

Frankenstein

PRODUCTION SOURCEBOOK

Frankenstein, a play in Two Acts, by Victor Gialanella

Adapted from the Novel by Mary Shelley

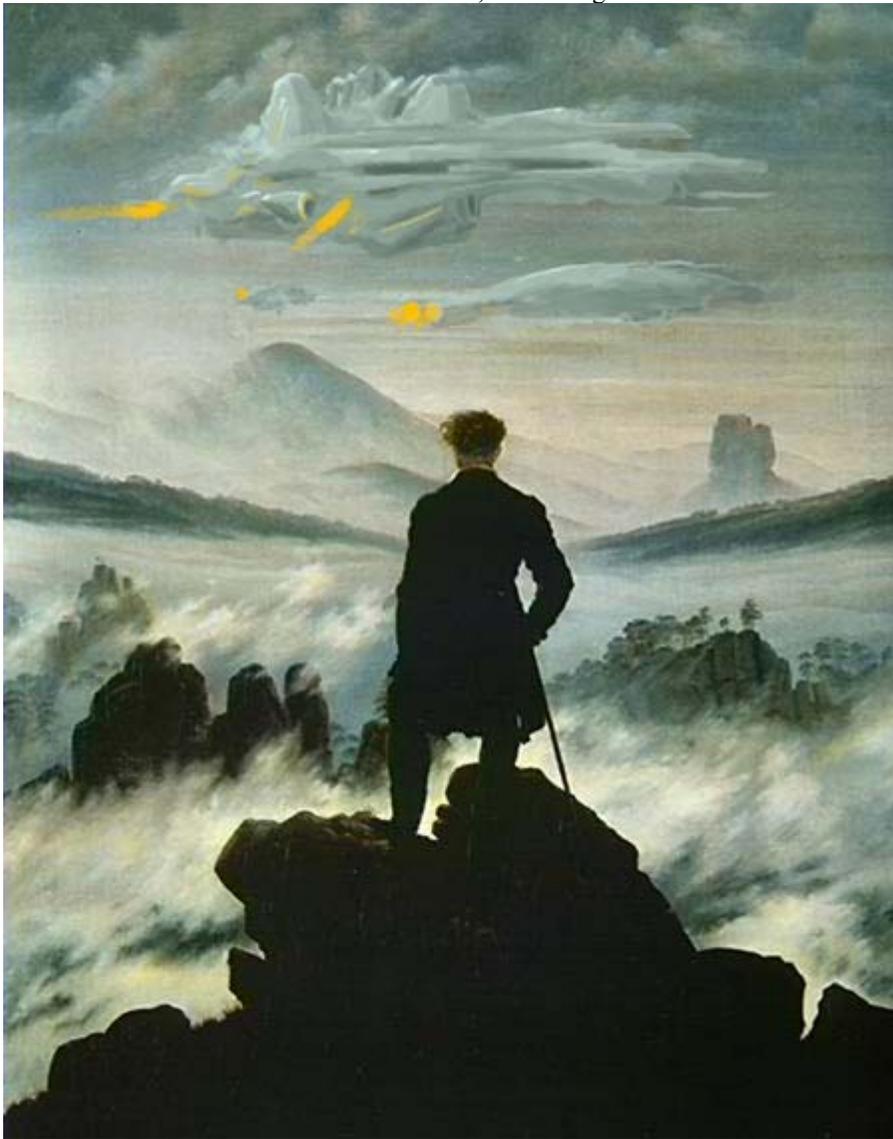
Central Theatre Ensemble

Central Washington University

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Michael J. Smith, Director

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Wanderer above the Sea of Fog
Caspar David Friedrich, 1818.

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The Life of Mary Shelley

by Kim A. Woodbridge

Mary Shelley, born August 30, 1797, was a prominent, though often overlooked, literary figure during the Romantic Era of English Literature. She was the only child of Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous feminist, and William Godwin, a philosopher and novelist. She was also the wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary's parents were shapers of the Romantic sensibility and the revolutionary ideas of the left wing. Mary, Shelley, Byron, and Keats were principle figures in Romanticism's second generation. Whereas the poets died young in the 1820's, Mary lived through the Romantic era into the Victorian. Mary was born during the eighth year of the French Revolution. One critic notes,

She entered the world like the heroine of a Gothic tale: conceived in a secret amour, her birth heralded by storms and portents, attended by tragic drama, and known to thousands through Godwin's memoirs. Percy Shelley would elevate the event to mythic status in his "Dedication to The Revolt of Islam".

From infancy, Mary was treated as a unique individual with remarkable parents. High expectations were placed on her potential, and she was treated as if she were born beneath a lucky star. Godwin was convinced that babies are born with a potential waiting to be developed. From an early age, she was surrounded by famous philosophers, writers, and poets: Coleridge made his first visit when Mary was two years old. Charles Lamb was also a frequent visitor.

A peculiar sort of Gothicism was part of Mary's earliest existence. Most every day she would go for a walk with her father to the St. Pancras churchyard where her mother was buried. Godwin taught Mary to read and spell her name by having her trace her mother's inscription on the stone. At the age of sixteen Mary ran away to live with the twenty-one year old Percy Shelley, the unhappily married radical heir to a wealthy baronetcy. To Mary, Shelley personified the genius and dedication to human betterment that she had admired her entire life. Although she was cast out of society, even by her father, this inspirational liaison produced her masterpiece, Frankenstein.

She conceived of Frankenstein during one of the most famous house parties in literary history when staying at Lake Geneva in Switzerland with Byron and Shelley. Interestingly enough, she was only nineteen at the time. She wrote the novel while being overwhelmed by a series of calamities in her life. The worst of these were the suicides of her half-sister, Fanny Imlay, and Shelly's wife, Harriet. After the suicides, Mary and Shelley reluctantly married. Fierce public hostility toward the couple drove them to Italy. Initially, they were happy in Italy, but their two young children died there. Mary never fully recovered from this trauma. (Their first child had died shortly after birth early in their relationship.) Nevertheless, Shelley empowered Mary to live as she most desired: to

enjoy intellectual and artistic growth, love, and freedom. When Mary was only twenty-four Percy drowned, leaving her penniless with a two year old son.

For her remaining twenty-nine years, she engaged in a struggle with the societal disapproval of her relationship with Shelley. Poverty forced her to live in England which she despised because of the morality and social system. She was shunned by conventional circles and worked as a professional writer to support her father and her son. Her circle, however, included literary and theatrical figures, artists, and politicians. She eventually came to more traditional views of women's dependence and differences, like her mother before her. This not a reflection of her courage and integrity but derived from socialization and the conventions placed on her by society. Mary became an invalid at the age of forty-eight. She died in 1851 of a brain tumor with poetic timing. The Great Exhibition, which was a showcase of technological progress, was opened. This was the same scientific technology that she had warned against in her most famous book, Frankenstein.

