

## VOICE AND SILENCE OF THE GENDERED SUBALTERN IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

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### Abstract

The present paper examines the production and perpetuation of Orientalist discourse, as well as the voicing and silencing of the gendered subaltern Other in Mary Shelley's worldwide classic *Frankenstein*.

More specifically, the analysis argues that there are specific characters of Oriental ancestry or appearance in the novel, namely Safie and the creature, which are attributed essentialized and stereotypically Orientalist characteristics when juxtaposed to the white European characters of the novel. Furthermore, the paper stresses that the female subaltern, that being Safie, as well as the female creature, who is destroyed by her creator, are not allowed to claim a voice. More specifically, Safie's story is fully narrated by the creature and the female creature is killed before she can actually narrate her own story. It is further argued that although the male subaltern, Frankenstein's creature, is presented as a savage figure of terror, he is given a powerful voice, as he is educated and eloquent, openly defying his master and demanding his freedom. This condition reveals a complex differentiation in the representation and access to power of the subaltern subject depending on the subject's gender.

In particular, this study employs Gayatri Spivak's theory *Can the Subaltern Speak?* which focuses on the epistemic violence that the subaltern subjects, especially the female, experience as they become silenced. Edward Said's theory on *Orientalism*, which discusses the stereotypical representation of the Orient based on which the Occident is constructed, is also used to facilitate this study. The paper thus, aims to contribute to the rich research which examines *Frankenstein* in a post-colonial context for its Orientalist discourse, by focusing on the less explored voice and silence of the gendered Subaltern.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, subaltern, gender, voice, representation

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## 1. Introduction

It is characteristic that many of the quintessentially classic novels in British literature, have been quite recently, more specifically in the postmodern era, examined in terms of their racialized and gender-binary perception of what horror and violence entail. Taking into consideration the fact that the gothic novel is a hybrid literary genre, great research has been made upon its constituent subgenres such as horror and science fiction and especially on the underlying theories it has employed such as the Orientalist discourse. In this Orientalist discourse, which advocates the superiority of the Occident over the Orient, a constructed notion, the condition of the Subaltern subject is highly complex in that it constitutes the amalgamation of different parameters such as Race, Gender and Class. Taking as a point of departure, Gayatri Spivak's (2018: 79) position that the subaltern is an inherently heterogeneous subject which is never allowed to speak or listened to when it actually speaks, the current paper closely examines the role of the narratorial strategies of Voice and Silence as these are employed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2006 [1818]). Being a complex gothic novel, *Frankenstein* demonstrates the different manifestation of the subaltern condition, as it is experienced by the male subaltern, namely the creature, who appears dominant in the gender hierarchy, and the female, such as Safie and the unborn female creature, whose voices are always either suspended or mediated. Although both the male creature and Safie internalize the white man's language, as it is exemplified in Shelley's novel, in order to acquire the voice and identity that they are denied by the white European oppressor, it is only the male subaltern that manages to challenge the master-slave hierarchy, whereas the female subaltern remains forever silent, always represented by her oppressors.

## 2. Theoretical background and previous research

In order to accurately examine the exact condition and social construction of the subalterns presented in Shelley's novel, it is vital to firstly explore the fascinating concept of the Subaltern itself, as well as Edward Said's seminal work on Orientalism and the man-made construction of the Other.

To begin with Said's (2018: 10) influential concept of Orientalism, which is defined as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'", this concept has proved an extremely fundamental tool for scholars invested in a postcolonial literary analysis. More specifically, Said's (2018: 9) argumentation that the "Orient is not only adjacent to Europe ... [but also] its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other" as well as "a battery of desires, regressions, investments, and projections" (Said, 2018: 16), has provided the means with which to explore and revisit classic literary works under a new prism, examining Oriental novelistic characters, as well as the power dynamic relation between these characters and the European characters to whom they are so often

juxtaposed and contrasted. It has thus, opened up the possibility for various scholars to share fresh perspectives on works such as Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a work which thrives on such juxtapositions between the Orient and the Occident.

