

Pursuit of knowledge and its effects/ Ambition

In the novel, *Frankenstein*, the pursuit of knowledge is depicted by Shelley as dangerous to those pursuing the knowledge as well as those close to the ones pursuing knowledge. This is mainly presented through Walton and Victor who are both shown to be promethean overreachers with Walton seeking to learn “the secret of the magnet” and Victor spending nights “filled with ardour” to “infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing”. As early as letter 4, it is clear to the readers that Walton’s aims are unrealistic, and his pursuit of knowledge is dangerous, “surrounded by ice...scarcely leaving her sea-room in which she floated. Our situation was somewhat dangerous”. This idea of unrealism is accentuated in chapters 4 and 5 of the novel where Victor is seen collecting “bones from Charnel-houses” and residing beside “The dissecting room and the slaughterhouse” rather than talking to or even acknowledging his family. This is also reflected in the 4 letters at the beginning of the novel where Walton has left his family in order to pursue knowledge. Victor’s unrealistic aim to replicate the “human frame” distances him further from his Edenic, prelapsarian childhood into the horrifying and traumatising postlapsarian nightmare caused by the onslaught of his own creation, a “miserable monster” and “wretched devil” who aimed to destroy Victor. Walton sees many of his men lose their lives in his pursuit of knowledge and eventually he accepts his mission to be too dangerous, “we were immured in ice, and should probably never escape...consented to return if we are not destroyed”. Every death, direct or indirect, in the Frankenstein family; William, Justine, the father, Elizabeth and eventually Victor himself was caused by the “abhorred monster” and “fiend” that Victor himself created. These death’s and by extent the psychological trauma mirrors the punishment given to Prometheus, where he was chained to a rock and an eagle ate his liver, only for it to regrow overnight and the eagle to return every day and eat it – leaving the titan in eternal pain, which in the case of Victor, could only be stopped by pain.

The creature’s pursuit of knowledge disassociates him from man and causes his Satanic fall from grace and his subsequent pursuit of vengeance on mankind. After the birth of the creature, he learns of fire and how “the same cause should produce such opposite effects”. He later learns he is “wretched” in terms of his physiognomy in the eyes of mankind when an “old man...perceiving [the creature], shrieked loudly...ran across the fields”. While the creature is observing the DeLacey family, he also gains the ability to read and with this ability, discovers that he has been abandoned by his creator. This rejection was his first step into his fall from grace. Later, he learns that all adults will judge him for his physical appearance when, upon seeing him, “Agatha fainted...Safie...rushed out of the cottage...Felix darted

forward...dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently with a stick". This exemplifies the creature's hatred for mankind and he takes one more opportunity to convince man that he is good when he sees William. William calls him "Monster! Ugly wretch! You wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces – you are an ogre" and the mention of the name Frankenstein, "My papa is a syndic – M. Frankenstein" leads to the death of William. This shows how the creature, in attempts to discover what it means to be human and who his family is, is thrust into a life hidden from humanity and one of crime and murder. His pursuit of knowledge was dangerous not only for him but also for all those around him. The creature's pursuit of knowledge and his eventual obtaining of knowledge leads to him wanting love and family, and his inability to obtain that leads to his hatred for mankind and his eventual murder of the entire Frankenstein family, directly and indirectly. Shelley uses the creature to show how the pursuit of knowledge is dangerous as it makes people wish to obtain the unobtainable, leading to hate, revenge and death. The creature frames Justine for the murder of William purely because he was envious of William having a loving upbringing and him having absolutely no one in his life.