Source: <http://www.kimwoodbridge.com/maryshel/life.shtml>

The Summer of 1816

Kim A. Woodbridge

Mary Shelley spent the greater part of the summer of 1816, when she was nineteen, at the Chapuis in Geneva, Switzerland. The entourage included her stepsister, Claire Clairmont, Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Polidori, Byron's physician. Lord Byron rented the Villa Diodoti on the shores of Lake Geneva, which John Milton, the author of Paradise Lost, had visited in the 1600's. Rousseau and Voltaire had also resided on these shores. Mary considered the area to be sacred to enlightenment. The weather went from being beautiful and radiant to melodramatically tempestuous. Torrential rains and incredible lightning storms plagued the area, similar to the summer that Mary was born. This incredible meteorological change was due to the eruption of the volcano, Tambora, in Indonesia. The weather, as well as the company and the Genevan district, contributed to the genesis of Frankenstein. All contributing events that summer intensified on the night of June 16th. Mary and Percy could not return to Chapuis, due to an incredible storm, and spent the night at the Villa Diodati with Byron and Polidori. The group read aloud a collection of German ghost stories, The Fantasmagoriana. In one of the stories, a group of travelers relate to one another supernatural experiences that they had experienced. This inspired Byron to challenge the group to write a ghost story.

Shelley wrote an forgettable story, Byron wrote a story fragment, and Polidori began the The Vampyre, the first modern vampire tale. Many consider the main character, Lord Ruthven, to be based on Byron. For some time it was thought that Byron had actually written the story, but over time it was realized that Dr. Polidori was the author. Unfortunately, Mary was uninspired and did not start writing anything. The following evening the group continued their late night activities, and, at midnight, Byron recited the poem, "Christabel," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Percy became overwrought

during the reading, and he perceived Mary as the villainess of the poem. He ran out of the room and apparently created quite a scene. This incident undoubtedly affected Mary, leading to feelings of guilt that contributed to the story ideas she later developed. For the next couple of days, Mary was unable to begin her story. The poets dropped theirs, but Mary persisted in her creative endeavor. She felt that her ambitions and her value were at stake, and she attempted to turn the pressure and frustration into creative energy.

On June 22nd, Byron and Shelley were scheduled to take a boat trip around the lake. The night before their departure the group discussed a subject from de Staël's De l'Allemagne: "Whether the principle of life could be discovered and whether scientists could galvanize a corpse of manufactured humanoid." When Mary went to bed, she had a "waking" nightmare:

I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life...His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away...hope that...this thing...would subside into dead matter... he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains...

The next morning Mary realized she had found her story, and she began writing the lines that open Chapter IV of *Frankenstein* - "It was on a dreary night in November"- and she completed the novel in May of 1817; it was published January 1, 1818.

Source: <http://www.kimwoodbridge.com/maryshel/summer.shtml>

The Literary Sources of Frankenstein

Kim A. Woodbridge

Frankenstein is considered to be the greatest Gothic Romantic Novel. It is also generally thought of as the first science fiction novel. I have always been impressed and amazed by the fact that Mary wrote this novel when she was eighteen years old. What experiences and powers of imagination led to such an innovative and disturbing work? The idea for the novel arose in the summer of 1816 when Mary Shelley was staying at Lord Byron's villa in Geneva Switzerland. Not only did Mary incorporate experiences from that summer into her novel, she also utilized the sources that she had been reading and studying. Two, in particular, were the Metamorphoses by Ovid and Paradise Lost by Milton.

It is believed that Mary studied Ovid in April and May of 1815. The major element that Ovid supplied to the theme of Frankenstein was his presentation of the Prometheus legend. This is acknowledged in the subtitle: Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus. The creation of the monster is similar to this passage from Ovid:

Whether with particles of heav'nly fire, The God of Nature did his soul inspire; Or earth, but new divided from the sky, And, pliant, still retain'd th'ethereal energy; Which wise Prometheus temper'd into paste, And, mix't with living streams, the godlike image cast... From such rude principles our form began; And earth was metamorphos'd into man.

Lines from Frankenstein that reflect the above passage are: "I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. [And] ...that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed."

The second important literary influence was Paradise Lost by Milton. (If you have not read this, it is really worth the time. It is difficult, but is well worth the effort. I find that it is helpful to have a copy of Bullfinch's Mythology when reading it. Almost all of Milton's mythological references are explained in Bullfinch.) The influence of Milton's Paradise Lost can be seen directly from the epigraph of the 1818 edition of Frankenstein:

Did I request thee, Maker from my clay to mould me man? Did I solicit thee, from darkness to promote me?

The spirit of Paradise Lost permeates Frankenstein throughout the novel. The monster says:

The fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone.

Three parallel themes from the two works arise from these quotes:

- the molding of a living being from clay
- the growth of malice and the desire for revenge
- the isolation of the hostile being and the consequent increase of his hostility

It is easy to establish Mary Shelley's knowledge of Paradise Lost. The work was admired in the Godwin household. Mary and Percy read it in 1815 and again in November 1816. Her journal states that Shelley read it aloud while she was writing Frankenstein. She even incorporated Paradise Lost into the novel by having it be one of the three works that the monster studied. The monster found a correlation between his condition and an aspect of the novel and stated:

Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other human being...I was wretched, helpless and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition.

Other echoes of Paradise Lost are as follows: Frankenstein hopes to be the source of a new species, but ironically his creature evolves into a self-acknowledged Satan who swears eternal revenge and war upon his creator and all the human race. The monster reflects that hell is an internal condition which is produced and increased through

loneliness. His only salvation is the creation of a mate, his Eve. In the later part of the book, Frankenstein refers to the monster in terms used in Paradise Lost; the fiend, the demon, the devil, and adversary. Both master and creature are torn by their internal conflicts from misapplied knowledge and their sense of isolation.

Source: <http://www.kimwoodbridge.com/maryshel/franken.shtml>

The “Birth” of a Monster

Kim A. Woodbridge

I have titled this "The Birth of a Monster" because Frankenstein can be read as a tale of what happens when a man tries to create a child without a woman. It can, however, also be read as an account of a woman's anxieties and insecurities about her own creative and reproductive capabilities. The story of Frankenstein is the first articulation of a woman's experience of pregnancy and related fears. Mary Shelley, in the development and education of the monster, discusses child development and education and how the nurturing of a loving parent is extremely important in the moral development of an individual. Thus, in Frankenstein, Mary Shelley examines her own fears and thoughts about pregnancy, childbirth, and child development.

Pregnancy and childbirth, as well as death, was an integral part of Mary Shelley's young adult life. She had four children and a miscarriage that almost killed her. This was all before the age of twenty-five. Only one of her children, Percy Florence, survived to adulthood and outlived her. In June of 1816, when she had the waking nightmare which became the catalyst of the tale, she was only nineteen and had already had her first two children. Her first child, Clara, was born prematurely February 22, 1815, and she died March 6. Mary, as any woman would be, was devastated by this and took a long time to recover. The following is a letter that Mary wrote to her friend Hogg the day that the baby died:

6 March 1815

My dearest Hogg my baby is dead - will you come to see me as soon as you can - I wish to see you - It was perfectly well when I went to bed - I awoke in the night to give it suck it appeared to be sleeping so quietly that I would not awake it - it was dead then but we did not find that out till morning - from its appearance it evidently died from convulsions - Will you come - you are so calm a creature and Shelley is afraid of a fever from the milk - for I am no longer a mother now

-- Mary

What is informative and sad about this letter is that Mary turned to Hogg because Percy was so unsupportive. Percy actually didn't seem to care that the child was dead and even went out with Claire, leaving Mary alone with her grief. Mary's second child, William,

was born January 24, 1816. (William died of malaria June 7, 1819.) Thus, at the time that Mary conceived of the story, her first child had died and her second was only 6 months old. There is no doubt that she expected to be pregnant again and about six months later she was. Pregnancy and child-rearing was at the forefront of Mary's mind at this point in her life.

