dedication to his wife.

In all these instances, the gap of the unknown between the 'strange stranger' and us, which usually instils dread, and fear, ironically, also creates a protection of sorts. For, it safeguards the assumptions of all three characters from any evidence to the contrary, maintaining their sense of self-importance.

Polarisations

Though seemingly due to either a matter of disgust or danger, the alien qualities associated with the 'strange stranger' appear to function as a *solution* by those who employ it, the unfamiliar strangeness evident in these beings essentially *permitting* humanity to reject or incapacitate it. This, of course, is a crude short-term solution. Nonetheless, our relationships to 'strange strangers' entail not only a destructive coexistence, or a misguided social and cultural system but also, one finds, a fundamental psychological necessity. One could argue that the mental stability of human beings, requires distance from the 'strange stranger'. The sense of self, both of individuals and the larger collective, depends on the belief that people are substantially removed from that which they view as a *stranger*, concerning factors such as biology, ethics, intelligence and capacity for affection.

Both *The Tempest* and *Frankenstein* portray a prominent polarisation in term of presentation of characters, Prospero and Victor almost immediately rejecting their respective 'strange strangers' as monstrous in their indeterminacy. These condemnations of the uncanny stranger indicate a refusal to operate within the living network of the 'mesh', both characters favouring oppositions benefiting themselves, rather than engaging and genuinely exploring with either Caliban or Frankenstein's creature, effectively observing the 'strange stranger' from a symbolic distance.

This outcome is also partly found in the narrative of 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. The narrator's husband, when confronted with the sudden indeterminacy of his wife, attempts to force a classification on her – one contrasting his own, as either childlike or non-human. Nevertheless, despite the short story's unfortunate outcome, the interaction between the narrator of the 'Yellow Wallpaper' and her family, is one based on genuinely well-meaning intentions, arguably, setting the text apart from the other two narratives of the thesis. Thus, the interaction discussed in the fourth chapter of the thesis enters the mesh to a certain point, though never fully. '[W]e have, in this pairing – cuddly closeness and the cold, sadistic gaze –

the coordinates of conventional fantasies about 'strange strangers […] The ecological thought thinks neither cuddliness nor wildness but uncanny familiarity' (Morton 2010, 75).

'Nature'

The portrayal of the 'strange stranger' is intimately tied to our depiction of nature. In fact, every 'strange stranger' discussed comes to be associated with 'Nature', made part of a sphere associated with the wild and primitive or the delicate and aesthetically pleasing. Thus, nature tends to be substituted for 'Nature', presenting a pastoral ideal or a wild, animalistic image, depending on our preference.

Nature, however, is neither separate from humanity nor a polarizing fiction. Instead, we are deeply ingrained in nature. It surrounds, and preserves us as individuals and as a species:

> [P]lant, animal, and human realms interpenetrate. Within a great diversity of oral traditions, in almost all cases, there is a recognition of the kinship between human beings and the natural world, a kinship that is based not upon rebirth [...] but upon shared heritage (Hall 2011, 100).

Nevertheless, there exists a certain difficulty in transmitting this message to others, for the theory involved in invoking an encompassing element cannot be established through theoretical texts representing nature. This demonstrates the need for a new perspective and presentation of that which is nature (Morton 2007, 4-5).

The current mistreatment of nature appears to be a strategy employed by signifiers as to justify their alienation and subjugation of foreign elements beyond their comprehension. Additionally, it presents a convenient simplification of an otherwise complicated subject matter. This imagery successfully allows the former to separate themselves from such beings, retaining a false sense of authority. Overall 'Nature' becomes an umbrella term for everything that cannot be defined, understood, or accepted.

This type of labelling arguably reveals an inner weakness rather than an acceptable response to a foreign entity, for the appearance of control and authority exuded by the *signifier*, is accompanied by not only arrogance and condescension, but also varying degrees of insecurity, paranoia, and despair. Victor, Prospero, and Miranda demonstrate not only disgust regarding the physical form of Frankenstein's creature and Caliban respectively, but are also fearful of them, as these three characters are left to assume the latter's motivations, instinctively assuming the worst. Additionally, John, despite his medical knowledge, does not

understand his wife to the degree that he can decipher her motivations, leaving him unable to anticipate her desperate and destructive actions and avoid their final confrontation.

Moving forward

Consequently, it is likely that the essential difficulty of the 'strange stranger' resides not primarily in its potentially problematic origins, but in its subjective *interpretation*. Frankenstein's creature, Caliban and Jane are all capable of speech, thoughts, and feelings to the same extent as their counterparts. Nevertheless, they are labelled alien beings, their inconsequential *differences* to those they encounter somehow more significant than the multitude of *similarities* evident. As long as this is not acknowledged, how can we ever hope to understand and share a connection with other beings within the 'mesh'?

Though, is comprehension and good intentions enough? Would a sense of community automatically develop between different groups? Would the signifying element's value and views of the world rearrange themselves to align with the new social and cultural reality presenting itself, allowing them to automatically bond with the 'strange stranger'? Quite possibly not. Here, innovative and admirable visions of understanding and acceptance would likely not be sufficient. This lack of understanding might stem from the absence of genuine familiarity

Thus, moving forward, rather than a project based merely on kindness and sympathy, our main priority should be to strive for intimacy with such beings. Intimacy comes first and foremost through permitting the existence of the 'strange stranger'. This would create a stage for understanding rather than fear and condescension, forming the foundation for reinterpreting democracy within the 'mesh'. However, if we genuinely seek intimacy, we must meet the 'strange stranger' on *all* levels: ranging from intestinal bacteria to, plant and animal life, to immigrants (Morton 2010, 49, 78 and 80).

A prudent step could be to revaluate the existing terms of hospitality, as briefly discussed in chapter three. This would entail rejecting parameters suggested by Derrida, in favour of a more beneficial alternative, in which all participants are met with respect and protected against loss of personal autonomy, increasing the likelihood of an intimate connection to the 'strange stranger'.

Regardless, the lesson is not that one must understand that there *are* no 'strange strangers', but rather that the 'mesh' in which we exist consist *only* of 'strange strangers' (including ourselves):

> The strange stranger is at the limit of our imagining [but] lives within (and without) each and every being […] The more you know, the more entangled you realize you are, and the more open and ambiguous everything becomes (Morton 2010, 17).

This insight effectively exchanges a previous sense of safe reality for an uncomfortable yet more authentic 'normal'. Thus, though revealing certain uncomfortable truths, the topic ought not to be suppressed and ignored, but instead explored.

These mystifying strangers force upon us stress, confusion, and displeasure, but also a new sense of awareness and awe. Once introduced to the 'mesh' and the 'strange stranger', these ideas become unavoidable. 'It's irresistible,' insists Morton, 'like true love '(Morton 2010, 135). Given a chance, I would welcome the opportunity to explore the topic of the 'strange stranger' in a greater capacity, further expanding my understanding of the concept.

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[2] As this article did not list an author, I am referencing it by its editor.

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