As far as the theorization of the Subaltern is concerned, Antonio Gramsci (2010: 14) was the first to explore the condition of the subaltern subjects, underlining the heterogeneity of these marginalized social groups, as he has famously argued that "the history of the subaltern groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic". His (Gramsci, 2010: 14) further commentary on the predicament of the subaltern subject is reflected in his argument that "the subaltern groups are subject to the initiative of the dominant groups, even when they rebel and revolt". Hereby, he points out the extremely difficult task of the subaltern subject to combat the dominant group which is responsible for the subaltern's subjugation and the effort of the subaltern to claim a new position in the social hierarchy. Gramsci's work has been a valuable point of departure in postcolonial work, as it has made visible the struggle of subaltern, marginalized groups and it has laid the foundation for more thorough research upon the condition of subaltern people, such as the groundbreaking work of Gayatri Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

In this seminal work, Spivak investigates the correlation between epistemic violence, gender and education in the societal production of the subaltern and its consequent subjugation by dominant, capitalist forces. More specifically she (Spivak, 2018: 76) defines epistemic violence as "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as other", underlining the fact that the subordination of the subaltern is a complex, systematic and strategic, colonial practice. She (Spivak, 2018: 77) further discusses the importance of education in the persistent effort of the subaltern to be liberated by the imposed social restrictions, as she argues that "the education of the colonial subjects complements their production in law" and she (Spivak, 2018: 78) then rightly proceeds to stress that "the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here) ... can speak and know their conditions". Indeed, as this paper will proceed to argue, in *Frankenstein*, the male creature's successful effort to educate himself, actually enables his liberation from societal, hierarchal restrictions through his self-realization process. However, the most interesting argument in Spivak's (2018: 82) analysis, which has proved crucial in this research paper, is her assertion that "both as an object of colonial historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant". Spivak's argumentation of the heterogeneity of the subaltern condition as experienced by the male and female subalterns, constitutes the basis of this research, as the paper investigates the subalterns' different representations and the different processes they are allowed, or not allowed to follow towards their liberation.

Moreover, Spivak's essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", which touches upon the work of *Frankenstein* itself, provides some interesting insights regarding the influence of imperialist thought on the novel, examining Shelley's work as a product of its time, which draws on different disciplines such as Kantian philosophy, Freudian thought and essentialist representations of the

Other. What makes this essay particularly interesting for the purposes of this paper, however, is Spivak's commentary on the destruction of the female creature, the misrepresentation of Safie and most importantly the vast difference described in Shelley's novel between the male creature and Safie's education, self-realization and transformation processes. More specifically, Spivak's (1985: 257-258) argument that "Shelley differentiates the Other [and] works at the Caliban/Ariel distinction", invites further exploration of this distinction. Although the differentiation of the Other is positive, as it reflects the heterogeneity of the subaltern, resisting essentialist thought of the Other as a timelessly, essentialized identical figure, Shelley's emphasis on the aesthetic beauty of Safie and the representation of her lack of educational or individual transformation is problematic, as this paper discusses.

Furthermore, *Frankenstein* has been at the center of various feminist readings, which discuss Shelley's narrative strategies and her effort to underline the social restrictions and injustice faced by women. One of these works is Joyce Zonana's work "They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale": Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*", which focuses on Safie's written documentation of the events, a piece of work which is never explicitly quoted or reproduced in the text itself, as Jonana's article argues. Zonana (1991: 170-171) rightly points out that "for the reader of *Frankenstein* Safie's letters remain opaque, a mysterious talisman of 'truth' that passes from hand to hand within the text". She (Zonana, 1991: 173) discusses Shelley's specific narrative choice, arguing that they "are central thematically as well as structurally, a fact Mary Shelley signals not only through her characters' use of them as evidence, but also through their content, their form, and their peculiar silence -- their absence as text from the novel". This absence is further explored in the present research, which aims to contribute to the existing bibliography by examining intersectionally, questions of voice, silence, representation and grief in relation to the subaltern condition.

