

A victim of fate? essay sample

Literature, Russian Literature



The character of Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" firmly believes that human life is determined by circumstance and therefore follows a necessary and irreversible pattern. He is depicted as being in a perpetual search of cause, reason, and explanation for the misfortunes that befall him and the glories that elude him. In his mind, he is nothing but the victim of his own tragic fate: "Nothing can alter my destiny: listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined."

Victor's blind belief in fate and destiny also plays a significant role in compelling him to follow the path of creation and to unraveling nature's secrets of life. He feels that he is obligated by his destiny to follow and explore the creation of life. This strong conviction comes off as one of Victor's characteristic traits as it continuously drives his actions, and is so used by Shelley to further the plot.

While recounting his tragic tale to Captain Walton, the now doomed scientist remarks that it was the "guardian angel of [his] life" which influenced the "miraculous change of [his] inclination" from natural history to mathematics (43). Even then, Victor's "destiny [is] too potent," and he feels drawn to follow the path of creation and to unraveling nature's secrets of life. A similar example of Victor's relationship with fate can be found in his interaction with his professor, M. Waldman. Moved by the professor's words, or according to him, "rather...the words of...fate" (49). Victor feels the initial sparks of inspiration and delves into the study of natural philosophy and chemistry, and upon the end of that "day memorable to [him, his] future destiny [is] decided" (50). Here, he sums up his own choices, ideas, and decisions to the capacity of destiny, not himself.

Throughout this retelling of his life's tragic tale, Victor repeatedly blames "destiny['s] immutable laws" for his own "utter and terrible destruction" (43). This disposition to blame his life's progression on fate shows frailty in his character and highlights his inability to take responsibility for personal actions (and inactions) and judgments. In contrast to destiny's original provocation of Victor to pursue creation and life, here, it serves as an excuse for failure and his acceptance of it.

There are many instances in the novel where Victor takes conscious decisions whose consequences ultimately come to haunt him as "his miseries" (157). Yet, he oddly chooses to believe that he is bound by his fate and deflects blame by claiming helplessness with great vigor. For example, in his second encounter with his creation, he recounts, "I thought of pursuing the devil, but it would have been in vain" (78). When the creature kills William and frames Justine, Victor only ruminates, but does nothing to save her from her unjust execution: "a declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman and would not have exculpated her who suffered through me" (81). He is merely pacifying his conscious with a shallow justification.

Even when he is forced to face the consequences of his actions, Victor fails to admit his own wrongdoings and uses fate as a scapegoat to come to terms with the consequences he brings down upon himself. Fittingly, the deaths of both William Frankenstein and Justine are portrayed by Victor as a curse ("the work of my thrice-accursed hands") imposed by "inexorable fate" (90).

While Victor does feel remorse for the loss of his loved ones, he drowns himself in self-pity, not once blaming himself for his own “ miseries”. The the depth of his self-indulgence is revealed when he agonizingly states that “ the tortures of the accused did not equal mine” in the aftermath of Justine’s execution.

Evidently, Victor Frankenstein is heavily reliant on fate and destiny to guide him, but his disposition to continually blame fate instead of admitting his guilt also affects his mental strength adversely. Whenever burdened by his suppressed guilt, as seen in the aftermath of the deaths of William and Justine, Victor’s mental perseverance falters, which leads to his frequent mental breakdowns.

Being subject to these “ miseries” only strengthens Victor’s acceptance of fate as his guiding light. This ultimately manifests into his twisted obsession of exacting revenge on his creation. Believing that “ some horrible destiny of the most horrible kind hangs over [him], and [he] must live to fulfill it” (185), Victor consciously initiates a conflict that he understands will result in either the death of himself or his creature. In one of his very last monologues, he remarks, “ Never will I give up my search until he or I perish; and then with what ecstasy shall I join my Elizabeth and my departed friends, who even now prepare for me the reward of my tedious toil and horrible pilgrimage!” (208) At this stage, Victor’s denial has gone further than just deflecting blame as he paints himself as a martyr wronged by fate.

Even on his deathbed, the creator is unable to realize the irrationality of his misguided actions: “ As Victor’s eyes fall dim and the last “ spark of being”

fizzles from his frame, he still believes “ it [his] destiny [to]...pursue and destroy the being to whom [he] gave existence” (215).

Thus, Victor Frankenstein’s belief in fate serves as the source of his inspiration, but at the same, time his blind devotion to its presence prevents him from accepting his guilt and realizing the fault in his actions, which ultimately lead to his demise. In his last words, Victor says, “ During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blamable.” (219) Thus, the gifted scientist meets his end believing himself powerless against fate and thereby destroying himself due to his ignorance of the principle of cause and effect which is the very basis of the scientific method which he worshipped.