Frankenstein Biography, Setting, Plot Outline,Themes,Literary Techniques Essay, Research Paper

Most people know of Mary Shelley as the writer of Frankenstein and the wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. However, she was far more than that, and parts of her life were just as dramatic and tragic, if not more so, than her famous gothic novel. Mary’s parents were themselves well-known in English society and somewhat notorious. Her father, William Godwin, was a radical theorist on the French Revolution. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was a pioneer of women’s rights and her book A Vindication of the Rights of Woman caused considerable reaction at the time. Furthermore, she already had an illegitimate child, Fanny Imlay, and was pregnant with Mary when she married William Godwin. She was born in London in 1797. Sadly, Mary never knew her mother as she died just ten days after giving birth. Literary theorists have suggested that this sense of loss and search for identity can be found in Mary’s works, particularly in Frankenstein and the creature’s search for his creator.

Mary was just fifteen years old when she first met Percy Shelley. He was an ardent admirer of Godwin’s works and politics and a frequent visitor to the Godwin’s home along with his wife Harriet. Percy s wife, Harriet, became suspicious of Mary and Percy, thinking they were having an affair she left Percy. Her suspicious were later confirmed when she got word of the couple eloping to France. Not receiving William Godwin s blessing, Mary and Percy eloped to France on July 28, 1814. They settled in Paris briefly whilst Mary recovered from extreme fatigue and sea sickness caused by the journey. They then began a trip across France into Switzerland with just one mule for assistance. Despite the hardship of the journey and dwindling money, they both read a great deal and kept a joint journal of their experiences. Their six week tour came to an end and they were forced to return to England due to lack of money. Shelley was now pursued by moneylenders and they lived in a series of lodgings in London, trying to keep one step ahead of being arrested. It was during this holiday that one night the topic of conversation turned to the supernatural and Percy proposed that they should each write a ghost story. That night Mary suffered a waking nightmare and from this grew the story of Frankenstein. Mary spent just under a year writing this book and was only nineteen years of age on its completion.

Upon their settlement in Rome, Mary gave birth to a young boy named William. Unfortunately, the heat caused young William to contract a fever which later developed into malaria. Sadly, the following year young William passed away. With such unthinkable losses it is not surprising that Mary lapsed into a deep depression which did not lift even when she discovered she was pregnant again. She still continued with her writing and completed her second novel Matilda. Later that year she gave birth to her second son, Percy Florence. The following year they moved to Pisa and Mary began writing Valperga. The Shelleys enjoyed a relatively trouble free time until 1822. In June of that year Mary suffered a miscarriage and in July Percy Shelley drowned at sea.

Despite this melancholy Mary found the strength to forge ahead and the following year began writing The Last Man. Their son Percy continued to thrive and Mary gained strength and comfort from him. Mary continued to write as means of supporting herself and her son. Further works of hers were published including The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck, Lodore and Falkner. She also found work by contributing biographical and critical essays on famous Italian, French, and Spanish writers for a regular publication. Percy secured a place at Harrow and Mary continued working throughout his education which continued at Cambridge. Mary’s works became more diverse, writing prefaces and notes for Shelley’s Poetical Works. She also wrote three volumes on the Lives of the Most Eminent Men of France. Her traveling experiences were put to use in the writing of Rambles in Germany and Italy.

. Mary Shelley died at the age of 53 from a brain tumor in 1851. She is buried in St. Peters Churchyard, Bournemouth along with the transferred remains of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Despite suffering so many tragedies and losses during her life, she was a prolific writer and her memory will continue to live on through her most famous creation – Frankenstein.

Victor Frankenstein grew up with two parents who loved and nurtured him. He spent the first couple years of his life moving around with his parents. When his brother Earnest was born the Frankensteins moved back to Geneva where they would stay to raise their family. Caroline, Victor’s mother, adopted a young girl the same age as Victor, Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Victor were very close and Victor showed unconditional love toward Elizabeth. Victor was also blessed with a second brother, William. Victor Frankenstein’s quest for knowledge is discovered during the beginnings of his education. As Victor begins reading elementary philosophy at the age of thirteen, he finds himself, “imbued with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature” (25). Victor had the most fulfilled childhood, which is why it was so peculiar that he went off the deep end. After Victor’s mother died, his father thought it best that Victor attend school in Ingolstadt, where he would study natural philosophy and chemistry. This excitement and desire to explore natural philosophy to its end, leads Victor to depart for the university of Ingolstadt soon after his seventeenth birthday. Within just two years he, “had become as well acquainted with the theory and practice of natural philosophy as depended on the lessons of any of the professors,”(36) and thought of quitting his education. Instead of this, Victor decided to more intensely study the concepts of life, and soon stumbled upon the secret of life itself. As Victor begins to construct a living being and apply his discovery in order to give it animation and life, he becomes absorbed in his work. At this point, he has isolated himself from society to fulfill his great expectations and depriving himself of nutrition and companionship, he states that he “seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit” (38). Victor’s search for knowledge concludes as he finishes his creation one dreary night in November.