Frankenstein is probably the first story in Western literature that expresses the anxieties of pregnancy. Obviously male writers avoided this topic and it was considered taboo and in poor taste for a woman to discuss it. Mary's focus on the birth process allowed men to understand female fears about pregnancy and reassured women that they were not alone with their anxieties. The story expresses Mary's deepest fears: What if my child is born deformed? Could I still love it or would I wish it were dead? What if I can't love my child? Am I capable of raising a healthy, normal child? Will my child die? Could I wish my own child to die? Will my child kill me in childbirth? Mary was expressing her fears related to the death of her first child, her ability to nurture, and the fact that her mother died having her. All of this is expressed in Victor Frankenstein's complete failure in parenting. For approximately nine months Victor Frankenstein labored on the creation of his "child". Finally on a "dreary night in November: he witnesses the "birth":

I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

Instead of reaching out to his child, Victor rushes out of the room disgusted by the abnormality of his creation. When the creature follows after him, Victor runs away in horror completely abandoning his child.

While creating his child, Victor never considered whether this creature would even want to exist. He also didn't take enough care with the creature's appearance. He could not take the time to make small parts so he created a being of gigantic size. Victor never considered how such a creature would be able to exist with human beings. He did not take time with the features either and created a being with a horrifying appearance. Unable to accept his creation, Victor abandons his "child" and all parental responsibility. He even wishes that his "child" were dead:

I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed, and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I have so thoughtlessly bestowed.

From the moment of the creature's birth, Victor thought of it as demonic and abused it. Frankenstein represents the classic case of an abused and neglected child growing up to be an abuser. The monster's first murder victim is a small child that he wished to adopt. As Mary Shelley wrote the novel, she began to identify more closely focused on the plight of the abandoned child. The heart of the novel is the creature's discussion of his own development.

The creature, himself, realizes that a child that is deprived of a loving family becomes a monster. The creature repeatedly insists that he was born good but compelled

by others to do evil. Mary Shelley bases this argument in Rousseau's Emile and Second Discourse. Mary's account of the creature's mental and moral development follows the theories of David Hartley and John Locke.

Mary Shelley read Rousseau's Emile in 1816. Rousseau stated that:

God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.

Rousseau specifically attributed moral failings to the lack of a mother's love. Without mothering and a loving education, "a man left to himself from birth would be more of a monster than the rest." Thus, Mary Shelley is suggesting that a rejected and un-mothered child can become a killer, especially a killer of its own family.

Even without the proper nurturing the creature manages to get an education. Mary alludes to Rousseau's theory of the natural man as a noble savage, born free but in chains and corrupted by society. In the battle of nature vs. nurture for development, Mary definitely sides with nurture. The creature is Rousseau's natural man, a creature no different than the animals responding only to physical needs. It is only later through contact with the DeLaceys (society) that the creature develops a consciousness and realizes that he is a societal outcast. While alluding to a couple of Rousseau's ideas, in particular the natural man, Mary Shelley utilized the theories of Hartley and Locke for the development and education of the creature.

The creature's moral development follows David Hartley's theories in Observations of Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations (1749) and Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690). David Hartley argued that early sensitive experience determines adult behavior and John Locke argued that man is neither innately good nor innately evil but is rather a "blank slate" on which sensations create impressions which later become conscious experience. The creature first experiences the physical sensations of light, dark, heat, cold, hunger, and pain. This was his period of infancy where he felt the sensations but had no conscious expression of them. Through time and experience the creature eventually learns to distinguish the various sensations and how to remedy them. He learns to gather food, clothe himself, and acquire shelter. In other words, his sensitive experiences cause him to learn for them and provide for his basic necessities.

The creature obtains a moral and intellectual education through his observation of the DeLacey family, who lived in the cottage adjoining his hovel. The DeLacey's provide the creature with an example of a loving, kind, and virtuous family. They stimulate his emotions and inspire him to do good deeds for others (he secretly collects firewood for the family). Through the creature's observation of the DeLacey family, the creature is also stimulated intellectually and is introduced to spoken and written language. Mary Shelley traces the linguistic development of the creature from his earliest acquisition to his ability to grasp abstract concepts and eventually read and write.

Not only does the creature learn morality and virtue from the DeLacey family but also acquires a small library, which enlarges his knowledge of human vice and virtue. From Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Romans he learns about human virtue, heroism, and civil justice. In his study of Volney's Ruins or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires, he learns about corruption and the decline of empires. In his reading of Milton's Paradise Lost, he learns the origins of good and evil as well as the roles of the sexes. Finally, in Goethe's The Sorrows of Werther he learns of the range of emotions, from love to depression and despair. The creature also read and received moral lessons from Aesop's Fables and The Bible. The creature received an excellent education but unfortunately this caused greater distancing from his previous state of "natural man". Once the creature left the state of nature and learned the language and laws of society, he gained a self-consciousness; a self-consciousness of his own isolation from humanity:

I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were, high and unsullied descent united with riches...but...I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome;...When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me... I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge. Oh, that I had ever remained in my native wood, nor known or felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst, and heat!

After being rejected by Victor Frankenstein, his father, the DeLacey family, and society, the creature abandons all good and lives out a course of vengeance against Frankenstein. He murders those close to Frankenstein and eventually leads Victor on a journey that will destroy both of them. Even though the creature received a moral and intellectual education, the lack of a nurturing and loving parent as well as companionship and acceptance from society led him to reject morality and instead destroy. The creature as well as the reader realized that he would have been better off without the education. If he wasn't going to have love and acceptance, it would have probably been best for him to live in an animal like state without a developed consciousness that made him realize how alone he was. Victor never realizes that his lack of parental love and guidance is what led to the creature's murderous path. He only felt guilt from having created the creature. If Victor had only been a loving parent, the creature could have probably overcome all other obstacles and remained moral.

One way to read Frankenstein is as an articulation of a woman's fear of pregnancy, childbirth, and her ability to raise and educate a child properly. This is especially poignant due to the fact that Mary was so young and had already experienced two pregnancies as well as the death of a child. What Mary may have been questioning through her novel is whether a "child whose formative experiences are of pain rather than pleasure will ever develop a rational intellect, a healthy moral sense, and a normal personality.

Source: <http://www.kimwoodbridge.com/maryshel/birth.shtml>

Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus:

An Introduction

By Andreas Rohmoser

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus (1818) is one of the most popular works of gothic horror and science fiction literature, and it also ranks among the best known novels of English Romanticism. Although most people are in some way familiar with the plot, many do not know that it is based on an almost 200-year-old novel, let alone have read it. In fact, the fame of Victor Frankenstein and his creation is based mainly on various adaptations and rewritings of the original 19th-century novel. The Frankenstein myth has entered 20th century popular culture and become part of it in the same way as Coca Cola, James Bond, Dracula, Levi's Jeans, Mickey Mouse, Elvis Presley or the Beatles. First adaptations of Shelley's novel appeared shortly after its initial publication in the form of plays written for the stage. Since then, Frankenstein and his monster have been featured in countless forms, mostly movies, but also horror and science fiction novels by various writers, TV programs and pop songs. Even children's books and cartoons (e.g. episodes from "Looney Tunes/Bugs Bunny," "The Flintstones," "Tom & Jerry") with a not-so-scary-version of the monster were produced; and several toy manufacturers have manufactured "Frankenstein" action figures and other Frankenstein-themed toys.