### **3. Orientalism and the othering of the subaltern**

In examining the subaltern condition in terms of its voice and silence, it becomes evident in various points in the novel that it is influenced by Orientalist thought. More specifically, such influence is perceived in the stereotypical depiction of the central subaltern figures, in comparison to the white European characters, such as the case of the male subaltern, the creature that Victor Frankenstein has brought to life, who is compared to his white victims. If Said's (2018: 9) argument on the role of the Orient as "its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other" is actually applied to the case of the subaltern Orientalized figures, their description as savage figures of horror may quite easily support the elevation of the white European protagonist and secondary characters. Specifically, Victor Frankenstein's observation of its creation's "dull yellow eye" and his "yellow skin [which] scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath ... his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips" (Shelley, 2006: 318) informs the reader that

the male subaltern is no white European worthy of respect and compassion, but a figure of terror and repulsion, which is supposed to heighten the dramatic effect of the creation scene and present Victor as a victim of his fate. Furthermore, Jerrold Hogle's (2020: 656) argument that the creature's composition "has resulted in a multiracial one, yellow as well as black and white, and so subjected the Creature to all the prejudiced discourses of racial differentiation" points out that the creature's appearance is responsible for all the hate and distrust that he receives from the humans that he encounters throughout the novel, even from William, who is supposed to be a young unprejudiced child. Therefore, the subaltern's hybrid countenance and deformed body, when juxtaposed to William's "sweet laughing eyes, dark eyelashes and curly hair" (Shelley, 2006: 327), necessarily represents the fear of miscegenation which may threaten the purity of the white benevolent characters in the novel.

Furthermore, reflecting upon the romanticized and idealized representation, of Safie the female subaltern, it appears that despite being a minor character in terms of her contribution to the plot, she constitutes nevertheless, an acute example of the Western perception of the exotic Oriental woman. Taking into consideration Said's (2018: 16) argument that the Western perception of the Orient is not based on empirical reality but is determined by "a battery of desires, regressions, investments, and projections", it comes as no surprise, that the Oriental woman, the female subaltern, would also be assigned an identity reflecting the white man's desire and fantasy over her body, being represented by her oppressor as an exotic, sexually promiscuous apparition. Although Safie is not described in sexual terms in the novel, she is still described by the creature as a "countenance of angelic beauty ... [with] her hair of shining raven black, and curiously braided" and her dark eyes "gentle, although animated" (Shelley, 2006: 382), constituting thus an inherently idealized and romanticized female figure, satisfying to the European eye and imagination. Furthermore, after her performance on the guitar is praised by the creature, he compares her to a white character, by referring to the "gentle words of Agatha" in contrast to the "animated smiles of the charming Arabian" (Shelley, 2006: 387). As it becomes apparent, Agatha, the white woman, is not assigned an exotic appearance or an alluring personality as the female subaltern is. Reflecting upon Joseph Lew's (1991: 280-281) position that when "the creature begins to recount Safie's earlier history ... we see her as unequivocally Oriental ...[y]et Mary Shelley inexorably strips away each of these 'oriental' traits", it is vital that his argument upon the challenging of Safie's stereotypical representation is more thoroughly examined. While it is obvious that Safie is stereotypically represented as quintessentially Oriental, the fact that she is a likeable character who gets married to a white man does not necessarily imply that she acquires an objective representation or that she even acquires a voice for that matter. On the contrary, Felix's admiration of her is based upon her idealized external appearance and not on her voice, a voice which is repressed.

Moreover, it is characteristic that the novel includes examples both of female and male racialized Others, whose subaltern experience becomes gradually differentiated, despite the fact that they are presented as sharing a similar alienating experience,

mostly because of the linguistic barrier. In this context of Othering, Gayatri Spivak's (2018: 79) argument that "the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous" is both empirically materialized, as it has been demonstrated in the description of the two central subaltern figures, but also epistemically visible in their access to voice. At first, both the creature and Safie appear to face the same alienation that emanates from their lack of knowledge of the French language. More specifically, the creature compares himself to Safie stating that "although the stranger uttered articulate sounds ... she was neither understood by, nor herself understood the cottagers" (Shelley, 2006: 383) quite similarly to his own experience when he did not know a single word. What is important, however, is the creature's recognition of Safie as a stranger, pretty much like him. Additionally, as the creature remarks that he "listened to the instructions bestowed upon the Arabian" (Shelley, 2006: 386) it is revealed that they are both actually instructed in the colonizer's language in order to facilitate communication with the white man. Therefore, examining Hogle's (2020: 656) argument that the creature "gains much of his very Western education by overhearing the cottage conversion of this black-haired Arab into a French-speaking Christian" which actually means "that the Creature is similarly "colonized" and still left as an "Other", it can be argued that they both have to be linguistically and consequently culturally colonized in order to claim their right to voice and recognition, exactly because they are both othered. In light of this, what is rather interesting is the necessity of the colonized to learn the colonizer's language and not the other way round, as none of the De Lacey cottagers actually try to learn the female subaltern's mother-tongue. It is this condition that initially presents both male and female subaltern subjects as similar, however their similarity ends here.