The creature brought to life by Victor is quickly abandoned by its creator, and forced to discover its identity and knowledge without assistance. The monster’s quest for knowledge begins the instant he is brought into the world, and speaking of this point in his life, the monster states: “I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept” (87). Here, the monster is as innocent and naive as a newborn baby, and without a parental figure to guide and take care of it, is limited to an experiential learning process.

During the monster’s quest for knowledge, he encounters the hostility that all humans seemed to show towards him, and at this point, the monster begins to learn about his difference from society. Finding a hovel connected to a cottage in which he could inhabit without human interference, the monster views a family’s everyday life for an extended period of time. The experiences that he endures here are the cornerstone and essence of his education. During this time in his life, the family he is watching, the De Lacey’s, begins to teach a foreign visitor how to speak the English language. This, combined with the discovery of several books, allows the monster an opportunity to learn how to read and talk, and desiring knowledge, he “bent every faculty towards that purpose” (103). With the monster’s newfound knowledge, came understanding, as he stated that “the words induced me to turn towards myself” (104). “What was I?”(105)

The monster’s hate towards his irresponsible creator begins to form immediately following his education. Besides Victor’s rejection of him, the event which determines his quest for vengeance against Victor is a final, failed attempt to fit into society. During this incident, the monster decides to confront a blind resident of the De Lacey cottage at a time when he is isolated. Getting his chance, he befriends the man who can not judge him with sight, only to have the other residents return to curse and beat him out. After this incident he says, “Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed?”(121) The feelings of rejection that the monster encounters transform into feelings of “rage and revenge” (121). With papers discovered in his jacket, he deciphers the location of Victor’s residence and decides to seek out his “unfeeling, heartless creator” (124). Thinking of Victor he expresses, “The nearer I approached your habitation, the more deeply did I feel the spirit of revenge enkindled in my heart” (125). In the end, with his quest for vengeance complete, the monster explains that he only wanted to love his creator but that his adoration turned to murderous hate in his creator’s rejection of him.

Victor Frankenstein was born in Geneva as the eldest son in a distinguished family. As described by himself in the novel, he has a very pleasant childhood mostly thanks to two kind and indulgent parents and Elizabeth. Even as a child he has a violent temper, vehement passions and a thirst for knowledge. His first interest is poetry but after some time his attention focuses on science. This interest quickly turns into an obsession: he is completely dedicated to learning the secrets of heaven and earth. His obsession is marked by radical changes in his character and health. He changes from a gentle, kind and healthy man to a selfish, sickly being who even loses contact with his beloved family for several years. Later, Victor says that he had been “misled by passion”(196) and that he was under “the evil influence of the Angel of Destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father’s door”(32).

It is only after the creation of the monster that Victor starts thinking about the consequences of his actions. The obsession had apparently blinded him from doing that before. He does not, however, take responsibility for what has happened. Actually, he seems quite eager to forget all about it, but of course the monster will not let him forget.

After the monster has told him his story, Victor does feel some compassion. He even feels responsible for his creation. However, the responsibility for his fellow human beings eventually takes over, as Victor decides not to comply with the monster’s request after all. This sense of compassion for the monster completely disappears when Elizabeth is killed. The only thing that Victor can feel after that point is hate. His sole purpose in life, which used to be creating life from lifeless matter, now becomes avenging his family and friends by killing that newly created life: the monster.

Towards the end of his life, some of that violent hatred has disappeared but he does remain as passionate as ever. This results in some conflicting actions and comments made by Victor. On the one hand, him telling the story of his life can be seen as a very positive deed. By doing this, he ensures that the story is passed on to and serves as a warning for future generations. From this it might be concluded that he knows now that what he has done is wrong and that he finally takes responsibility for his actions.

An example of his selfishness is apparent in the way he deals with the monster’s threats. It is obvious that the monster wants to hurt him. Victor believes therefore that it is only him that the monster wants to kill. It seems obvious, however, that the best way to hurt Victor is to hurt the people whom Victor loves. This is exactly what the monster does by killing Victor’s friends and family. Victor, on the other hand, does not seem to realize this. If he had realized, he would have been more protective about his wife Elizabeth, for example. Essentially, there are two ways for Victor to escape from the revenge of the monster. One way is to kill the monster. Victor has tried this but the monster escapes him. The other way is to sacrifice his life for the life of his friends and family, in other words: to kill himself. By doing that, Victor would have taken away the means of revenge of the monster. That this tactic would have worked is proven by the final pages of the book. This drastic way of making the monster stop killing actually never crosses Victor’s mind. He is not afraid to die however. When he is ill with fever, he even wishes he were dead: “Soon, oh, very soon, will death extinguish these throbbing and relieve me from the mighty weight of anguish that bears me to the dust; and, in executing the award of justice, I shall also sink to rest”(162).

Elizabeth Lavenza Frankenstein orphaned at a very young age, Elizabeth lives with a Milanese peasant family before being adopted by the Frankensteins. She is brought to Geneva where they raise her as if she were their own. From the moment she enters the house, Elizabeth was meant to become Victors wife. Victor has always thought of Elizabeth as his “No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me — my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only.”(23), therefore their marriage is inevitable.