However, many so-called adaptations of Frankenstein are rather exploitations of Mary Shelley's novel. In his Frankenstein Scrapbook, Stephen Jones lists hundreds of films featuring mad scientists, artificially created monsters, and references to Frankenstein, both novels and films. About 80 films carry the name "Frankenstein" in their title, although many of them have little to do with Mary Shelley's novel and only use the popular name "Frankenstein" to draw people into cinemas. Among these "fake-Frankensteins" are titles like "Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter," "Frankenstein Conquers the World" (a "Godzilla"-like monster film from Japan), "Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein," "Dracula vs. Frankenstein," and "Frankenstein Meets the Space Monsters." Jones even lists a number of porn films exploiting the Frankenstein myth.

Unlike Dracula, another great figure from horror literature, Frankenstein has undergone several changes and mutations over the decades. In most Dracula films the vampire is basically the same and the image of Count Dracula conceived in the novel has not been altered. Mary Shelley's creation, on the other hand, has always prompted new interpretations. Literary purists might state that Frankenstein has never been too lucky since most film adaptations were not faithful to the book. Others might say that Frankenstein -- much more than Dracula -- has inspired artists to create something new out of old parts.

The "Twix" commercial perfectly illustrates how the conception of Frankenstein and his monster has changed since the first publication of the book. Of course one of the major changes is the misnaming of the creature. Today, the Monster is usually named "Frankenstein," whereas this is the name of its creator Victor Frankenstein in the novel. The Monster has a flat head with bolts in its neck (and the face of Boris Karloff), and none of these features were in the novel. And, Victor Frankenstein is reduced to the image of the typical "mad scientist". Literary critic Chris Baldick describes the modern Frankenstein myth as a skeleton story requiring only two basic principles:

- a) Frankenstein makes a living creature out of bits of corpses.
- b) The creature turns against him and runs amok.

The following essays illustrate how and when these changes occurred. The main focus will be on the most important film adaptations because due to their wide reach they had the longest-lasting impact on the image of Frankenstein.

Source: <http://members.aon.at/frankenstein/frankenstein-introduction.htm>

The Origin of a Myth: Mary Shelley's Novel, Frankenstein

By Andreas Rohrmoser

I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination unbidden, possessed and guided me ... I saw with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, - the pale student of unhallowed arts standing before the thing he had put together, I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion... frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror stricken.... He (the artist) sleeps but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

-- Mary Shelley

A couple of days later, Mary Shelley finally began her novel Frankenstein with chapter IV. She completed it in 1817, and the first edition was published in 1818. But what exactly was it that Shelley wanted to express with Frankenstein ? Does she condemn the protagonist Victor Frankenstein for his hubris or does she approve of his deeds? Throughout the whole novel Frankenstein, Mary Shelley never explicitly comments on her position. The following section is dedicated to these questions and presents a number of possible different interpretations of Frankenstein based on the work

of different critics.

These different readings of Frankenstein, on the one hand conservative criticism on science, on the other hand the Promethean believe in the unlimited progress of science, are based on the three different narrators of the novel. Two contradicting points of view are expressed in the narratives of Frankenstein and the Monster, whereas Walton's frame narrative basically supports Victor Frankenstein's point of view. Therefore the value of Mary Shelley's novel lies not in presenting a clear morale but in encouraging the readers to make up their own.

Victor Frankenstein's original reasons for creating life from dead parts are noble. His driving force is the desire to help mankind conquer death and diseases. But when he finally reaches the goal of his efforts and sees his creature and its ugliness, he turns away from it and flees the monstrosity he has created. From that moment on he tries to suppress the consequences of his experiments and wants to escape them by working in other sciences. Victor even withdraws from his friends and psychological changes are visible.

Mary Shelley seems not to condemn the act of creation but rather Frankenstein's lack of willingness to accept the responsibility for his deeds. His creation only becomes a monster at the moment his creator deserts it. Insofar Frankenstein warns of the careless use of science, which is still an important issue, even 200 years after the book was written. Taken into consideration what many inventions of the last 50 years brought upon mankind, one must assume that many scientists still do not care much. (E.g. the splitting of the atom was turned into nuclear bombs and the invention of the computer resulted in an eerie dehumanization of western society). Most scientists seem to be like Victor Frankenstein, who finished his work in the prospect of achieving fame. Only when he realizes the repulsiveness of his creation, Victor comes to senses. Intended as a warning, Victor tells his story to the polar explorer Walton:

I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. 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.

In his corrupting striving for knowledge Victor Frankenstein is compared to Prometheus, as the novel's subtitle "The Modern Prometheus" suggests. It is a typical example of "hubris," where a character is doomed because he transgresses his limits and rises up against some sort of authority, in Greek mythology usually a divine authority. The mythological Prometheus rebelled against the Gods when he gave fire to humankind; Frankenstein is a rebel against nature when he tries not only to find the secret of life but also to remove life's defects. But even more so, in Victor Frankenstein both aspects of the Prometheus myth are embodied: the transgressive (hubris/rebellion against authority) and the creative (Prometheus also molded mankind from pieces of clay). Therefore

Frankenstein is truly a drama of the romantic promethean hero who fails in his attempt to help mankind.

Feminist literary theory claims that Frankenstein's act of creation is not only a sin against God/nature. It is also an act against the "female principle", which includes natural procreation as one of its central aspects. The Monster, the result of male arrogance, is the enemy and destroyer of the eternal female principle. The Monster is the child of an unnatural act of procreation in which woman has become unnecessary. The male, who is the executive power in a patriarchal system, has deprived woman of her most natural function because he is now able to create children without female participation. The present discussion about genetic engineering and human cloning shows that this is not a far-fetched utopia. At least in his subconscious Frankenstein must have realized his crime against the "female principle," which becomes clear in the following symbolic dream. In the night after the reanimation of the Monster Victor has a nightmare in which he kills his mother and his fiancée:



Frankenstein creates the fiend - illustration by Bernie Wrightson (© 1977)

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, 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.

At the same time Frankenstein is not willing to fully take the role of the mother of his "child". Immediately after its birth he leaves his child and thereby evades his parental duty to care for the child.

Walton, constructed as a parallel to Frankenstein, is kept from continuing his dangerous journey by Frankenstein's cautionary tale. But in contrast to Walton Frankenstein's character remains somehow ambivalent. Although he feels remorse for his deeds he ends his tale with a rather strange statement:

Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed.

Victor Frankenstein has given up his attempts to create artificial life. But he still hopes that someone else may successfully continue his works. This last sentence makes all his warnings look like a farce. And it also brings up the assumption that Mary Shelley really did not condemn the Promethean striving of her hero. Probably she was not against scientific progress but only wanted to warn of carelessness in science.

A totally different position is represented in the Monster's narrative, the central part of the novel. If only this narrative is considered, the Monster appears to be an almost perfect creation (apart from his horrible appearance), who appears often more human than the humans themselves. He is benevolent (he saves a little child; he helps the De Lacey family collecting firewood), intelligent and cultured (he learns to read and talk in a very short time; he reads Goethe's Werther, Milton's Paradise Lost and Plutarch's works). The only reason why he fails is his repulsive appearance. After having been rejected and attacked again and again by everyone he encounters only because of his horrible physiognomy, the Monster, alone and left on his own, develops a deadly hatred against his creator Frankenstein and against all of mankind. Therefore only society is to blame for the dangerous threat to mankind that the Monster has become. If people had adopted the Monster into their society instead of being biased against him and mistreating him he would have become a valuable member of the human society due to his outstanding physical and intellectual powers.

