

# Eternal light

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Another “wayfarer” is Victor Frankenstein, who is striving for “eternal light,” but in another aspect. He is the “Modern Prometheus,” longing to “pour a torrent of light into our dark world,” while creating a human being – a deed, which is intrinsic to God (26). His creation is the third participant in the “journey” to “eternal light.” He is unnamed, or more often called the creature, the monster, the wretch, or the one with “unearthly ugliness” (55). Victor’s creation also dreams for “eternal light” in the meaning of pure love or happiness, but he is compelled to follow the contrary direction – to “darkness and distance” (134).

The three meet each other at the “land of mist and snow,” where their “journey” ends, where the border between possible and common lies, between dream and reality, between genius and mankind, between God and mankind, between “a country of eternal light” and “darkness and distance.” The character, accountable for the novel’s drama, is Victor Frankenstein, a student in humanities.

“A possible interpretation of the name Victor derives from the poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, a great influence on Shelley (a quotation from *Paradise Lost* is on the opening page of *Frankenstein* and Shelley even allows the monster himself to read it).

Milton frequently refers to God as ‘the Victor’ in *Paradise Lost*, and Shelley sees Victor as playing God by creating life” (Wikipedia). As a god Victor is determined to endow mankind: “Yet my heart overflowed with kindness, and the love of virtue. I had begun life with benevolent intentions, and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice, and make myself useful

to my fellow-beings” (50). Moreover, as Prometheus, he gives the world “ a spark of being” (28). Furnishing the world with such extreme power Frankenstein should take the responsibility of creator and help his gift be useful not destructive.

However he mishandles it. When he is fifteen, he witnesses “ a most violent and terrible thunderstorm,” which “ utterly destroys” an “ old and beautiful oak” (18). This event could be interpreted as an allusion to how pestilential this “ spark of being” could be. As Miglena Nikolchina contends, the “ serious ailment” is “ in the man alone, undertaking the ‘ godlike’ function to be a creator, but in many respects immature for it” (57). The concrete reason for the creature being “ spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on” is his physical ugliness (133). Why Frankenstein’s creation is ugly?

According to Cvetan Stoyanov, “ Ugliness is in fact alienation, drifting away from the vital principle – organic could not be ugly, transgressing and killing it is ugly” (206). Something, often cited in connection to Shelley’s work is a sentence in which the perfect artist is described as a morally perfect man, as a “ second creator, faultless Prometheus under the sky of Jupiter” (Shaftsbury 207). In this respect Miglena Nikolchina considers Frankenstein as an untalented artist, because he is not “ morally perfect” and shows this as a reason for the monster’s ugliness.

She claims that the Frankenstein’s morality is not one of a creator, but one of an ordinary man. “ Frankenstein has not even fancied that love – namely love and only love his creation wants – is the first characteristic of creator. ” “ Ugliness turns out the sign, left behind by the creator who infuses life, but does not manage to come to love it and thus calls forth death, for it is not

possible the fated for living to be made without love, and has no vitality what is deprived of the mercy to be loved” (Nikolchina 79-82). Victor’s blindness about the monster’s innocent nature is more harmful than the physical blindness.

The blind De Lacey is the only man who perceives the monster’s good resolutions. About the structure of the novel Nikolchina offers an interesting definition. It is “constructed as if of concentric circles of ice. The sailing to the North Pole is the outer circle, which serve as a frame of Frankenstein’s story. The conversation between the monster and Frankenstein among the sea of ice near Chamounix is the frame of the monster’s story, which is the core of the novel” (Nikolchina 86). The central part of his story is when after burning down the cottage of De Lacey he wonders: “And now, with the world before me, whither should I bend my steps? (80). Hereafter he starts hunting for his creator and begins alienating from his natural innocence.

The creature wends his way toward “darkness and distance.” The changing nature corroborates his moral collapse: “I travelled only at night, fearful of encountering the visage of a human being. Nature decayed around me, and the sun became heatless; rain and snow poured around me; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface of the earth was hard, and chill, and bare, and I found no shelter” (81). “Advancing into experience,” Miglena Nikolchina explains, “is entering into a core of cold as well” (87).