A clear description of Elizabeth’s appearance is given when her future adoptive parents first lay eyes on her: “this child was thin and very fair. 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 cloudless, and her lips and the molding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features”(21). Every word of this description can be seen as symbolic for the good, the angelic. As can be derived from other descriptions in the novel, Elizabeth embodies the perfect middle-class young woman. She is always calm and concentrated, she is unprejudiced, she loves poetry and the beauty of the countryside and she is forever loyal to her friends and family.

Alphonse Frankenstein, Victor’s father, is a noble man and well-respected in the community. He is very protective and loyal towards his family and friends. For example, he always stood by his son when he was accused of murder, never questioning his innocence. He worships his wife Caroline as if to compensate for the sorrow she had to endure as a child.

Alphonse is patient, extremely benevolent and has great self-control. He can be regarded as a level-headed person as Victor states that his father “had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should he impressed with no supernatural horrors. I do not ever remember to have trembled at a tale of superstition or to have feared the apparition of a spirit. Darkness had no effect upon my fancy, and a churchyard 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”(38).

Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein as a young girl attends her sick father for several months. The circumstances are difficult for her but her courage pulls her through. She works hard and has numerous jobs that pay very little money. After she marries Alphonse Frankenstein and finances are no longer a concern, she becomes a guardian angel to the ones less fortunate than her. She is tender, kind and indulgent towards her children. She is, in short, the perfect mother. The description of Caroline can be compared to Elizabeth’s; both seem to be the definite image of femininity in eighteenth century middle to upper class ideology.

Henry Clerval is Victor’s only friend. It is difficult to determine exactly why they are such good friends as the relationship seems somewhat one-sided. Throughout the book Henry stands by his friend: nursing him back to health and accompanying him on his travels. Henry and Victor are opposites in many ways. It is clear that Victor admires Henry’s sensibility, enthusiastic imagination and gentility. As opposed to Victor, Henry does not have an interest in science at all. He is more interested in literature “heroic songs, books of chivalry and romance, language and nature.”(21) Although Henry too has an inquisitive mind and is anxious to gain experience and instruction, he never lets it interfere with his personal relations.

Henry has a clear insight into others. Because of this and also because of Victor’s continuous bad health, Henry must have known that there was something terribly wrong with Victor. But Henry, being a loyal friend, never asks Victor about it. It is probably clear to him that Victor does not want to talk about it. Although one has to wonder what would have happened if Victor had confided in his friend. Maybe then Henry would not have had to pay the highest price for their friendship.

The Frankenstein monster has outward appearance of the monster, who remains nameless, is described by his creator: he is created from various different body parts, he has yellow skin which “scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath,”(43) he has lustrous, flowing black hair and white teeth, he has a “shriveled complexion and straight black lips.”(43) Combine these features with the fact that he is also very tall and the image of a monster is complete.

His appearance turns out to be the cause of all his problems. People are frightened when they see him, which keeps the monster from making contact with them. This inability of personal contact and the resulting isolation is what indirectly drives the monster to his crimes. He has tried to communicate with people on several occasions but he keeps on being rejected. He has somewhat lost hope as he takes refuge in the hovel near the De Lacey’s home. He observes them for months, learning their language and their habits. Through reading novels like Milton’s Paradise Lost he starts wondering about himself and his isolation because of his apparent uniqueness: “I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence”(112). It is obvious that he longs for some kindness, protection and company. These desires become even more evident when he reads the diary that Victor kept during his creation. From these papers, the monster learns that Victor was not at all happy with his creation. This makes him feel even more lonely and abhorred.

It is only when he is convinced of the De Lacey’s goodness that he decides to try to make contact one more time. His initial talk with the old De Lacey is very positive. This is mainly because De Lacey is blind and therefore the monster’s appearance cannot lead to any prejudiced ideas. The other family members return unexpectedly, however, and the monster is beaten out of the house. He still refuses to think evil of them and blames himself for being discovered. It is only when he finds out that the family out of fear has permanently left the cottage that the monster starts feeling negative emotions like hatred and revenge. These feelings are not directed towards the De Lacey family however, but towards his creator.

He later states that all the killings did not make him feel better. He says that he was “the slave, not the master, of an impulse which I detested, yet could not disobey,”(199) a state somewhat similar to the Victor’s obsession with science. The monster, just as Victor, reaches a point where he has no feelings left except for hatred. When he sees that his final victim namely Victor Frankenstein, is already dead, he shows remorse. He has now accepted that there will never be any being who “pardoning my [the monster's] outward form, would love me for excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding.”(199-200) With an immense self-hatred, he promises Walton that he will “consume to ashes this miserable frame”(201) so that future curious generations would not create “such another as I have been”(201).

De Lacey he is the head of the household adopted by the creature. A blind man who is kind but has been robbed of his fortunes. Felix the son of De Lacey, he is idealistic and not afraid to stand up for what he believes in. He loves his family with all his heart. Agatha the daughter of De Lacey, she is a cheerful soul who lives to aid her brother and care for her father. She retains a level of class, even though she is poor.

Safie he betrothed of Felix, she is wonderfully exotic and beautiful. She also is cheerful, and loves to sing.

A centerlized theme in Mary Shelly s Frankenstein is that society shapes and defines the Frankenstein monster into who he became. Though the being has the physical characteristics of a monster, it is only after he is repeatedly rejected by society that he adopts the personality and behavior of a monster. Thus, society plays a large role in shaping the monster’s personality and behavior. Because society expects him to act like a monster, he inevitably becomes one. The being is clearly a victim of a stereotype.