Creation and the imagination and its effects

The unnatural creation of human beings creates a “wretch” delineated from mankind physically and emotionally. Victor creates the creature without the involvement of the maternal and using “bones from charnel-houses” meaning that the “human frame” which he sought to replicate was “8 feet tall” so that Victor could add in every detail and the result was “yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath...horrid contrast with his watery eyes...dun white sockets...shrivelled complexion and straight black lips”. At first the creature is kind-hearted but his rejection from mankind due to his assumed physiognomy leads to the corruption of his mind and his fall from grace, much like in Milton’s paradise lost. The creature is, symbolically, the product of Victor’s fantasies of new life without the involvement of the female. The lack of said female figure in his life and his conception can be interpreted as the cause of his physical and psychological deformities. Victor aimed to be God and therefore create Adam, “I ought to be thy Adam” but the results of his promethean overreaching was the creation of a parallel to Satan, “I am rather the fallen angel”. Victor, when meeting the creature in the Alps, calls him a “Devil”, which relates to when reading Milton’s paradise lost, the creature likens himself most to the character of Satan. He does this as he is rejected by his family and left without a love in the world. Unlike Adam, who had his prelapsarian beginnings, the creature was born into isolation and the creature, “feeling pain invade [him] on all sides, [he] sat down and wept”. This is significant because the creature was intended to be the first of a great species, just as God intended Adam to be the first of a great species, but the creature’s unnatural creation ensured that he could not be accepted by any man who could see and this destroyed the dream of the creation of a new species. The creature’s unnatural creation relates to the motif of incest as Victor aims to remove the role of the maternal and by extent family relationships by creating life himself. This is a parallel to Satan who gave birth to sin using only his mind, just as Victor did with the creature.

The destruction of the creature’s imagination of having a relationship with a member of the opposite sex, as mankind did, ensured the creature’s turn to evil. The creature’s claim “I was supposed to be thy Adam” is followed by the wish to “create a female for [him]...as hideous as [him]self”. The creature has, along with his wish of a female, imagined a life far from the judgement of mankind, “I would make peace with the whole kind...cut off from the world...neither [Victor] nor any other human being shall ever see us again”. The creature spends many days and nights of his life imagining his new life with this unborn female creature and then he sees Victor “destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness...solemn vow...never

to resume [Victor's] labours". This destroys not only the creature's imagination and hope of a new life but also his psychological state and further fuels his revenge. His psychological state is a parallel in one way to Victor's psychological state in chapter 5 where the creature is born, both Victor and the creature's hopes and dreams of a new life and a new species that can thrive are ripped away. This destruction led to the creature saying, "I will be there on your wedding night" and on Victor's wedding night, the creature kills Victor's wife and destroys Victor's dream of a happily married life with a woman, just as Victor did to the creature.

Horror and its effects

Shelley uses the creature's physical characteristics and the effect that appearance has on humanity to present horror and its effects in 'Frankenstein'. The creature himself is the physical manifestation of horror, created by Victor using "bones from charnel-houses" while he was residing beside "the dissecting room and the slaughterhouse". The creation of the creature from a collection of corpses accentuates the gothic nature of the novel and is the cause of the creature's grotesque appearance. Shelley presents this with Victor's "breathless horror and disgust" upon seeing the creature after its birth, "how can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe...yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath ...dun white sockets...shrivelled complexion and straight black lips". Victor's horror is further accentuated by the gothic binary of beauty and the sublime. This is illustrated by the "luxuriances" of the creature's hair which was "lustrous black, and flowing" and teeth which were of a "pearly whiteness" which "formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes". Horror is further illustrated when an old man in his cottage "shrieked loudly...quitting the hut, ran across the fields". Here the old man experiences horror when faced with the physical appearance of the creature. This is further depicted by the DeLacey family, where the creature is not judged by the blind father but only by the 3 people that can see the creature. This shows that the creature originally created horror through his appearance and not through his personality. William's rejection of the creature, "you wish to eat me...you are an ogre" presents how the creature is horrifying to even small children due to his appearance.

The effects of horror are shown through the rejection of the creature. While there is the original gothic binary of external "deformities" and inner beauty and innocence, the creature transgresses into a satanic figure and his outer ugliness is reflected by his mental state. Victor's immediate disgust, "How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe", along with his rejection, "I rushed out of the room" along with the DeLacey family's rejection the creature where "Agatha fainted...Safie...rushed out of the cottage... Felix darted forward...dashed [the creature] to the ground, and struck [the creature] violently with a stick" is the main cause of horror in Frankenstein as it catalyses the creature's fall from grace into a satanic figure, "Devil", who causes the Edenic downfall of the hubristic Victor Frankenstein, along with the rest of the Frankenstein family. The creature's solitude far from mankind's judgement due to his brutalisation at the hands of the "barbarous villagers" causes him to regress in a decrepit "low hovel" which mimics the embryonic womb room in which the creature was born. This creates a gothic binary

between the creature filled with animalistic tendencies and living in a “kennel” to the eloquent, perfectly composes being that is seen in chapter 10. Finally, the creature’s unfulfilled want for love, along with the horrific destruction of the female creature that the creature is forced to witness “I tore it limb from limb” fuels the revenge lust of the creature even more and furthers his progression from a prelapsarian Adam “I ought to be thy Adam” to a postlapsarian satanic figure, “I will be with you on your wedding night” – a further cause of horror in the novel. The destruction of the future bride of the creature causes the creature’s psychological trauma to multiply and is horrifying from the creature’s perspective as to him, it appears as if a child is being ripped to shreds by a maniacal scientist. The creature’s progression to a satanic figure is hastened when William is disgusted by him “you wish to eat me...you are an ogre” and this established in the creature’s mind that solitude is his prison, and no human will ever accept him – regardless of age.