Mary Shelley's husband, the romantic poet Percy B. Shelley, saw Frankenstein as a summing up of one of the central ideas of the enlightenment movement. The moral qualities and faults of a human being are mainly the products of his/her private and social environment. Everything we become is simply a question of nature vs. nurture. In his review "On Frankenstein" (1818), Percy B. Shelley wrote:

Nor are the crimes and malevolence of the single Being, though indeed withering and tremendous, the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow irresistibly from certain causes fully adequate to their production. They are the children, as it were, of Necessity and Human nature. In this the direct morale of the book consists, and it is perhaps the

most important and of the most universal application of any morale that can be enforced by example - Treat a person ill and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn; let one being be selected for whatever cause as the refuse of his kind - divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations - malevolence and selfishness. It is thus that too often in society those who are best qualified to be its benefactors and its ornaments are branded by some accident with scorn, and changed by neglect and solitude of heart into a scourge and a curse.

For Percy Shelley the problem does not seem to be Frankenstein's promethean transgression because danger for mankind is not rooted in science but in society itself. In this context Frankenstein's final words become quite clear: Someone else should continue his experiments and remove the creature's visible defects, in other words assemble a creature with a more beautiful appearance, which would be accepted by society more easily. If this could be achieved, the result would be the perfect artificial human being.

At this point other critics continue and read Frankenstein in a different context. To them the book works as a harsh criticism on religion. The horrible physiognomy of the Monster is only a result of Frankenstein's hurry and anxiety caused by his awareness of committing a sin against God. Because of this unrest he uses inadequate materials and assembles them too quickly. It implies that a scientist can only work for the benefit of mankind if he breaks with the church and its values. This reading of Frankenstein may have been influenced by Percy Shelley's pamphlet "The Necessity of Atheism" (1810), where he states that a reasoning human being has to deny the existence of God due to a lack of proofs. However, one might easily share my opinion that this interpretation of Frankenstein is a bit far-fetched. Since Victor Frankenstein is not at all a professional surgeon he cannot be expected to create a perfect human being out of partly rotten body parts, especially not with the kind of instruments, assistance and funding he uses.

In her preface to Frankenstein, Mary Shelley admits that her main goal was simply to write a ghost story. She got the idea for what she later called her "hideous progeny" during the legendary summer of 1816, which she spent at Lake Geneva in Switzerland together with Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Dr. John Polidori. Inspired by Fantasmagoriana, a French translation of German Gothic tales, they held some kind of ghost story competition where Mary Shelley invented her story of Frankenstein. But the classification of Frankenstein as a ghost story, Gothic novel or horror novel is not fully adequate, considering the following facts: It contains no supernatural apparitions such as ghosts, witches, devils, demons or sorcerers. In Frankenstein all "diabolical agency has been replaced by human, natural and scientific powers." Other typical Gothic elements, e.g. ruined castles, graveyards and charnel houses, appear only briefly or in the distance. And unlike most Gothic novels Frankenstein is set in the 18th rather than in the 15th century. Shelley also abandoned the simple good-evil scheme of the Gothic novel.

Neither Frankenstein nor the Monster are one hundred percent good or evil. Instead they are both highly ambivalent characters. Frankenstein is rather a kind of novel German literary critics call *Entwicklungsroman*, a form of the novel showing the development of an individual's character. Both Victor and his creation change during the novel as a consequence of their relationship. Furthermore, one could argue that it shows the Monster's development from earliest childhood to adulthood. And by making its protagonist hero as well as victim Frankenstein is clearly set in the context of Romanticism.



The Frankenstein monster as a symbol for cloning: Cartoon on stem cell research by Dick Wright (© 2001)

But since one of its main topics is a scientific discovery, *Frankenstein* could equally be called a precursor of the science fiction novel. The artificially created Monster is often seen as a foreshadowing of recent scientific developments like test-tube babies, robots and organ transplantation. The Monster may also be interpreted as "a symbol of the ambiguous nature of the machine" or as a symbol of modern technology.

Source: <http://members.aon.at/frankenstein/frankenstein-novel.htm>

It lives! Early Theatre and Film Adaptations

By Andreas Rohrmoser

Shortly after the publication of Frankenstein, the first theatre adaptations of the novel appeared although, at that time, the novel was widely criticized for being subversive and atheistic. William Beckford, writer of fantasy and travel literature, called

it “the foulest toadstool that has yet sprung up from the reeking dunghill of the present times.” Stage adaptations of Frankenstein were intended as commercial productions that should only entertain the audience. The writers of these adaptations had to bear in mind the conservative majority of their audience and therefore tried to include a morale which would satisfy less liberal views.

The title of the first Frankenstein stage adaptation, Richard Brinsley Peake’s Presumption: or the Fate of Frankenstein (1823), clearly signals that it presents a morale fit for a conservative audience. Nonetheless so-called “friends of humanity” started a moral campaign appealing to fathers of families to boycott the play. Under such pressure the management announced the play with the following statement, “The striking moral exhibited in this story is the fatal consequence of that presumption which attempts to penetrate beyond prescribed depths, into the mysteries of nature.” In order to appeal to his audience Peake changed the original plot of the novel. He introduces an assistant to Frankenstein, the bumpkin Fritz, who “prepares the audience to interpret the tale according to received Christian notions of sin and damnation by telling them that ‘like Dr Faustus, my master is raising the devil.’ Immediately after Frankenstein has created the Monster he begins to regret his doings, when he describes its ugliness and wants to “extinguish the spark which I have so presumptuously bestowed.” Other minor changes – Victor is in love with Agatha de Lacey, who falls victim to the Monster; Elizabeth becomes Victor’s sister – were simply made to fit the play into the genre of melodramatic romantic theatre. But the most significant changes are the omission of the Walton subplot and – even more important – the muteness of the Monster. Peake made it a brutish creature with an infant’s mind and unable to speak. It does not develop human emotions and is only capable of rage and violence. In Peake’s version the Monster is no longer “a sensitive critic of social institutions” but has been “assimilated firmly into the traditional role of the monster as a visible image of presumptuous vice.” At the end Frankenstein and his Monster are buried under an avalanche.

Music. – Frankenstein draws his pistol – rushes off at back of stage. – The gypsies return at various entrances. – At the same time, enter Felix and Clerval with pistols, and Safie, Elizabeth, and Ninon following. – The Demon appears at the base of the mountain, Frankenstein pursuing.

CLERVAL. Behold our friend and his mysterious enemy.

FELIX. See – Frankenstein aims his musket at him – let us follow and assist him. *(Is going up stage with Clerval.)*

HAMMERPAN. Hold master! If the gun is fired, it will bring down a mountain of snow [on their heads.] Many an avalanche has fallen there.

[FELIX. He fires –]

Music. – Frankenstein discharges his musket. – The Demon and Frankenstein meet at the very extremity of the stage. – Frankenstein fires – the avalanche falls

and annihilates the Demon and Frankenstein. – A heavy fall of snow succeeds. – Loud thunder heard, and all the characters form a picture as the curtain falls.

Mary Shelley attended one of the performances but found that “the story was not well managed.” This opinion is quite understandable considering the fact that the original’s wide range of possible interpretations had been removed in favor of a moralistic reading of Frankenstein.