It is clear that the being has the physical characteristics of a monster. A monster is defined as a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty. The being is unnatural right from the very beginning–his “birth.” He was not carried in his mother’s womb and delivered as normal babies are. The being is merely a construction of random corpses’ bodily parts sewn together and brought to life. Naturally his appearance is utterly grotesque, thus confirming his “extreme ugliness.” Victor even remarks that “A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch” (59). Though he displays all of the normal features of a man, his are heightened to a level of deformity. He has a gigantic stature and displays superhuman speed and strength.

Just as the being’s external features are heightened, the being also exhibits heightened internal qualities of man, shown by his altruistic attitude toward humanity. The being tells Victor that his “soul glowed with love and humanity” (91). The being enjoyed helping others. He provided the cottagers with wood for their fire so Felix could devote time to other household tasks. The being risked his own life and saved a little girl from drowning. All the being wanted in return was companionship and acceptance, neither of which he received. The creation says, “Let [man] live with me in the interchange of kindness; and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance” (125). It is clear that initially the being was only monstrous in his appearance, not his actions.

However, because of the expectations held by an insensitive, hostile society, the being is forced to become a monster internally as well. The creature tries to find companionship many times, but he is only met with fear and hostility. Because the being cannot escape society’s expectations regardless of his behavior, he eventually confirms them and acts accordingly. He completes the definition of a monster as he commits wicked and cruel acts. The being has fallen into a stereotypical monster.

From the very beginning the being was misjudged, because of his appearance. Even the being’s creator fled when he saw him. Victor calls him a “wretch,” “monster,” “demon,” before the creation even does anything (58). The being asks his creator, “Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust?” (113). Victor completely abandoned his creation, because he couldn’t even bear to look at him. If Victor, the creator, regards him with horror, imagine the response of an unprepared society. Neither Victor nor anyone else considered the being’s feelings. They only reacted to Victor’s creation’s appearance. Victor had “endowed [the being] with perceptions and passions and then cast [him] abroad for the scorn and horror of mankind” (120).

When Victor abandoned the being, the creature left and wandered around aimlessly struggling to survive on his own without any concept of knowledge or language. When he reached a village, immediately, “children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country and fearfully took refuge” (95). Initially the being had been delighted by the sight of the village, but he was brutally driven from it for no reason other than his appearance. Because he appeared abnormal, they assumed he was evil. Just as society fears the creature, the creature fears society. The only difference is that the being has a reason to fear society; it attacked him.

The being regains faith as he believes that “When they [the cottagers] should become acquainted with my admiration of their virtues, they would compassionate me, and overlook my personal deformity” (114). However, when the being finally gains acceptance from the old man, Felix, Safie, and Agatha enter and immediately assume that the being was attacking their father. It is appropriate that only the blind man is the one who can accept the being. He can judge the creature fairly, because he cannot see him. Not once is the old man frightened when he is alone with him. This shows how deceptive appearances can be. Expectations based solely on appearances are groundless. Because the being looks abnormal, the three cottagers assume that he is evil and wants to harm them. It is ironic that the creature was, in fact, trying to befriend them. After all, the creature had been helping them with their daily chores. The being is thanked by getting attacked as Felix “dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained” (117). The being didn’t even defend himself. Yet the being is the one who is regarded as a monster, not Felix, even though Felix ruthlessly attacked the being.

Despite this encounter the being performs another good deed; he risks his own life to save a little girl who is drowning. As he rescues her and attempts to revive her, the girl is torn from his arms and he is shot. The man automatically assumes that he was trying to kill the girl, when, in fact, he has saved her life. At this point, the being cannot avoid a stereotype. When the being is punished for committing noble acts, why should he continue to repeat them? The monster discovers that performing good deeds causes just as much harm and certainly more suffering than doing evil. After all, he was hurt by the ones he had helped. Why would he ever want to do any good if man still rejects him? Because of his inability to befriend man, at least by doing evil, the monster will be able to attain satisfaction by destroying the one who has placed him in these unalterable circumstances. At least then the monster will deserve his mistreatment.

The monster’s last attempt for companionship ends his search and thus marks the start of his evil acts. When he comes across a young boy, he decides that since the boy hasn’t lived long enough to develop prejudices, this is his chance. The being tells the boy that he won’t hurt him, but the boy responds, “monster! ugly wretch! You wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces–You are an ogre” (123). The child thought the being wanted to eat him, when the being had only hoped to befriend him. As a result of these continuous rejections and unfair assumptions, the being vows for revenge. When the creation discovers that the boy is Victor’s brother, he strangles him and his “heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph” (123). The being then becomes a monster both externally and internally, ultimately confirming society’s previously groundless expectations.

The monster moves from one horrid act to another, indulging in evil. First, he kills William. Then he frames Justine as the murderer and she is hanged for his crime. He warns Victor that “if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear;” (125) and “if I have no ties and affections, hatred and vice must be my portion” (126). He takes the lives of Clerval and Elizabeth– both innocent victims. The monster intensely desires to be a part of society and if the only way he can participate in society is to indulge in evil, then he will. Thus, the being truly becomes the monster that society had feared from the start.