Settings

Shelley uses the arctic setting to signify a geographically, and by implication morally, remote location. This relates to Victor and the creature as both characters are presented with a warped moral compass. The arctic setting is at the extremity of human experience, “a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe” and is utilised by Shelley to signify the place of extraordinary events which surpasses human understanding. The creature can be interpreted as the living manifestation of this setting, as he is an extraordinary being who surpasses the understanding of all but Victor. The extremity of the setting can also represent and reflect the perilous and extreme moral dilemmas faced by characters. The setting mirrors Victor’s dilemmas when he reaches it as he has to decide between losing all hope or pursuing the creature and killing him for what he has done. The setting metaphorically delineates mankind on the brink of the unknown and the monstrous, eerie and grotesque products of promethean overreaching by establishing a parallel between Walton who wishes to ascertain “the secret of the magnet” and Victor who wished to “infuse a spark of being into this lifeless thing”. Both goals, much like the arctic setting, surpassed what was considered possible but were destined to fail. Both men aimed to achieve their goals through different means, Victor isolated himself and sought to surpass what was scientifically possible while Walton wishes to find his way through the polar region and surpass what was physically possible. The arctic setting appears at the beginning and end of the novel and encapsulates the rest of the novel in the Chinese box structure making it not only the physical extremity in the novel but also the metaphorical extremity that surrounds the rest of the novel in the structure. This, therefore, sets the premise of the novel to be based around the extremities of all aspects of the world and life. For example, Justine is subjected to the extremity of the justice system when she is sentenced to death and Victor is sentenced to the extremity of punishments where his entire family is taken from him.

The alpine setting used in ‘Frankenstein’ is both literally and figuratively on top of the world and this establishes a parallel with Victor’s “Solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase”. The alpine landscape resonates with the key theme of isolation and its presentation in the physical and metaphorical sense. Victor and the creature are physically isolated as they are miles away from any human contact and are metaphorically isolated as the alpine setting at the top of the world symbolises Victor’s isolation in his cell at the top of his house in “Ingolstadt”. Victor’s ambition to “infuse a spark of being into this lifeless thing” rather than accept that the natural science is

mere “sad trash”, as indicated by his father, isolates him from the rest of mankind, as he ventures to achieve what mankind deems impossible. The beauty of this sublime setting, “glorious presence – chamber of imperial nature”, juxtaposes with the uncanny and grotesque physical deformities of Victor’s creation, a being at the bottom of the world, sentenced to living in a mere “hovel” like an animal. This emphasises Victor as a promethean overreacher, as his attempt to end up figuratively at the top of the world is not achieved (when he sees himself as the future leader of a new civilisation) ends only in disaster and while he physically journeys to the top of the world, it is only after his life has partially been destroyed. The alpine settings and its vast, free nature juxtaposes with the entrapment of the “low hovel” which was “quite bare”. The creature’s journey from the hovel to the alpine setting is not only an increase in physical altitude but also in mental ability and intelligence. The creature rises from a “kennel” where he exhibits animalistic tendencies to “a wonderful and stupendous scene” where he is able to compose his thoughts perfectly and act as if he is a sophisticated member of a community.