Other stage adaptations took this simplification to an even farther extent when Victor Frankenstein was made more egotistic and ruthless by turning him into a typical mad scientist figure. This was the case in Henry Milner’s Frankenstein or the Man and the Monster (1826), a minor work, which nevertheless is still known for being the first version that showed the creation/awakening of the Monster. In Shelley’s novel the actual creation is only described in a few lines:

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I 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.

In Peake’s Presumption, the Monster is still created off-stage. At the end of the first act Frankenstein disappears to his laboratory. A servant watches him through a window, but runs off frightened when Frankenstein cries, “It lives!” A horrified Frankenstein reappears on stage when suddenly the Monster himself, throwing down the laboratory’s door, rushes on stage and presents his monstrosity to the audience. Like Mary Shelley Peake did not reveal the secret how Frankenstein animates his Monster.

Milner, however, provides exact stage directions for the creation scene in Frankenstein or the Man and the Monster:

Laboratory with bottles and chemical apparatus. First sight of the monster an indistinct form with a black cloth...music....A colossal human figure of a cadaverous livid complexion, it slowly begins to rise, gradually attaining an erect posture. When it has attained a perpendicular position, and glares its eyes upon him, he starts back with horror.

In subsequent years many stage and film productions of Frankenstein would present similar creation scenes.

By 1826 Frankenstein had been dramatized in burlesque and melodramatic forms fifteen times. Even before first film versions appeared, Mary Shelley’s creation was already popular in England and Europe. But by that time the “Frankenstein” myth had

already been considerably changed. Mary Shelley herself changed her novel for the third edition (published in 1831) according to recent, more conservative readings and under the influence of the various stage adaptations. She strengthened the cautionary element of the story, introduced galvanism and even inserted the word "presumption" from Peake's play into one of Victor Frankenstein's speeches.

Source: <http://members.aon.at/frankenstein/frankenstein-theatre.htm>

For more information about the film productions, see Andreas Rohrmoser's website:
<http://members.aon.at/frankenstein/frankenstein-start.htm>

Summaries of the Novel

by Cynthia Hamberg

A really short synopsis of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus would be:

A young Swiss student discovers the secret of animating lifeless matter and, by assembling body parts, creates a monster who vows revenge on his creator after being rejected from society.

A more detailed summary would go like this:

An English explorer, Robert Walton, is on an expedition to the North Pole. In letters to his sister Margaret Saville, he keeps his family informed of his situation and tells about the difficult conditions on the ship. One day when the ship is completely surrounded by ice, a man in bad condition is taken aboard: Victor Frankenstein. As soon as his health allows it, he tells Walton the story of his life.

He grew up in Geneva, Switzerland as the eldest son of a higher class family. He was brought up with an orphan, Elizabeth and also had two younger brothers. He did not have many friends, Henry Clerval being the only exception. At the age of nineteen, Frankenstein became interested in natural philosophy, electricity, chemistry and mathematics. After the death of his mother, who succumbed to scarlet fever, Frankenstein left for Ingolstadt, Germany, to attend university. There, his interest in natural philosophy quickly became an obsession. He was particularly fascinated with the human frame and the principle of life. After four years of fanatic studying, not keeping in contact with his family, he was able to "bestow animation upon lifeless matter" and created a monster of gigantic proportion from assembled body parts taken from graveyards, slaughterhouses and dissecting rooms. As soon as the creature opened his eyes, however, the beauty of Frankenstein's dream vanished: it became a horrible creature. He realized he made a mistake in creating this monster and fled from his laboratory. On his return the next day, the monster had disappeared. Victor was consequently bedridden with a nervous fever for the next months, being nursed back to health by his friend Clerval. On the eve of the return to his parental home, he received a letter that his youngest brother had been found murdered. On his way home, Frankenstein saw the dæmon he has created and immediately realized that it is he who is responsible for his brother's death. Frankenstein decided not to tell his family about the dæmon because they would simply dismiss it as

insane. As he arrived home, he was informed that the murderer of his brother had been found. The accused was Justine, a good friend of the family. When Justine has been found guilty and has been hanged, Frankenstein's heart was tortured. He could not stay in the house and started wandering in the Alpine valleys. There, Frankenstein was confronted with his creation who tells him his life story.

After leaving Frankenstein's laboratory, he went to the village where he was insulted and attacked by the frightened villagers. He eventually went to the country and found refuge in a hovel next to small house inhabited by an old, blind man and his two children. By observing the family and by reading their books, the monster learnt how to speak and read. He felt compassion for the family who has to struggle to get by, and anonymously did chores for them. Longing for some kindness and protection, he decided to meet his hosts. He got into a pleasant conversation with the blind man but his children return unexpectedly. Horrified by his appearance, they beat him and he fled the house. Completely disillusioned, the monster was filled with rage and decided to find his creator. By chance he met Frankenstein's younger brother in the forest. As soon as he discovered that the boy "belongs to the enemy" he choked him. He also placed a portrait in the lap of a sleeping young girl, Justine, thereby incriminating her with his crime. The dæmon's only request from Frankenstein was that he should create another being: a female to accompany him. If Frankenstein complies, he and his bride will stay away from other people and keep to themselves in the wild. Frankenstein saw some justice in the monster's arguments and also felt that he has a duty towards his fellow-man, so he agreed to the dæmon's request.

Victor left for England to finish his work accompanied by his friend Clerval, promising to marry Elizabeth on his return. When the work on his second creation was advanced, he started to question his promise. He was afraid that they might hate each other, or that they might produce a whole race of these creatures. When the monster visits to check on the progress, Frankenstein destroyed his work. The monster swore revenge and promised to be with him on his wedding night. The following day a body was found and Frankenstein was accused of murder. He was taken to the body which he identified as Henry Clerval. He was eventually cleared of all charges and returned to Geneva in a very bad condition. Frankenstein married Elizabeth after promising her to tell her his horrifying secret the following day. Remembering the monster's threat, Frankenstein was convinced that he would be killed that night. The monster, however, kills Elizabeth instead. Frankenstein lost another family member as his father died after hearing the news about Elizabeth's death. Frankenstein had now lost every sensation except for revenge. He followed the monster everywhere which eventually led him to the Arctic region, where he was taken aboard Walton's ship.

After telling Walton his story, Victor asks him to kill the monster if he dies before he can do it himself. The ship has in the mean time been freed from the ice and pressured by his crew, Walton has decided to abandon his trip and return home. Victor's health eventually deteriorates and he dies. Just after his death, Walton finds the monster hanging over Victor's body. The dæmon speaks of his sufferings. Because of all the murders he has committed, he now hates himself. Since his creator is dead, he decides it is time that

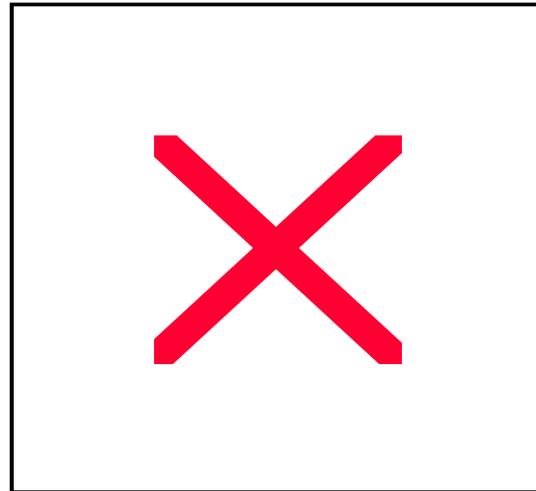
he too will rest in death. After stating that he will build a funeral pile for himself, he leaves the ship and disappears on his ice-raft in the darkness.