The danger of a stereotype is that people become that which they originally were not. As a result, they are unable to live with the person that they have become. The being was not a monster on the inside initially. As the monster says, “I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend” (90). Society created his misery by rejecting him. Thus, Victor created the being, but society created the monster. None of these tragic murders would have occurred had someone, anyone, accepted him. The being even says, “If any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them an hundred and an hundred fold; for that one creature’s sake, I would make peace with the whole kind!”(125). His repeated rejections and his intense loneliness lead him to commit acts which he never thought himself capable of committing. Society’s expectations are fulfilled, but at the expense of the creature’s soul. The monster confesses to Walton, “My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change, without torture such as you cannot imagine” (182). The monster has fulfilled the stereotype, but he cannot live with what he has become. Thus, the being ultimately takes his own life.

In Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein, families are a very important theme in the novel. Frankenstein’s family is critical because the reason why the monster was created lies within the family. Almost every family mentioned in the novel was either incomplete or was dysfunctional. Frankenstein’s family in particular was missing a female role. The Frankenstein family had no mother, but they did have Elizabeth who was the only other female in the house and she was adopted when she was just a child. The monster was created because of this absence, not necessarily to fill the role of the mother, but to fill in the role of the missing family member. However, the monster is shunned away when he is animated and the fall of the Frankenstein family awaits them.

Victor Frankenstein’s family was normal to begin with. He had a mother and a father, but later on when Elizabeth becomes sick with a fever, his mother nurses her back to health at the cost of her own life. On her deathbed, Victor’s mom says, “Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to my younger children. Alas! I regret that I am taken from you; and, happy and beloved as I have been, is it not hard . . . a hope of meeting you in another world” (42). Elizabeth is expected to fill in as the role of the mother by taking care of and protecting the young children. Although she replaces the role of the mother, there is still the fact that a family member is missing. A mother is impossible to replace; you can’t have a stepmother because she will never be a replacement for an original mother. Nor can a mother be bought, but Victor uses his knowledge from Ingolstadt to create a being to fill in that missing figure.

In the later part of the novel, the monster stumbles upon a family where he learns the basics of living and surviving. The monster is very intelligent and can learn at a exceedingly rapid rate. The family that he crosses is the De Lacey family. This family is also incomplete because they are also missing a mother figure here. Yet they have a substitute as does the Frankenstein family has. For the De Lacey family, Agatha, the sister, plays the womanly role here. Felix her brother always takes care of her and tries to make life as easiest as possible even though they have gone through many hardships. The problems that this family faces are numerous indeed. Their father is blind and cannot help them in any way. Besides this fact, the De Lacey family was expelled from their native land and forced to live in poverty in a foreign place. “He did not succeed. They remained confined for five months before the trial took place; the result of which deprived them of their fortune and condemned them to a perpetual exile from their native county” (122). During the time of the exile, Felix was unable to see his loved one, just like while Victor was away studying, they both could not see the one they cared for. The monster at this time learns of emotion and compassion. He can sympathize with his “benefactors” and he also wants to help them, but he can’t because of his appearance. The missing family member of the De Lacey’s is directly correlated with the missing family member of the Frankenstein’s. The existence of the De Lace’s in the novel proves that Mary Shelly wanted to include the importance of a family and how being close in a family can make everyone happy. This happiness that Victor is trying so hard to pursue by creating the monster.

Near the end of the novel, the Monster requests from Victor to create for him, a female counterpart. When the Monster says, “You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I do demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede”(140). The Monsters longing for a person he can communicate with is very important. It signifies that he wants to be included in some kind of family situation as he has observed from before. He wants a person who can understand the way he feels and why he feels this way. When a person usually has problems, he/she turns to family for help, but in the case of the Monster; he has no family and must ask his creator to make him one. Not a whole family, but a single person, who could be his companion for life. The way the Monster needs a member is the same as Victor wanting to create a new member himself. By creating the female one, Victor is attempting to make a new family for the monster, but near the completion of the female monster, Victor decides to destroy it. He contemplates that making this female version of the Monster will allow the male one to be able to produce offspring’s and this he thought would be a horrendous idea. A lot of little monsters with superhuman powers running around.

Not one family in this novel was complete. Even in the beginning when the Frankenstein family took in Elizabeth from the poor family, they were breaking up another family. Although Elizabeth was not a part of that family to begin with, she was still taken from her original foster parents. “She was not her child, but the daughter of a Milanese nobleman. Her mother was a German, and had died on giving birth”(34). The additional family member from early on might have given Victor the idea of bringing in his “own “family member when his mother passed away. Elizabeth was very precious to him and he cared for her tremendously. “No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only” (35). This phrase right here shows his feelings for her from early on in the novel. As the novel proceeds, his feelings remain unchanged. This kind of relationship was mutual between the both of them and since they were not really brother/sister it was okay for them to have this kind of relationship in the family.