Importance of family and its effects

The creature's lack of family due to Victor's rejection of him and his subsequent envy leads to his eventual fall from grace, much like Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and hatred of mankind. The creature is rejected by Victor when he is born, "I rushed out of the room" and the creature is left there, "feeling pain invade [him] on all sides, [he] sat down and wept". The creature's rejection from his father (Victor Frankenstein) in the early moments of his life juxtaposes with Victor's Edenic prelapsarian childhood where he was surrounded by family, "we were brought up together" and this is significant because while Victor moved to "Ingolstadt" in order to study and cut off contact with his family, barely acknowledging their existence, the creature was unable to survive solitude without harm to his mental state.. The creature's lack of family includes his lack of the maternal and so the lack of sufficient guidance to do the right thing. Even "the moon had disappeared from the night" and this symbolises that there is no maternal in the creature's life – only abandonment. This lack of a maternal figure in his life is a cause of him framing Justine for the murder of William, as he wonders why she didn't care for him, but she did care for William, "joy-imparting smiles are bestowed on all but me". The creature's rejection relates to the idea of nature and nurture as he is left without nurture and only nature and so he kills William, Victor's friend and Victor's wife in an onslaught of revenge for his abandonment. When the creature's bride is destroyed, "I tore it limb from limb", the creature is left with no hope of having a family and this cements his turn towards evil and his hatred towards Victor, leading to the death of Elizabeth. Shelley utilises the DeLacey family to show what the creature cannot have and make him yearn for happiness with his family, "I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature; they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced"

Shelley uses the DeLacey family and the Frankenstein family to present dysfunctional or broken families as still having the ability to be happy. The DeLacey family is presented without the presence of a maternal figure, a parallel to the Frankenstein family. Furthermore, both families are presented with fathers who are sympathetic and loving towards their children and in the case of DeLacey, outsiders. Despite their lack of food and money, the family is somewhat happy due to the love they have for each other. Safie's entrance into the DeLacey household further increased the happiness levels of the DeLacey family, "Felix seemed ravished with delight...every trait of sorrow vanished from his face...expressed joy...joy had taken the place of sadness". The Frankenstein family is broken after the death of Caroline Beaufort,

Victor's mother. Despite the sadness of her death, along with Victor leaving, the family is still happy, and Elizabeth and Victor are still able to enjoy a good wedding before the creature kills her.

Victor's oedipal complex, along with his tendency for incest, is presented by Shelley in the horrific nightmare dreamscape Victor experiences shortly after the birth of the creature and this emphasises Elizabeth's fluidity of roles in Victor's life. The nightmare augments the incest motif of the novel as it takes Victor's adopted sister and places her in the position of his wife, "embraced her...imprinted the first kiss on her lips" before "her features appeared to change...held the corpse of [his] dead mother in [his] arms". This dreamscape emphasises Victor's uncertainty about his feelings for Elizabeth, as well as his guilt for creating the creature. Incest is presented through the dreamscape as the strong female presence in his dream represents him having assumed the role of the woman as well as the man in creating the creature and thus created death rather than life, "grave-worms". This fluidity of roles relates to the gothic theme of uncertainty as Victor is clearly uncertain about what role Elizabeth has in his life. She cared for him as a mother would after the death of Caroline, she loved him as a sister when they were "brought up together" and then she loved him romantically in the time leading up to their wedding and the short time that they were married.

Misery and despair

Victor's misery and despair is presented through his change in attitude and behaviour in Walton's letters from his attitude and behaviour in his narrative. The Chinese box structure encapsulates Victor's narrative and creates an inevitable misery that the readers know he will have to face, sealing his fate. When Victor describes himself in chapter 4, as he is creating the creature he is hardworking and filled with passion for "natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry", "I read with ardour those works...my ardour was indeed the astonishment of the students...my proficiency that of the masters...engaged, heart and soul...I had dedicated myself". This juxtaposes with his behaviour and attitude in the letters and in the continuation, "He must have been a noble creature in his better days, being even now in wreck so attractive and amiable...Do you share my madness?...paroxysm of grief that had seized the stranger overcame his weakened powers...great and unparalleled misfortunes...so miserable a wretch". It is clear to the readers that Victor has undergone extreme psychological changes as he no longer has ambition and has given up on life. Victor, however, is still trapped inside his need for revenge against the creature. Victor refuses to leave the inhospitable extremity of the arctic circle without confronting his creation, showing that he is willing to die in order to seek justice for his family, a true change in personality from the man who could not acknowledge his family's existence. Frankenstein's misery, however, is initially presented alongside his selfish nature. When William is killed, and Justine is framed and executed for the murder Victor, "the misery [he] imagined and dreaded... indulging in the misery of reflection", speaks of his own misery and complains but does not alert anybody about the existence of the creature and in doing so ensures that even more people will be killed in the creature's onslaught. Frankenstein never admits that he is responsible for his own misery and blames fate and his parents, saying that his future was "in their hands to direct to happiness or misery" and that if his father did not disregard the works of "Cornelius Agrippa" as "sad trash" then he would not have taken an interest in "natural philosophy."