Source: <http://home-1.worldonline.nl/~hamberg/>

The Novel's Title

by Cynthia Hamberg

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.

Source: <http://home-1.worldonline.nl/~hamberg/>

Genre of the Novel

Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus contains elements of two major genre of literature: the gothic and science fiction. Gothicism is part of the Romantic Movement that started in the late eighteenth century and lasted to roughly three decades into the nineteenth century. The Romantic Movement is characterized by innovation (instead of traditionalism), spontaneity (according to Wordsworth good poetry is a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"), freedom of thought and expression (especially the thoughts and feelings of the poet himself), an idealization of nature (Romantic poets were

also referred to as "nature poets") and the belief of living in an age of "new beginnings and high possibilities."

The first novel that was later identified as Gothic was Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story in 1764. The Castle of Otranto, like many other Gothic novels, is set in a medieval society, has a lot of mysterious disappearances as well as other supernatural occurrences. The main protagonist is usually a solitary character who has an egocentric nature. Even though the genre is a phase in the Romantic movement, it is regarded as the forerunner of the modern mystery or science fiction novel.

Many of the above mentioned elements appear in Frankenstein. For example, nature is used frequently to create atmosphere. The bleak, glacial fields of the Alps and the mists of the Arctic serve to indicate the isolation of the two protagonists. The solitary character in Frankenstein can apply to both Victor as his creation as they both live their lives in social isolation. Although Gothic novels were written mainly to evoke terror in their readers, they also served to show the dark side of human nature. They describe the "nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the controlled and ordered surface of the conscious mind." Surprisingly, there were a vast number of female Gothic authors. It is not unlikely that this kind of fiction provided a release for the "submerged desires of that . . . disadvantaged class."

The Gothic genre also extends to poetry. Poems by Coleridge and Keats ("Christabel" and "Eve of St. Agnes" respectively) deal with "the fantastic . . . and the exploration of the unconscious mind". Science fiction explores "the marvels of discovery and achievement that may result from future developments in science and technology". Mary Shelley used some of the most recent technological findings of her time to create Frankenstein. She has replaced the heavenly fire of the Prometheus myth with the spark of newly discovered electricity. The concepts of electricity and warmth led to the discovery of the galvanization process, which was said to be the key to the animation of life. Indeed, it is this process which animates Frankenstein's monster.

Source: <http://home-1.worldonline.nl/~hamberg/>

Character Descriptions

by Cynthia Hamberg

Victor Frankenstein

Victor is 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" 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".

It is only after the creation of the dæmon 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 dæmon 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. But on the other hand there is the scene on the ship when Walton's crew demands to return home. Victor responds to this by giving a very emotional and passionate speech. Among other things he accuses the men of cowardice and unmanly behavior. If they were to abandon their expedition they would return home with a "stigma of disgrace". Judging by this speech, Victor has not learnt much of his ordeal. He apparently still feels that people should put their own feelings and desires above everybody else's. This is an interesting insight into Victor's selfish nature.

Another 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 for example Elizabeth. 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 throbbings 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."

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 Victor's 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."), 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." 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, Alphonse, 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 be 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."

Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein

Being a caring person, Caroline 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

Henry 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. Although Henry too has an inquisitive mind and is anxious to gain experience and instruction, he never lets it interfere with his personal relations.

In the novel it is stated that 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 Dæmon

The 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", he has lustrous, flowing black hair and white teeth, he has a "shrivelled complexion and straight black lips." 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". 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", 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." With an immense self-hatred, he promises Walton that he will "consume to ashes this miserable frame" so that future curious generations would not create "such another as I have been."

The characters in general

As is perhaps obvious from the character descriptions, most of the characters are so-called flat (or two-dimensional) characters. These characters are "built around 'a single idea or quality'" and are not described in great detail. Their role in a literary work is usually to contrast with or to support the real protagonist(s). Flat characters therefore do not need to have the subtle representation and the developing character that round characters have. In Frankenstein, the only three-dimensional characters are Victor Frankenstein and his creation. The others merely represent the stock types of goodness, benevolence and love.

Source: <http://home-1.worldonline.nl/~hamberg/>

Frankenstein & Other Literary Works

by Cynthia Hamberg

There are numerous references to authors, literary works and other (mythological) figures in Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus. You will find listed below some information about those writings and authors.

- **Byron, George Gordon Noel (a.k.a. Lord Byron) (1788-1824)**

Lord Byron was one of the most important and versatile writers of the Romantic Movement. The publication in 1812 of the first two cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a poem narrating travels in Europe, brought Byron fame. Rumors about his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta and doubts about his sanity led to his being ostracized by society. Deeply embittered, Byron left England in 1816 and never returned. For two years Byron traveled around Italy, settling in Pisa in 1821. He wrote the verse dramas Cain and Sardanapalus and the narrative poems Mazeppa and The Island during these years. In 1822, with the poets Percy Bysshe Shelley and Leigh Hunt, he started at Pisa a journal called The Liberal, but Shelley's death that year and a quarrel with Hunt put an end to this venture after only three issues had been printed. Don Juan, a mock epic in 16 cantos, encompasses a brilliant satire on contemporary English society. Often regarded as Byron's greatest work, it was completed in 1823. Byron is mentioned several times in the Introduction to Frankenstein.

- **Darwin, Erasmus (a.k.a. Dr. Darwin) (1731 - 1802)**

Although not quite as famous as his grandson the evolutionist Charles Darwin, Erasmus Darwin was one of the most distinguished scientists of his age. His most famous works include The Zoonomia and The Temple of Nature. He was a frequent visitor to the Godwin household. Although in the Preface to Frankenstein Mary Shelley states that "the event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed, by Dr. Darwin (. . .), as not of impossible occurrence", this is not entirely correct. Some comments Darwin made in an article entitled "Spontaneous Vitality of Microscopic Animals" have probably been remembered wrong by Byron and Shelley.

- **Magnus, Albertus (a.k.a. Albert the Great) (1200-1280)**

Magnus was widely known as *doctor universalis* for his wide interest in natural science. He was especially noted for his introduction of Greek and Arabic science and philosophy to the medieval world. Born in Lauingen, Bavaria (Germany), to a noble military family, Magnus became a master of theology in 1245 and subsequently held one of the Dominican chairs of theology. Among his early students was Thomas Aquinas. Albert was an influential teacher, church administrator, and preacher. Magnus had, on his journeys, shown an intense interest in natural phenomena, and he seized on Aristotle's scientific writings. He examined them, commented on them, and occasionally contradicted them on the evidence of his own careful observations. He produced essentially new works and, according to the English philosopher Roger Bacon, held much the same authority in his time as did Aristotle himself.

Albert died at Cologne on November 15, 1280. He was beatified in 1622 and declared a saint by Pope Pius XI in 1931, at which time he was acclaimed an official Doctor of the Church. In 1941 Pope Pius XII made him the patron of all

who study the natural sciences. Albertus Magnus is referred to in Chapters II and III of Frankenstein.

- **Milton, John (1608-1674)**

Milton, the author of the famous Paradise Lost, was an English poet who was known for his rich and dense verse. He was a powerful influence on succeeding English poets, and his prose was devoted to the defense of civil and religious liberty. After Shakespeare, Milton is often regarded as the greatest English poet.