When the Monster starts killing his family members one by one, he makes Victor contemplate the idea of what it is like to be without a loved one. Although this message doesn’t actually get into Victor’s mind, he decides to create the female monster just to be rid of the male monster. This selfish act by him, is really what causes Elizabeth, now his wife, to die. With the death of Elizabeth Victor loses him self to the act of revenge. He searches and attempts all possible ways to kill the Monster, but of course the Monster which he created is too powerful for him. “Scoffing devil! Again do I vow vengeance; again do I devote thee, miserable fiend, to torture and death. Never will I give up my search, until he or I perish; and then with what ecstasy shall I join my Elizabeth and my departed friends, who even now prepare for me the reward of my tedious toil and horrible pilgrimage” (198). The Monster’s true intentions was to make his creator realize the need for a family, even for one that has been alone since creation. Every being deserves someone to love and someone to love them.

The need for an extra family member was the reason Victor created the monster. Through various examples throughout the novel, we can see that the need for family is greatly needed. If one is missing, the family is incomplete and must attempt to substitute that member with someone else. Many times, a substitute cannot be found and life must go on with what you have. The Monster in the end had no one and decided cease living and leave this place as an act of goodwill. This was most unfortunate because he never got to experience what living with a family or having anyone to love was like. As the creator, Victor should take full responsibility and provide his creation with these pleasures in life. In the very end, the monster does regret putting his creator through the torment that he went through. Two wrongs do not make a right, but it seemed the only reasoning that could get through Victor’s stubborn head was to it this way. In the end we learn that family is the basis for which we can continue on and have happiness.

The term Gothic conjures up images of frightened women, graveyards, and haunted castles in the mist, popular settings for horror films. But is this what Gothic means? The Oxford Companion to English Literature defines Gothic as, “Tales of the macabre, fantastic, and supernatural, usually set amid haunted castles, graveyards, ruins and wild picturesque landscapes” (Drabble 405). Furthermore, according to the Oxford Companion, Gothic tales “reached the height of their considerable fashion in the 1790 s and the early years of the 19th century” (Drabble 406). It becomes obvious that Gothic is a literary term which describes a particular type of story and atmospheric surrounding. In so doing, it establishes a contrast between darkness and light, which evokes a sinister irony. In such tales, darkness often prevails, and according to literary scholars, elevated these horror stories into “Gothic sublime” (The Gothic Sublime. 333). Specifically, the Gothic sublime symbolizes a “black hole which finally absorbs history into its own emptiness” (The Gothic Sublime. 333). Gothic fiction is, quite simply, man taking a “walk on the dark side.”

There is, undeniably, no novel which epitomizes the popular Gothic structure more than Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley s early 19th-century masterpiece, Frankenstein (actually entitled, Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus). According to Greek mythology, Prometheus is a hero who steals fire from the heavens to serve man, but he is ultimately punished by the mighty Zeus, who chains him to a rock, where a vulture feasts on his liver. Inexplicably, however, the liver grows back each night. This reference abounds with Gothic possibilities, which Mary Shelley was, no doubt aware. She was long a fan of Gothic tales, and it was a night of story-telling in a Geneva castle which inspired her story. As she herself recalled in her introduction to Frankenstein, “The season was cold and rainy, and in the evenings we crowded around a blazing wood fire, and occasionally amused ourselves with some German stories of ghosts, which happened to fall into our hands. These tales excited in us a playful desire of imitation. Two other friends (a tale from the pen of one of whom would be far more acceptable to the public than anything I can ever hope to produce) and myself agreed to write each a story founded on some supernatural occurrence” (2).

While the familiar castle may have been missing from the story itself, a castle setting and the telling of ghost stories inspired the science fiction foray into the supernatural. There is also a proper setting for a Gothic tale, and if there is no castle, there is usually a thunderstorm to inspire terror. It was one particular thunderstorm which ignited the imagination of the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein: “When I was about fifteen years old we had retired to our house near Belrive, when we witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm. It advanced from behind the mountains of Jura; and the thunder burst at once with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens. I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight” (20).

Victor Frankenstein was a bright young man with a dark fascination which began as a child, with “the raising of ghosts or devils… a promise liberally accorded by my favorite authors” (20). First manifesting itself as a deep interest in science while a college student, it grew into an obsession with the dead. While listening to his professor speak, increasingly tormented Victor lamented, “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… I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation. I closed not my eyes that night. My internal being was in a state of insurrection and turmoil” (25). Many Gothic tales from the time involved people who were stranded in a haunted castle who were struggling to get out. In Frankenstein, the door between life and death was unlocked by technology, and once through the door, Victor Frankenstein knew there would be no turning back.

Not content with merely exploring the traditional Gothic form, Shelley decided to introduce a decidedly feminine quality to her Frankenstein story. By exploring and literally exploding the myth of motherhood, Mary Shelley created a new dimension to the genre, the “Female Gothic” (Frankenstein: Birthing the New Female Gothic). Having recently given birth to a child who died shortly thereafter, Shelley employed the theme of birth, which had always been depicted as miraculous and beautiful, and put a terrifying spin on it as Dr. Frankenstein gives birth to his creation. According to one literary scholar, it was her nouveau female Gothic style which separated Frankenstein from similar horror tales of the time: “Here, I think, is where Mary Shelley s book is most interesting, most powerful, and most feminine: in

the motif of revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences. Frankenstein seems to be distinctly a woman’s myth making on the subject of birth precisely because its emphasis is not upon what precedes birth, not upon birth itself, but upon what follows birth: the trauma of the afterbirth” (Frankenstein: Birthing the New Female Gothic). Of the most abnormal of births, Victor recalled, “It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs” (32). The nightmare of birth continued, with a repulsed Victor Frankenstein observed, “How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe… His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled 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 ardor that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (32-33).