#### **4. Gender hierarchy and voice of the male subaltern**

Despite the fact that both the creature and Safie are forced to employ language as a means to assimilation into the white Western culture, their education appears to be portrayed in different terms by Shelley, as the male subaltern appears more eloquent than the female, according to his claims. Taking as a point of departure Spivak's (2018: 82-83) hypothesis that "if in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female in even more deeply in shadow", the description of the creature's high accomplishments in comparison to Safie's hesitant learning process, may actually start unraveling the double predicament of the subaltern woman within the colonial context, that is her race and gender. In specific, the creature takes great pride in his education, exclaiming that he "improved more rapidly than the Arabian, who understood very little ... whilst [he] comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken" (Shelley, 2006: 385), a statement which aims to underline the creature's high intellect and implicitly demonstrate the male subaltern's superiority over the female. In fact, the creature feels rather strongly the need to turn to language in order to battle his marginalization that is the outcome of the aforementioned othering.



Considering Katherine Montwieler's (2011: 75) similar observation that "[a]fter his initial rejections by people, the creature turns to nature for comfort. Reading history, literature, and the classics offers him an education, but it is complemented by his life", it can be stressed that the importance given to the sublimity and beauty of nature, becomes quite understandable since *Frankenstein* is undoubtedly a gothic novel, highly influenced by Romanticism. However, what makes specifically language, literature, knowledge and education vital for the creature's survival is their ability to shape and establish the power hierarchy and consequently to offer him an opportunity to improve his position in this hierarchy.

The exemplifying of the silence of the female subaltern, necessarily involves an evaluation of the male subaltern's education and access to voice, which despite the condition of being narrated by Frankenstein and Walton in the novel's epistolary form, it still remains rather powerful and eloquent. As it has been already mentioned, education is important to both subalterns, especially considering Spivak's (2018: 77) argument that the "education of colonial subjects complements their production in law", that is their right to be at least theoretically acknowledged as human beings. Specifically, education is essential for the subaltern in order to be recognized even as a subaltern in the social hierarchy, taking its place at the bottom of the social pyramid. In this context, it is highly remarkable that the male subaltern not only manages to acquire a voice through his colonial education, but most importantly he acquires a powerful voice, as he makes his master listen to his story. More specifically the creature tries to reason with Frankenstein by exclaiming rather eloquently "Be calm! I intreat you to hear me before you give vent to your hatred" (Shelley, 2006: 364), an attempt that appears to be successful as the creature manages to narrate his unfortunate condition through Victor and Walton. Even though the novel's form is distinctively epistolary, in the form of letters containing one another, the male subaltern still manages to get his story across. The creature's aim during his narration seems to be to utilize the knowledge that might make the cottagers ignore the deformity of his figure (Shelley, 2006: 379) as he admits, and indeed his voice carries power as his eloquence cannot be easily ignored by Frankenstein. Taking into account Criscillia Benford's (2010: 334) argument that "once the authorial audience reads the creature's narrative ... they begin to doubt Frankenstein's description of the creature's moral character", it can be easily stressed that the male subaltern actually comes to challenge the gruesome story of his evil deeds as they are presented by the white man, his creator. As a consequence, he tries and succeeds in retrieving back the voice that he is denied and the readers are thus enabled to make their own assumption about the credibility of the two conflicting narratives.