John Milton's work is often centered-around themes of lofty religious idealism and the cosmic. It reveals an astonishing breadth of learning and command of the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew classics. His blank verse is remarkably varied and rich, so skillfully modulated and flexible that it has been compared to organ tones. Milton is referred to in the Preface to Frankenstein.

- **Newton, Sir Isaac (1643-1727)**

Newton was an English mathematician and physicist; he is considered one of the greatest scientists in history, who made important contributions to many fields of science. His discoveries and theories laid the foundation for much of the progress in science since his time. Newton was one of the inventors of the branch of mathematics called calculus. He also solved the mysteries of light and optics, formulated the three laws of motion, and derived from them the law of universal gravitation.

In 1665, Newton received his bachelor's degree from Cambridge University. Newton ignored much of the established curriculum of the university to pursue his own interests: mathematics and natural philosophy. Proceeding entirely on his own, he investigated the latest developments in mathematics and the new natural philosophy that treated nature as a complicated machine. Almost immediately, he made fundamental discoveries that were instrumental in his career in science. Sir Isaac Newton is referred to in Chapter II of Frankenstein.

- **Paracelsus (a.k.a. Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim) (1493-1541)**

Paracelsus was a German physician and chemist who claimed diseases are caused by agents that were external to the body and that they could be countered by chemical substances. He defied the belief of the so-called Scholastics, that diseases were caused by an imbalance of bodily "humors" or fluids, and that they would be cured by bloodletting and purging. Paracelsus devised mineral remedies with which he thought the body could defend itself. He identified the characteristics of numerous diseases, such as goiter and syphilis, and used ingredients such as sulphur and mercury compounds to counter them. Many of his remedies were based on the belief that "like cures like," and in this respect he was a precursor of homeopathy. Although the writings of Paracelsus contained elements of magic, his revolt against ancient medical precepts freed medical thinking, enabling it to take a more scientific course. Shelley refers to Paracelsus on two occasions, namely in Chapter II (twice) and Chapter III (twice).

Selections from Mary Shelley's 1818 Text of Frankenstein, or The New Prometheus

Selections by R. Steele Michael, Dramaturg

Source

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.

Foreshadowing of the Term, "Friend"

The explorer, Robert Walton, who finds Victor Frankenstein among "the icy climes of the north," writes to Margaret Walton, his sister:

I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine. You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. (10)

Explanation of the Term, "Daemon"

Oxford English Dictionary:

- Daemon: inferior divinity
- Demon: evil spirit
-

Walton of Victor:

I begin to love him as a brother; and his constant and deep grief fills me with sympathy and compassion. (15)

Victor's Love of Learning:

Natural philosophy is the genius that regulated my fate. (21)

Victor & His Aspirations:

But what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (22)

University of Ingolstadt:

Founded in 1472, the university in this Bavarian town was important to the Counter-reformation, and, later, was the birthplace of the Illuminati. The secret society of rational freethinkers, holding deistic and republican

beliefs, was founded at Ingolstadt in 1776 by Professor Adam Weishaupt. The sect was outlawed in 1785, and the university was moved to Landshut in 1800 and then to Munich in 1826. (24)

Victor's Mentor, Professor Waldman:

'The ancient teachers of this science [chemistry],' said he, 'promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascent into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows.' (27-28)

Victor on Reanimating Life:

'After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.' (30)

Victor's Warning to Walton:

'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.' (31)

Victor's Hubris:

'Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me.' (32)

The First Major Description of the Creature:

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. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how

delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips. (34)

Victor's Fear & Loathing:

I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the court-yard belong to the house I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life. (34-35)

After William's Death & Justine's Execution:

I had been the author of unalterable evils; and I lived in daily fear, lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new wickedness. (60)

Victor Meets the Creature on Mont Blanc & Evidence of Character Development for the Dæmon:

‘Devil!’ I exclaimed, ‘do you dare approach me? And do not fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! or rather stay, that I may trample you to dust! And, oh, that I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!’

‘I expected this reception,’ said the dæmon. ‘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. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace;

but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends.' (65)

The Creature Again Confronts Victor:

[Creature]

'Be calm!' I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.'

[Victor]

'Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall.'

[Creature]

'How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favorable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion. Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow-beings. If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great, that not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of its rage. Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defence before they are

condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands.’ (66-67)

The Dæmon Enounters De Lacey, Agatha, & Felix [his children]:

‘What chiefly struck me was the gentle manners of these people; and I long to join them, but dared not.’ (73)

‘I spent the winter in this manner. The gentle manners and beauty of the cottagers greatly endeared them to me: when they were unhappy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys.’ (75)

The Dæmon Realizes He Is Ugly:

‘I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity.’ (76)

More Self-Realization:

‘When I looked around, I saw and heard none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned?’ (80-81)

Larger Questions:

‘But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing. From my earliest remembrance I had been as I then was in height and proportion. I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans.’ (81)

Paradise Lost & Its Important Influence Upon the Dæmon:

‘But *Paradise Lost* excited different and far deeper emotions. I read it, as I had read the other volumes which had fallen into my hands, as a true

history. It moved every feeling of wonder and awe, that the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures was capable of exciting. I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me.' (87)

After William's Death, the Dæmon Resolves Vengeance:

'I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph: clapping my hands, I exclaimed, 'I, too, can create desolation; my enemy is not impregnable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him.' (97)

After the Murder, the Dæmon Contemplates a Mate in his Dialogue with Victor:

'For some days I haunted the spot where these scenes had taken place; sometimes wishing to see you, sometimes resolved to quit the world and its miseries for ever. At length I wandered towards these mountains, and have ranged through their immense recesses, consumed by a burning passion which you alone can gratify. We may not part until you have promised to comply with my requisition. I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create.' (97)

The Passage from "Dæmon" to "Monster"

'What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself: the gratification is small, but it is all that I can receive, and it shall content me. It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel. Oh! My creator, make me happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my request!' (98-99)

The Dæmon's Last Words after Victor Dies

‘Fear not that I shall be the instrument of future mischief. My work is nearly complete. Neither your’s nor any man’s death is needed to consummate the series of my being, and accomplish that which must be done; but it requires my own. Do not think that I shall be slow to perform this sacrifice. I shall quit your vessel on the ice-raft which brought me hither, and shall seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch, who would create such another as I have been. I shall die. I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me, or be the prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched. He is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish. I shall no longer see the sun or stars, or feel the winds play on my cheeks. Light, feeling, and sense, will pass away; and in this condition must I find my happiness. Some years ago, when the images which this world affords first opened upon me, when I felt the cheering warmth of summer, and heard the rustling of the leaves and the chirping of the birds, and these were all to me, I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation. Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?’

‘Farewell! I leave you, and in you the last of human kind whom these eyes will ever behold. Farewell, Frankenstein! If thou wert yet alive, and yet cherished a desire of revenge against me, it would be better satiated in my life than in my destruction. But it was not so; thou didst seek my extinction, that I might not cause greater wretchedness; and if yet, in some mode unknown to me, thou hast not yet ceased to think and feel, thou desirest not my life for my own misery. Blasted as thou wert, my agony was still superior to thine; for the bitter sting of remorse may not cease to rankle in my wounds until death shall close them for ever.’

‘But soon,’ he cried, with sad and solemn enthusiasm, ‘I shall die and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell.’

He sprung from the cabin-window, as he said this, upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance.

THE END
(155-156)