The creature Dr. Frankenstein bore during one rainy night in his laboratory became the most frightening of any Gothic monster. He wasn t merely a singular ghost, but was a composite of all the dead spirits who had once given his body parts life. However, setting and ghostly monsters are not the only characteristics of this Gothic work. There is usually a fair maiden in distress, who requires the care of a dashing knight/lover, who serves as her protector, warding off any evil spirits who may cross her path (Eighteenth-Century Gothic Fragments and the Paradigm of Violation and Repair.). This is also supplied in Frankenstein, in the character of Elizabeth Lavenza. Adopted by Victor s parents, Elizabeth is the fairest and frailest of young ladies, having been seriously ill with scarlet fever as a child. She also provides the perfect Gothic contrast between darkness and light. Of his “beautiful and adored companion,” an enamored Victor would say, “Everyone loved Elizabeth. The passionate and almost reverential attachment with which all regarded her became, while I shared it, my pride and my delight… I… looked upon Elizabeth as mine- mine to protect, love, and cherish” (16-17).

What Victor would later come to realize, it was he who would place his beloved Elizabeth in mortal danger. But he was clearly under Elizabeth s spell, and it was Elizabeth’s gentle encouragement which always resurrected him in much the same way as he had resurrected his monstrous masterpiece from the bodies of the dead. As Victor came to realize that his creation was a horrible mistake, for rejected by society as a whole, he embarked on a murderous rampage, even killing William, Victor s younger brother. Wracked by guilt, Victor cried, “Alas! I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery” (46).

While it was easy for Victor to cast the blame on his monstrosity, was it really the monster who bore responsibility for the murders, or the creator? When the monster confronts his creator, the ironic consequences of his actions are readily apparent: “All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind” (61). This demonstrates not only irony, but a popular Gothic technique of visits from the dead. After all, though the harnessing of electricity breathed life into the creature, he was still an apparition, nevertheless. He was a new breed of Gothic ghost, one of the “living dead,” a scientific experiment gone terribly wrong.

The stage was now set for the inevitable climax between the monster and the maiden. Victor married Elizabeth, believing that only he can protect her from the creature. He vowed to tell his new bride of his murderous invention, in hopes that it would set them both free. However, this wasn t to be. The dark forces, which Victor has irrevocably set in motion, has obscured the light. After hearing her piercing scream, Victor ran into the bedroom to find the inert body of Elizabeth. According to Victor, “She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Everywhere I turn I see the same figure- her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier” (130). Unfortunately, the chivalrous knight was unable to save his damsel in distress.

Victor was not altogether surprised by this turn of events, because he had long been haunted by nightmares that Elizabeth would someday perish. In one such dream, “I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel” (32). Dream sequences play an integral part in the telling of Gothic tales, and scholars have later theorized that the awakening feelings of sexuality in the morally-conservative western Europe of the early nineteenth century were responsible for the subject matter of these dreams — usually a presumed-dead woman, who, it is hoped by her suitor, will be miraculously brought back to life with his kiss . As literary fiction critic E.W. Pitcher noted, “One can argue for… Gothic fragments that the dream-death-stasis was also the expedient retreat of innocence from the awareness of sexual appetite, and the differentiating attraction to the other. Many Gothic fragments figured forth the struggles of sexual urgings (emergence into a mature self) with withdrawal into innocence (submergence in the old self)” (35). Victor s wedding night was supposed to represent the satisfaction of his sexual desire for the virginal Elizabeth. But, instead, Elizabeth is killed by Victor s monster, which may have, perhaps, been an extension of his own perversions.

By now completely consumed by guilt, and realizing he must destroy his invention, Victor is only at peace at night while asleep. He mused, “In sleep I saw my friends, my wife, and my beloved country; again I saw the benevolent countenance of my father, heard the silver tones of my Elizabeth s voice” (136). Victor was eager to convince himself that his supernatural interactions were only dreams, but having crossed the precarious line between life and death, he couldn t be certain. In a final showdown with his creation, Victor Frankenstein can deny his link to the monster. Did the monster actually destroy the lives of Victor s loved ones, or was Victor the culprit? Or was the real bearer of blame the rampant technology, which if left unchecked could destroy the society it was created to improve.

Mary Shelley does not provide any tidy endings in Frankenstein, which adds to its Gothic appeal. Readers are left to draw their own conclusions as to the meaning and the roots of the terror. Because the appeal of the Gothic novel was on the wane by the time Frankenstein appeared in 1818, it was the introduction of the science fiction element which rejuvenated the medium. As Professor Peter Pelzer wrote, “It proved that Gothic could be revitalized by reshaping it to meet the changing interests in society. Shelley combined the intended shock, the feeling of horror with the new interest in science and humanity of her age. On the one hand purposely rooted in the Gothic tradition, she was showing on the other hand the ways out of the limits of the genre for further development” (The Gothic Experience). With Frankenstein, Mary Shelley brought Gothic literature into the 19th century, and expressed the fears of her contemporaries that the Industrial Revolution would forever change the values and conventions they held so dear. Though intentionally a period piece, it was the future implications of Frankenstein which made it a timeless classic. Dr. Pelzer noted, “What lay at the base of this innovation is a change in the time relation. While Gothic was originally related to a certain era in the past, it is in the Frankenstein case directed to fantasies or speculations about the future which are able to create the same horror, to make the reader feel his nothingness” (The Gothic Experience).