What is more, as soon as the creature acquires the human language, his inferior othered position appears to be reversed, considering that he gradually becomes able to control not only his fate but also the fate of his master Frankenstein, both linguistically with his persuasion and physically with his bodily sturdiness. In that respect, Spivak's (2018: 82) argument that "both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant" appears highly justifiable, considering that the male

subaltern manages quite successfully to assert his power and use his voice in order to demand what he considers his unequivocal right, namely his freedom. Apart from his claim to freedom, the creature demands that Frankenstein creates another subaltern creature, a female one in particular, with the prospect of having a companion in life. It is characteristic that Frankenstein is described as being influenced by the creature's reasonable, eloquent voice, as he remarks that "his words had a strange effect upon [him]" (Shelley, 2006: 414), that is that he is persuaded to start creating the female creature. However, when he changes his mind and moves on to destroy this unborn creature, the male subaltern uses his new-found power and voice to warn the white man who poses a threat to his aspirations. In fact, his voice greatly impresses the reader in that it constitutes an explicit attack to the master-slave hierarchy that is imposed upon him as the creature exclaims "[s]lave, I before reasoned with you ... [r]emember that I have power ... [y]ou are my creator but I am your master" (Shelley, 2006: 437), whereby he not only challenges Frankenstein's authority but he actually reverses the existing hierarchy. Reflecting upon Benford's (2010: 328) line of reasoning that the creature's voice "empowers him to challenge traditional authority and the concomitant belief that the people must be spoken for by more highly ranked advocates" it can indeed be argued that the male subaltern employs language to lay claim on Frankenstein's position in the social and racial hierarchy, as he asserts that his deformed body can guarantee Frankenstein's enslavement to his demands. Therefore, the creature appears to control his creator's life by threatening him and killing his most precious kin, exercising a form of power that emancipates him from the societal restrictions that are imposed on the subaltern subject.

## **5. The female subaltern, silence and the plight of misrepresentation**

On the other hand, it is critical to contrast the male subaltern to the female one, Safie, who is being introduced to the reader only by the narration of the creature, which is narrated by Frankenstein. Her story is conveyed in third person, in contrast to the creature whose first-person voice prevails. A dramatic past full of fear of the Turkish harem and her tyrannical father is assigned to her. If Said's account on Flaubert's perception and establishment of the quintessentially Oriental woman is examined in relation to Safie's silence and misrepresentation, their condition will be revealed to be quite similar. More specifically, concerning his argument that "Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself ... [but] [h]e spoke for and represented her" (Said, 2018: 14) it can be rightfully stressed that the specific female subaltern is also being represented solely by the male subaltern in third person. At no point in the novel is Safie offered the option to express her convictions, her fears or her feelings. On the contrary, it is the creature that describes her supposed fear of returning back to Turkey, back to her presumed tyrannical father, as he narrates that Safie "sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia and being immured within the walls of a harem" (Shelley, 2006: 390), a claim which can by no means be proved



or disproved by Safie, given the fact that she does not possess a first-person voice in the first place. Considering Jeanne Britton's (2009: 5) assertion that the creature's narration of Safie's story "exists in the distinct forms of speech and text, as narrative summary and epistolary document", it can be argued that despite the documentation of the creature's narration, this by no means can guarantee that this narration is more than an idealized misrepresentation, which is influenced by the creature's sympathy of this subaltern person. In fact, Joyce Zonana's (1991: 176) argument that "Safie, a woman who narrowly escapes being 'immured' in a harem under her father's 'Mahometan' law, is a woman escaped from patriarchy ... is a woman who insists on her own possession of a soul", takes for granted the Orientalist discourse which presents Safie's father as a tyrannical figure. It does not take into consideration the fact that as the male creature is the one copying Safie's letters, it is quite possible he has altered or left out parts of Safie's narrative. Safie is not given the opportunity to present her own truth explicitly. As a matter of fact, Safie's story is bound to be misrepresented as it is mediated by three male figures to the reader, all of which are most probably ignorant of the subaltern woman's predicament but still actually speak for her. Furthermore, Zonana's (1985: 180) assertion that "Safie and Felix share a relationship of mutual respect and pleasure, a relationship embodied in the formal structure of the letters, and one that eludes the other speakers", can in no way be proved, as the reader's only source of information is the creature's description of the woman's fortune, which is again mediated by Frankenstein and Walton.