Shelley presents misery and despair through the creature's experiences ignites the flame of the creature's revenge on the Frankenstein family and by extent, mankind. The creature undergoes intense and immediate rejection from his "creator", "how can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe...rushed out of the room". "Breathless horror and disgust filled [Victor's] heart" when he saw the creature and he left the "poor, helpless, miserable wretch" alone to survive without nurture from anyone. This

rejection, along with the creature's observation of the happiness and companionship of the DeLacey family makes the creature long for his own family, especially after his education – reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* amongst other literature – and realisation that “no father had watched [his] infant days, no mother had blessed [him] with smiles and caresses”. This realisation causes the creature to be envious of not only the DeLacey family, but also Victor's prelapsarian and Edenic childhood which juxtaposes with the creature's isolation and rejection. The creature's envy incites him to remove from Victor his family, as the creature did not have family. This begins with the murder of William, which occurred because William said his “papa [was] M. Frankenstein”. The creature's misery is presented when he is forced to leave the DeLacey household, “I could have torn him limb from limb...But my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness...overcome by pain and anguish, I quitted the cottage”. The creature is too miserable to even do anything in this moment and this captures clearly the psychological effect that rejection had on the creature.

The monstrous

The Chinese box narrative structure, the fluid interchangeability between Walton, Frankenstein and the creature along with the symbiotic doppelganger motif that intimately links Victor and his “wretched” creation positions the monstrous structurally and thematically at the centre of this novel, imbuing debate with moral ambiguity.

Frankenstein and his creation both embody the monstrous in different forms. Originally, a juxtaposition is exhibited by Shelley with the inner monstrous nature of Victor Frankenstein and the outer monstrous appearance of the creature. Whether nature or nurture is considered, Victor is the cause of the creature’s evil. When considering nature as the cause of the creature’s evil, the creature is evil because he was created without the presence of a maternal figure and that imbued the monstrous nature into “this catastrophe” that Victor created. When considering nurture as the cause of the creature’s evil, the monster tells Victor “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed.” The creature falls from grace, much like Satan in Milton’s *paradise lost*, as he was “solitary and abhorred” after being “shunned and hated by all mankind”. This drives the creature who “cannot inspire love” to “cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred”. The creature’s rejection from society and his creator led the creature to adopt monstrous behaviour, just as Satan did.

The creature’s narrative raises the question of what it means to be monstrous. The inner-outer dichotomy between sensibility and physical “deformities” withdraws from societal responsibility in the creation of the monstrous. This is presented by Shelley when an “old man...turned on hearing a noise...shrieked loudly...quitting the hut...ran across the fields”. This is accentuated by the behaviour of the DeLacey family where “Agatha fainted...Safie...rushed out of the cottage... Felix darted forward...dashed [the creature] to the ground, and struck [the creature] violently with a stick”. Only the blind DeLacey does “raise [the creature] from the dust by [his] kindness”. This depicts society as judging people on purely on their physiognomy and as DeLacey is unable to do this, he treats the creature with the same kindness that he treats human beings. Even Victor, the creator, refers to the creature as “Devil” which suggests there is no hope for the creature’s redemption – with William and Justine already dead. In this way Victor, and by extent society,

exhibit monstrous qualities by judging and persecuting the innocent for appearing different.

Fittingly the confrontation between Frankenstein and the creature occurs in the extremities of the sublime Alpine setting where the gothic binaries of light and dark accentuate the moral transgression of both characters; the harsh and jagged rock face is a metaphor for the fractured and by extent disconnected psyche of both characters with Victor voluntarily isolated from humanity and the creature isolated involuntarily. The alpine landscape acts as the epicentre of anagnorisis where Victor, the hubristic and deluded Promethean overreacher is forced to confront the outcome of his unrestrained and ego-fuelled penetration into the natural order of science and “natural philosophy”: he sees the results of his unhallowed labours and the consequences of his role as an unloving and neglectful father. The monstrous scientist beholds his monstrous creation – a “wretched” embodiment of the scientist’s personality.

Mary Shelley does not just present the monstrous in ‘Frankenstein’ using the creature, which the reader immediately surmises as the clear monster of the novel, but also using Victor and by extent the society in which he was raised for rejecting the “miserable wretch” for his physical appearance without any regard for his personality or his mental state. While the creature may embody the monstrous in a physical sense, Victor Frankenstein is the true monster of the novel – with society sharing many of his monstrous qualities.