

THE GRAVEYARD OF AMBITION: MARY SHELLEY'S 'FRANKENSTEIN'

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ABSTRACT

People think Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is just some ordinary ghost story. They are dead wrong. It is a cold, naked post-mortem of human ambition and a swollen, unrestrained ego. This paper digs into the tragedy of Victor Frankenstein and his nameless orphan. The real horror doesn't come from the unnatural act of stitching dead flesh together. The true monster is the creator's own spine-chilling cowardice and the sheer betrayal of abandoning his own flesh and blood. Victor's blinding arrogance, the creature begging for a little connection, and the ruthless society that turns his pain into pure vengeance-the novel rips off the civilized masks of humanity. Ultimately, this paper is a blood-soaked charge sheet against a world that butchers what it cannot understand, holding up a mirror and forcing you to stare right into the eyes of the real monster of the modern age.

KEYWORDS: *Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, Hubris, Monstrosity, Abandonment, The Sublime, Paradise Lost, Creator And Creation.*

The present novel isn't a story of triumph. It doesn't smell of roses or ring with the bells of a happy ending. This is a story that smells of damp graveyard earth, formaldehyde, and the terrifying, bottomless arrogance of the human ego. We often talk about monsters. We look for them under the bed, in the dark alleys, in the dense forests. But Mary Shelley, an eighteen-year-old girl, sat down during a gloomy summer in 1816 and pointed her finger at the most dangerous place on earth: the mirror. Trapped inside the Villa Diodati near Lake Geneva during the "Year Without a Summer," while Lord Byron and Percy Shelley debated the animating principles of life, young Mary had a waking nightmare. She envisioned a "pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together" (Shelley 8). From that singular, terrifying vision was born a novel that would haunt the human consciousness for centuries. Her novel, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, is not just a horror story. It is a post-mortem of human ambition. It is a blood-soaked indictment of what happens when a man decides that he no longer needs God, but lacks the heart to be one. It is a prophecy whispered from the nineteenth century into the ears of our modern, hyper-technological world, warning us of the catastrophic fallout of

unchecked creation.

The Arrogant Architect: Victor Frankenstein

Victor Frankenstein is a privileged boy from Geneva, armed with too much intellect and entirely too little wisdom. He wasn't a mad scientist laughing maniacally in a thunderstorm—that is the cartoonish invention of Hollywood. In the novel, he is something far more common and far more dangerous. He was a coward. He was driven by that intoxicating, fatal human flaw: the desire to conquer death and elevate himself above the natural order. As a youth, Victor becomes obsessed with the outdated, mystical texts of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, before arriving at the university in Ingolstadt, where he marries this ancient, alchemical desire for godhood with the cold, cutting edge of modern chemistry. He locks himself away in what he calls his "workshop of filthy creation," isolating himself from his family, his friends, and the warmth of the sun (Shelley 55). To become a creator of life, Victor paradoxically severs himself from the living world. He didn't create life out of stardust or divine clay. He sneaked into charnel houses at midnight. He plunged his hands into rotting meat, stealing limbs from the gallows and eyes from the dead. He violated the sanctity of the grave, torturing the living animal to

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animate the lifeless clay (Shelley 54). He stitched together a grotesque mockery of humanity. And when the creature-the eight-foot-tall assembly of stolen flesh-opened its dull yellow eyes and took its first agonizing breath. The creator ran away from it. "Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room," Victor confesses, completely devoid of paternal responsibility (Shelley 58). Victor's sin was not creation but abandonment. He usurped the female role of reproduction, bypassed the natural order, brought a soul into the agonizing light of reality, and then slammed the door in its face because it was ugly. That is the foundational tragedy of Frankenstein. It's the story of a father who looks at his newborn child in the crib, feels disgusted, and walks away, leaving it to the mercy of a cruel, unforgiving world.

The Unnamed Tragedy

Then we have the Creation. The Monster. It is perhaps the most telling detail of the entire novel that Shelley never gives him a name. He is called "demon," "fiend," "wretch," and "it." To name something is to claim it, to grant it a place in the human family. By leaving him unnamed, society denies him existence. But as we read his narrative, our heart breaks for the wretch, not the master. The Monster wanders into the world with the innocence of a newborn. He doesn't know hate. He doesn't know murder. He is a blank slate, a Rousseauian natural man, cast out into a freezing forest. He must discover fire, pain, hunger, and cold all on his own. He just wants what every single soul on this earth wants: connection. A gentle touch. A word of kindness.

What does society give him? Stones. Screams. Pitchforks.