More specifically, all of these men that represent and misrepresent her, appear to focus on the assumption that she needs to be saved and protected from the horrifying fate in Asia which she supposedly abhors, a fear assigned to her as it has been exemplified previously, by these male oppressors. Under these circumstances, what appears really interesting, is Spivak's (2018: 92) well-founded criticism of the strong conviction that "[w]hite men are saving brown women from brown men", or at least this is what they claim to be doing in the colonial context. If it is argued that the white man desires to control the subaltern woman permeably and absolutely, even more than the male one, the white colonizer can only justify his conduct, on the grounds that he gallantly protects the subaltern woman from the presumed evil subaltern man. It is this exact pretext that justifies Safie's arrival in Germany, away from the barbarous Orient and away from her treacherous father. However, as it has been already discussed, Safie cannot possibly comment upon this mediation of events. The creature attempts to validate his narration by exclaiming "I have copies of these letters ... they will prove the truth of my tale" (Shelley, 2006: 389), the accuracy of these letters, however, can be still contested, since such documents could have easily been fabricated or altered in order to solidify the creature's narrative. Furthermore, by examining Britton's (2009: 17-18) point that the creature's "knowledge of her is confined to limited visual and textual exposure ... [and that] the monster cannot in turn adopt that voice when he tells her story", it can be highlighted that the creature's subjective narrative cannot in any way replace the female subaltern's voice or justify her silence and that the described exposure is not only limited but highly equivocal. This complete silence and inherent misrepresentation of the female's voice can be

considered a conscious effort by Shelley to shed some light on the double predicament of the subaltern woman. However, a powerful female voice, able to represent and express herself, might have been proved more effective in challenging the colonial institutionalized silence of the subaltern woman. Therefore, it can be claimed that Safie is freer than the other women in the novel, though the freedom she enjoys is granted to her at the cost of denying her the voice that speaks her identity and culture, given the fact that Safie has internalized the European French language in order to be assimilated and accepted by the Delaceys.

Additionally, Safie does not constitute the sole example of a subaltern woman, taking into account the almost complete creation of another female creature which would perhaps also be treated as a subaltern if it actually came to life. The destruction of the female creature constitutes more than just an act of violence and termination. More specifically, Frankenstein's impulsive choice to destroy his newest creation which remains forever in the dark, does not offer the female creature the opportunity to be educated and be introduced in society, not even as a female subaltern. The female creature is not allowed even to assume the lowest position at the bottom of the societal hierarchy. Her absence from society and her inability to obtain a voice and speak for herself, are all testimonies to the condition that the female subaltern has to face, an absolute denial of any form of representation and in this particular case even the right to an embodied physical materialization. Spivak (1985: 255) rightly underlines the impact and implications of the female creature's destruction highlighting that "[e]ven in the laboratory, the woman in the making is not a bodied corpse but a human being", arguing that what Frankenstein perceives as an amalgamation of different butchered pieces of flesh, that he has put together, is in fact more than that. Indeed, Frankenstein's act of hubris has created life, therefore the female creature is indeed a human being, a human being who is denied basic rights. First and foremost, the female creature is denied the right to life and consequently the right to education and freedom of expression. Consequently, the reader needs to take into consideration the potential existence of the female creature and what this potential presence would have to offer both to society and to the male creature. Zonana's (1991: 182) insightful commentary that "Frankenstein's destruction of the half-completed female creature ... masks the fear of female spirituality, and its powerful challenge to patriarchal domination" captures the essence of Frankenstein's violent action, as he seeks to exterminate and annihilate not only the body but also the female creature's thinking mind. It can be argued that the female creature might have revolted against Frankenstein and his exercise of control over his creations. The thinking female creature might even have denied the male creature's offer of companionship and even demanded a position higher than being placed under the male creature in the social pyramid. Therefore, Shelley's poetic decision to describe vividly the destruction of the female body constitutes a quite symbolic example of the everlasting silencing of the female subaltern.

