

Relationship between man and nature in frankenstein



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Theme: Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* explores how destructive the pursuit of knowledge can be when it goes beyond human understanding. Given that Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* in the midst of Romanticism, which was a movement against the Industrial Revolution, it follows that one of the main themes in her novel explores the responsibilities of the scientist, and the consequences of ignoring these responsibilities. The dangerous nature of pursuing certain kinds of knowledge is at the heart of this text. Mary Shelley successfully explores the various other themes as well, such as the proper relationship between man and nature and the respect that is owed to nature. She also examines the relationship between creator and creation, the duties that belong to the creator, and the consequences of using science to elevate oneself to a god-like status.

Quote #1: "Yesterday the stranger said to me, ' You may easily perceive, Captain Walton, that I have suffered great and unparalleled misfortune... You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent sting to you, as mine has been" (73).

This is a great first quote because it really sets the scene for what is to come in the stranger's story. The stranger, who we learn is Victor Frankenstein, begins to tell his story by describing his family background in great detail. He then moves on to describe his childhood " more than sister" companion, Elizabeth, and how she became to be adopted into the Frankenstein family. Victor paints this very happy picture of his childhood but the reader still gets the impression that this he cannot escape the great tragedy of his future.

Quote #2: " It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my enquires were directed to metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the word" (81).

Victor continues describing his background, his relationship with Elizabeth, and his friendship with his schoolmate, Henry Clerval. The quote mentioned above is significant because foreshadows what Victor's future holds. As a teenager, Victor became fixated on natural philosophy, and studied old and outdated alchemy books. Under the guidance of a more modern natural philosopher, Victor eventually becomes fixated on finding the elixir of life. Despite describing his happy childhood with a sense of nostalgia, Victor continues to allude to his imminent ruined future ruin caused by his desire to know the secrets of heaven and earth, and particularly, his desire to find the elixir of life.

Quote#3: " 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 own their being to me" (96).

This quote builds off of the previous one, and highlights what Victor ultimately desires to know and master. In Geneva, Victor excels at his studies and becomes fascinated by the creation of life and death. He devotes himself to discovering the secrets of the creation of life and decides that he wants to resurrect an inanimate object. However, his ultimate goal is to

create a new race of creatures; in a way, he wants to become a father, or something of a god, to a new species that owes its entirety to him alone. Victor isolates himself as he becomes obsessed with making this dream of creating a new creation a reality. In his studies, he neglects everyone and everything else, and becomes extremely lonely and pale. Victor sees science as the way to conquer and dominate the natural world around him, and more importantly, he sees science as the way to become a god himself. When knowledge and ambition are pursued without caution or societal concern, the consequences can be dangerous.

Quote #4: " A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed upon him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived... unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room" (101).

Unlike the first few chapters which gradually hint more and more at Victor's impending misfortune, this chapter depicts the beginning of his terrible future. After all of his hard work to become the creator of new species that is wholly his own, Victor finally succeeds but is utterly horrified at the creature and abandons it. Despite being successful in bringing the creature to life, the fact that the creature is so physically hideous illuminates the problematic nature of Victor's initial desire to conquer and manipulate the natural world through scientific knowledge. What he had initially hoped would be the ultimate triumph of scientific knowledge, is now his hell that he cannot escape.

Quote# 5: " Study before secluded me from the intercourse of my fellow-creatures, and rendered me unsocial, but Clerval called forth the better feelings of my heart; he again taught me to love the aspect of nature, and the cheerful faces of children" (112).

This quote highlights another theme within the book: nature, and the effects it can have on man when both are in proper relation with one another. When Victor spent years creating the monster, he was isolated and fell very ill. It was only after abandoning his creature and spending time in nature with his childhood friend, Henry, that he began to heal. With Henry he began to become healthy again and regained a proper relationship with nature. What he once saw as something to dominate with science, he now sees as something to be respected and loved for its own sake. It is in regaining a proper relationship to nature that Victor begins to heal. The portrayal of nature as restorative is a subtle theme throughout the book.

Quote #6: " 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. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded" (140).

This quote is particularly important because it is the first time that the creature and Frankenstein see each other since the night of the creation.

This is also the first time that Victor realizes that the creature is not just a grotesque physical being, but is rather a quasi-human

figure who capable of speech and is capable of experiencing and expressing his emotions. This exchange between Victor and the creature is the first time

that the creature is portrayed as a sensitive being with wants and needs. The <https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-man-and-nature-in-frankenstein/>

creature clearly understands his place as an outcast in the world and convinces Victor to listen to his past so that he can convince Victor to help make him happy. By comparing Victor to God in the quote above, the creature makes Victor responsible for all his evil actions, including the murder of Victor's little brother, William and the subsequent execution of Justine. The creature blames Victor for his failure to fulfill his duty as creator to care for his creation.

Quote #7: " But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses... I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I?" (160)

Just as Victor pursued knowledge of the biological origins of life, his creature also pursues knowledge of his own origins. However, unlike Frankenstein's pursuit of knowledge, which Shelley clearly portrays as going beyond what should be pursued by man, the creature's pursuit of knowledge does not share this negative connotation. Victor abandoned his creature and left him to fend for himself in a society that would never accept him due to his appearance. Thus, the creature was forced to develop without any help from a creature similar to himself. The creature, who was not even given a name, did not understand why he was shunned from society, why he was different, why he did not have a family, or why there was not anyone else like him. The creature was completely isolated and as a result, it was of great importance for the creature to know where he came from and who he was. Rather than wanting to know the origins of life in order to be its master, and thus, be a

god as Frankenstein did, the creature simply wants to know who and what he is.

Quote #9: " 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" (182).

This quote sets up the last section of the book nicely because it ties together Victor's failure to perform his duty as creator to care for his creation with the consequences of pursuing knowledge without caution or prudence. The creature has given Victor an ultimatum: either create him a female companion and never bother mankind again or he will kill everyone Victor loves. This is the consequence of Victor's initial desire to conquer nature as well as his inability to take responsibility for his creation.

Quote #10: " As I sat, a train of reflected occurred to me, which led me to consider the effects of what I was now doing... Had I a right, for my own benefit to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?" (204).

While working one night in the lab, Victor realizes the consequences that might incur if he continues making the female creature. Unlike before, Victor is conscious of the effects that his selfish scientific pursuits might have on society and destroys the female, knowing this will result in the death of those he loves. Victor is no longer so single-minded but sees the bigger picture and consequences of his actions as a scientist.

Quote #11: " The murderous mark of the fiend's grasp was on her neck, and the break had ceased to issue from her lips" (232).

The murder of Elizabeth is the climax of the novel as the nightmare that Victor had the night that he created the creature where he kisses Elizabeth and she dies from his kiss becomes reality. In this moment, the reader sees Victor being stripped of everyone he loves by his creature because Victor selfishly went too far in his pursuit of scientific discovery. Now Victor is just as isolated as the creature always has been.

Quote #12: " I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on" (256).

This is the perfect quote to end on as it reminds the reader of the motivation behind the creature's crimes: he was a life that was unwanted and abandoned by his creator. While Victor's ambition resulted in him playing god, it was his egoism and failure to assume responsibility for his creation that ultimately caused his downfall and the downfall of those around him. Unsurprisingly, the ending chapter is set in the icy artic, where it is not possible for either Victor or the creature to find comfort in nature, as they both once did. This reminds the reader of the cruel and unforgiving aspect of nature that results from disrespecting nature, as Victor once did.