Shelley shows us the absolute brutal reality of human nature: we destroy what we do not understand, and we are merciless to the ugly. The Monster learns the ways of humanity not through formal education, but by hiding in a miserable hovel attached to a shed, watching a poor, exiled family-the De Laceys. Through a crack in the wall, he observes their affection. He learns language by listening to them speak. He secretly chops their wood and clears their snow, acting as an invisible guardian angel. He learns love, and tragically, he learns that his physical form means he will never, ever be allowed to experience it. He also learns of his own wretchedness through literature. Finding a satchel of books, he reads John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But unlike Victor, who sees himself as God, the creature realizes he has no divine parent. "I ought to be thy Adam," he later tells Victor, "but

I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed" (Shelley 103). The creature makes one desperate, agonizing attempt to connect. He waits until the blind patriarch of the De Lacey family is alone, knowing the old man cannot see his horrific face. For a brief, shining moment, the blind man offers him kindness. But when the sighted children return, they see only a monster. Felix De Lacey beats him with a stick until he flees, his heart shattered into unrecoverable pieces (Shelley 137).

The Birth of the Butcher

When society starves a soul of love, it feeds on vengeance. The Monster realizes a terrifying, inescapable truth: If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear. He doesn't become a killer because it is in his nature; he becomes a killer because it is the exact language humanity taught him. The Monster tracks down his creator and makes one final, entirely reasonable demand: create for me a female companion, as hideous as I am, so that I do not have to exist in this agonizing void. "My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor," he pleads, promising to vanish into the wilds of South America if Victor complies (Shelley 147). Victor initially agrees, but his cowardice overtakes him once again. Fearing a "race of devils" might populate the earth, Victor destroys the half-finished female creature right before the Monster's eyes (Shelley 170). It is here that the Butcher is truly born. The Monster lets out a howl of unparalleled despair and issues a chilling vow: "I will be with you on your wedding-night" (Shelley 173). He systematically dismantles Victor's life. He has already strangled Victor's young brother, William, and framed the innocent servant, Justine, letting the gallows take her. Now, the violence escalates. He kills Victor's best friend, Henry Clerval. And in the most chilling, poetic climax of revenge, he fulfills his promise: he infiltrates the bridal chamber and murders Victor's bride, Elizabeth, strangling her on their wedding night. Victor destroyed the Monster's bride; the Monster destroys Victor's. An eye for an eye, until the whole world is blind. Is it brutal? Yes. Is it monstrous? Absolutely. But whose hands are truly covered in blood? The Monster who struck the blow, or the creator who wound up the toy, removed its heart, and let it loose in the world?

The Ice of Inevitability

Shelley ends this magnificent nightmare exactly where it belongs: in the freezing, barren, indifferent wastelands of the Arctic. It is a landscape devoid of life, perfectly mirroring the internal desolation of both creator and creation. Victor

and his Monster are locked in a pathetic, endless chase across the ice. Two dead men walking. They have taken absolutely everything from each other. Victor is no longer a brilliant scientist; he is a hollow shell consumed by hatred, sustained only by the dark, obsessive need to destroy his own creation. The Monster is no longer an innocent child of nature; he is a weary demon drowning in regret, leaving clues and sustenance for Victor just to ensure the chase continues. Because without Victor, the Monster is truly, comprehensively alone. The hate is the last remaining thread connecting him to humanity. The story is framed through the letters of Captain Robert Walton, another ambitious man who is risking the lives of his crew to find a passage through the North Pole. Walton listens to Victor's harrowing tale. And unlike Victor, Walton learns the lesson. When his ship is trapped in the ice, rather than sacrificing his men on the altar of his own glory, Walton turns back. He chooses humanity over hubris. When Victor finally dies of exhaustion aboard Walton's ship, the narrative provides its most heartbreaking scene. The Monster boards the ship and weeps over his creator's corpse. "That is also my victim!" he cries out. "In his murder my crimes are consummated" (Shelley 224). The creator is dead, and the creation's purpose is extinguished. With that final thread snapped, he tells Walton he will journey to the northernmost extremity of the globe, build a funeral pyre, and burn his miserable frame to ashes. He leaps from the cabin window onto an ice raft and is "borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance" (Shelley 225).

Conclusion

Frankenstein is a masterpiece because it violently strips away our civilized masks. It forces us to confront the darkest aspects of our own intellectual and technological pursuits. It asks a question that makes us sweat in the middle of the night: Who is the real monster? The grotesque creature who kills out of agonizing loneliness, or the handsome, educated man who creates a life just to stroke his own ego, and then throws it into the garbage? Mary Shelley knew the answer. She saw the creeping dawn of the industrial and scientific age, and she knew that humanity's capacity for invention would always outpace its capacity for empathy. Looking at the arrogant, disconnected world we have built for ourselves today—a world of artificial intelligence, genetic tampering, and rampant, unchecked ambition where we endlessly innovate without pausing to ask who will care for the things we create—so do we.

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