Considering that Frankenstein destroys the body of this female subaltern without any remorse, this conduct is indicative of the predicament of the female subaltern, who is not treated as a living being but as a non-grievable object. This condition in

fact, correlates highly with Judith Butler's (2004: 32) pioneer argument that certain lives are considered to be of extremely high value and protected at all costs, whereas "[o]ther lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable'", such as the white idealized characters whose deaths are largely grieved, in contrast to the female subaltern's body which does not qualify as human. In particular, Victor's declaration that he has "a resolution to pursue [his] destroyer to death" (Shelley, 2006: 471) in order to avenge the death of his family and friends, actually demonstrates which lives are considered worthy of grief, namely white, high-class European lives. On the contrary, the description of the female subaltern's destruction involves no compassion for the female creature nor does it invoke any condemnation, as Victor narrates how "trembling with passion, [he] tore to pieces the thing" (Shelley, 2006: 436) on which he was working. Considering that the female creature is defined as a thing and not as the body of an actual person, what becomes distinctively visible, is the overall objectification of the female body, and especially of the subaltern one. Reflecting upon Zoe Beenstock's (2015: 8) commentary that "Victor destroys the female creature to guarantee social stability and explains this act as preempting a possible revolution in sexual politics", it can be clearly perceived that Victor desires indeed to secure and preserve the dominance of white masculinity over both white and subaltern femininity, in order to prevent his downfall. As a result, the lost future and non-grieved body of the female creature, further reinforce the argument that in order to be grieved, a person needs to be firstly acknowledged as human, a privilege which is never really attained by the female subaltern.

More specifically, as the body of the female creature becomes obliterated, and is offered no option to acquire a voice and negotiate its position, it can be easily argued that the female subaltern becomes forever silenced through this male violent action, left to be represented by the dominant male. It is in no case coincidental, that both Safie and the female creature, which constitute different manifestations of the female subaltern identity, are denied in the novel any actual access to voice and first-person narration. In the light of this realization, Spivak's (2018: 93) insightful assertion that "one never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness" virtually materializes in the novel's complete and successful silencing of the female subaltern by the dominant male in the established gender hierarchy. This silencing can be perhaps thoroughly explained in relation to the masculine fear of the female voice's capacity to reverse and dismantle the existing power relations. In specific, the possibility of an eloquent and reasonable female subaltern is highly dreaded by the white dominant male, as it necessarily poses a threat to his established power. In fact, Victor's justification of the destruction of the subaltern body indeed confirms his intimate fear of it, as he openly admits that "she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation" (Shelley, 2006: 435) and thus disturb both Victor and the creature's efforts to control her body and voice. It is for this exact reason that the female creature shall never be born or heard. In regard to Beenstock's (2015: 8) position that "Shelley contrasts the female creature's powerless status and silenced voice with Victor's privileged position, and also with that of the articulate male

creature” it can be indeed argued that the contrast between this female character and the male ones is evident. However, whether this contrast is intended by Shelley to highlight the subaltern’s predicament remains ambiguous. What remains unambiguous, however, is the persisting fact that the female subaltern, in all cases, remains both implicitly and forcefully silenced and misrepresented by her oppressor, who speaks on her behalf.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, *Frankenstein* is a complex gothic novel, considering that its inherent hybridity is largely indebted on the fusion of different literary genres and theories, among which the Orientalist discourse is unequivocally central. The stereotypical portrayal of the novel’s non-white characters indeed betrays that it is highly aware of the epistemological binary between Orient and Occident that Said has touched upon. Both the creature’s appalling apparition and hybrid body, along with the eminently idealized and romanticized misrepresentation of Safie as the quintessentially exotic Oriental woman, can be viewed as profoundly Orientalist. On the other hand, the novel’s innovation and point of divergence from Orientalism, can be traced in relation to the subaltern male’s acquisition of a powerful voice, which undoubtedly functions as a form of conscious resistance to the dominant white man and the established race hierarchy. The creature’s newfound eloquence and power enables him primarily to become a master of his fate and secondly to address, persuade and openly challenge his white creator and his narrative, reversing the master-slave hierarchy. In this light, the male creature manages quite successfully to escape the limitations of the subaltern condition and to create a new societal position for himself, before his mysterious disappearance in the novel’s ambiguous closure. In this context of the novel’s Orientalist discourse, if the subaltern male’s acquisition of voice, through the employment of the white colonizer’s language, is compared to the corresponding internalization of the European language by the female subaltern, the predicament of the subaltern woman appears in all its entirety, as she is denied any access to voice and any opportunity to be represented objectively. In contrast to their male equivalent, neither Safie nor the almost alive female creature are allowed to have their own narrative in the epistolary form of the novel, but they are at all times misrepresented by the male characters, both white and subaltern, that wish to control them. In this respect, it becomes quite apparent that there is indeed no position for the subaltern woman to actually speak and be heard of in this novel (Spivak, 2018: 103). The destruction thus, of the female creature’s body is highly indicative of the oppressed and silent condition of the subaltern woman. It constitutes a rather symbolic testimony to the systematic silencing and act of erasure that the Western, male dominated social hierarchy exercises over the female subaltern’s body and mind.