With Frankenstein, Mary Shelley not only mastered the Gothic form which had mesmerized her as a child, she improved upon it, leaving the indelible marks of her interest in the supernatural, her unlimited imagination, and her concerns for society. Gothic novels not only explore horror through their characters, but they also bring their readers in touch with their own fears. The Gothic castles of old which used to imprison visitors with their fears was now replaced by society itself, terrorizing its citizens with technology which has run amok. What could be more macabre, fantastic or Gothic than that?

Mary Shelly s Frankenstein ventures into the realm of science fiction. It is consider a work of science fiction because it tells of imaginary events involving science and technology. Dr. Victor Frankenstein creates a life out of bits and pieces of others lying around. “It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burned out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light. I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open, it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs (56). Inspite every mad scientist dream this was out of the realm of possibility then and now. Now the creation of the monster is not the only appearance of science fiction in the novel. As everyone knows human babies are not born with ability to walk. Since the monster was created in the image of humans, it stands to reason that he would lack the same ability. However, unlike normal humans the creature is up and moving around within minutes. “As it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch-the miserable monster who I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if they may be called, were fixed on me”(57). Once again this is out of the realm of possibility. Now since the monster example falls into the literary technique of science fiction.

Frankenstein, is told through the view of Dr. Victor Frankenstein. This type of point of view is referred to as limited first-person. The story is told by Victor looking back at his life and all the major events in it. He tells us this story to convey a message that he has learned through his experiences. Here is an example of what he is trying to tell us. “Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow him”(52). This is just one example of the point of view used through out the novel.

One of the most widely used literary technique is the use of irony. Of course, I wouldn t bring up irony with out it being present if Frankenstein. Dr. Victor Frankenstein toiled day in and day out. “I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body”(56). As we all know he created a monster commonly refereed to as Frankenstein. “It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishments of my toils”(56). Now on to the irony. The irony lies in the fact that the monster who Victor toiled many years and nights, had become the one that haunted Victor. The monster who Victor bestowed life upon became the one that took it away. “The filthy demon to whom I had given life. He was the murderer!”(73) To put it into basic terms, the monster who Victor had given life also became the taker of it.

Frankenstein, being like most science fiction novels, contains elements of fantasy. A writer of fantasy presents improbable character, places, and events, often on involving magic or the supernatural. The monster, being an improbable character, is of course the element of fantasy. “His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horried contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dunwhite sockets in which they were set his shriveled complexion and straight black lips”(56). Inspite every childs fears monsters only exist in a fantasy.

Even Frankenstein, a classic horror novel, has a moral. The novel is told by Dr. Victor Frankenstein. He is using this to convey his own personal morals after his experience. “Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how mush happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow”(52). He feels that the acquirement of knowledge brought him nothing but death and remorse. The monster that he discovered how to create came back and caused him his hardships. However, I believe Mary Shelly used this book to convey an even bigger moral. The moral she conveys is that man was never intended to play God and that man should never should cross that line. Victor Frankenstein created a monster in the image of humans. “I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! (56) God never intended for man to build life, just created it(babies). This monstrous creation same back and murders everyone close to Victor. “The filthy demon to whom I had given life. He was the Murderer!”(73) The basic moral of the entire novel is that when men play God, their creation or God himself, will soon level the playing field.

The subtitle The Modern Prometheus refers to the figure in Greek mythology who was responsible for a conflict between mankind and the gods. In order to help the people, Prometheus stole Zeus’s fire from the sun. The people were thereby given an advantage to the animals since fire gave man the ability to make weapons and tools. Prometheus was severely punished by Zeus who chained him to a rock in the Caucasus. Every night, Prometheus was visited by an eagle who ate from his liver. During the day, however, his liver grew back to its original state. It also refers to the story of Prometheus plasticator who was to said to have created and animated mankind out of clay. These two myths were eventually fused together: the fire that Prometheus had stolen is the fire of life with which he animated his clay models. Because of the ‘creating’ aspect, Prometheus became a symbol for the creating artist in the eighteenth century.

Victor Frankenstein can indeed be seen as the modern Prometheus. He defies the gods by creating life himself. Instead of being the created, Victor takes God’s place and becomes the creator. Just as Prometheus, Victor gets punished for his deeds. He is, however, punished by his creation whereas Prometheus was punished by the god who he stole from.

The text of the Signet Classic Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus is that of the third edition, revised and corrected by the author and published by Henry Colburn and Richard Bently, London, 1831. The author s Introduction, lacking in the first edition (1818) and the second (1823), was published in this edition for the first time. The text is reprinted here with permission from The Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation, Ins., on behalf of The Carl H. Pforzheimer Library.

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