The present paper explored *Frankenstein*, under a feminist, postcolonial prism, building up on the already rich research carried out by scholars such as Spivak, Zonana and many more researchers, who pushed the limits of the existing bibliography on

what constitutes undoubtedly a timeless classic novel. This research drew largely on key theoretical works, bringing together seminal concepts such as that of orientalism, the subaltern condition, examining previous commentary on the text's employment of such concepts. Moreover, this paper undertook to contribute to the current bibliography, by focusing more closely on the narratorial strategy of voice and silence as these are skillfully employed by Shelley in her novel, underlining the role of voice in the subaltern's perennial effort to be liberated. The paper also elaborated on the role of silence and the literary representations of absence and erasure as these are best reflected in the case of the female subalterns. Last but not least, this research introduced to the equation questions of precariousness and grievability, drawing on Judith Butler's work, in order to investigate the significance of grief for the perception of the subaltern as human. The paper thus opens up further questions, in relation to the various literary strategies that can be utilized in order to creatively present and represent the predicament of the female subaltern, as the narratorial strategies of voice, silence and grievability that have been hereby examined.

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## GLAS I TIŠINA RODNO ODREĐENOG SUBALTERNOG SUBJEKTA U ROMANU *FRANKENŠTAJN* MERI ŠELI

### Apstrakt

Ovaj rad ispituje stvaranje i održavanje orijentalističkog diskursa, kao i davanje glasa i ućutkivanje rodno određenog subalternog Drugog u svetski poznatom klasiku Meri Šeli, *Frankenštajn*. Zapravo, analiza pokazuje da se određenim likovima orijentalnog porekla ili izgleda u romanu, kao što su Safi i stvorenje, pripisuju suštinski i stereotipno orijentalističke osobine u poređenju sa belim evropskim likovima. Štaviše, rad naglašava da ženskim subalternima, u ovom slučaju Safi, kao i žensko stvorenje koje njen tvorac uništava, nije dat glas. Preciznije, Safinu priču u potpunosti pripoveda stvorenje dok žensko stvorenje gine pre nego što je dobilo priliku da ispriča svoju priču. Dalje se tvrdi da, iako je muški subaltern, odnosno Frankenštajново stvorenje, prikazan kao divljački izvor straha, njemu je dat moćan glas, jer je obrazovan i elokventan, otvoreno prkoseći svom tvorcu i zahtevajući slobodu. Ova situacija otkriva složenu diferencijaciju u reprezentaciji i pristupu moći subalternog subjekta, u zavisnosti od njegovog roda. Ova studija oslanja se na teoriju Gajatri Spivak, *Može li subaltern govoriti?*, koja se fokusira na epistemološko nasilje koje subalterni subjekti, posebno žene, trpe kada bivaju ućutkani. Takođe, rad se oslanja i na teoriju Edvarda Saida o orijentalizmu, koja se bavi stereotipnim prikazivanjem Orijenta na osnovu kojeg se stvara slika Zapada. Sledstveno tome, cilj rada je da doprinese postojećoj obimnoj literaturi posvećenoj proučavanju romana *Frankenštajn* u postkolonijalnom kontekstu u svetlu njegovog orijentalističkog diskursa, sa fokusom na manje istražene aspekte glasa i tišine rodno određenog subalternog subjekta.

**Ključne reči:** orijentalizam, subaltern, rod, glas, reprezentacija