She suggests two aspects in analysing the role of ice. First it could be seen as “a supreme, unapproachable, unsusceptible to changes reality. It elevates Frankenstein ‘from all littleness of feeling,’ it fills him with ‘a sublime ecstasy that gives wings to the soul, and allows it to soar from the

obscure world to light and joy” (Nikolchina 87). Such an eternal and infinite is the picture before Robert Walton too: “...the region of beauty and delight. ...the sun is for ever visible; its broad disk just skirting the horizon, and diffusing a perpetual splendour. The explorer’s hopes are so great that they turn out fantasies – he imagines an absolutely unreal North Pole: “...there snow and frost are banished; and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe” (2). The Modern Prometheus chooses the “ wild and mysterious regions” to “ the tamer scenes of nature” (11). He goes beyond the potentialities of ordinary people, however, aiming not at admiring of the Great Nature, but at gaining the divine secrets.

While Elizabeth contemplates “ with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things,” Victor delights “ in investigating their causes. ” Elizabeth follows “ the aerial creations of the poets” and “ in the majestic and wondrous scenes” she finds “ ample scope for admiration and delight,” while Victor is “ capable of a more intense application,” and is “ more deeply smitten with the thirst for knowledge” (15). He elevates his intellect, but not his soul. He does not realize that new born (for his creation emerges in a completely unfamiliar world) needs love and attendance. Striving to eternal light,” he encounters “ impenetrable darkness. ”

Night is closing around,” “ dark are the mountains,” “ heavens are clouded” (40-41). The “ spark of being” turns out a hideous abortion. “ Thick mists hide the summits of the mountains” (54). Frankenstein falls into “ deep, dark, deathlike solitude” (50). Suffering “ the eternal twinkling of the stars weighed upon him,” instead of delighting “ eternal light,” he exclaims: “ Oh!

stars, and clouds, and winds, ye are all about to mock me: if ye really pity me, crush sensation and memory; let me become as nought; but if not, depart, depart, and leave me in darkness” (87).

The magnificent scenes give way to appalling “ dusky plain” (124). The other aspect of the ice, according Nikolchina, is “ something barren and lifeless; like a power, which is hostile to life; like muteness” (88). Longing revenge, Victor departs from land and “ pursues his journey across the sea in a direction that leads to no land,” “...the snows thicken and the cold increases in a degree almost too severe to support... The rivers were covered with ice and no fish could be procured” (123).

The nature seems to be inspirited and acts against Frankenstein: “ Immense and rugged mountains of ice often barred up my passage, and I often heard the thunder of the ground sea which threatened my destruction” (124). It seems he has stepped on some unseen border that can not be crossed. “ When he appears almost within grasp of his foe, his hopes are suddenly extinguished, [... ]. The wind arises; the sea roars; and, as with the mighty shock of an earthquake, it splits and cracks with a tremendous and overwhelming sound.

The work is soon finished: in a few minutes a tumultuous sea rolls between him and his enemy, and he is left drifting on a scattered piece of ice, that is continually lessening, and thus preparing for him a hideous death” (124). “ Walton is also surrounded by mountains of ice which admit of no escape and threaten every moment to crush his vessel” (127). The situation with the “ unearthly” creature is however different. The stream of his spiritual development is contrary to the ones of Frankenstein and Walton.

Through the epithet “ unearthly” Shelley differentiates him from mankind. While Walton and Victor aim “ wild and mysterious regions,” the creature seeks an intimacy with common world. The monster is “ immaculate in a quite literal meaning – he is empty, tabula rasa” (Nikolchina 72). Every scene and every feeling he touches to are admirable for him. Everything is for the first time. He is a child. The monster meets the civilization, for the first, through the agency of fire, which is an allusion to a new Promethean deed. However he encounters some strangers’ fire.

The “ new born” learns everything from the outside world, from accidental circumstances. There is no one to guide him, no one to show him what is worth learning. According to A. A. Belskee, Shelley displays “ the destructiveness of individualism, the tragedy of compulsory desolation, the intangibility of happiness without associating with others” (Belskee 303). Every approach to human society brings a lot of suffering to the creature, notwithstanding he sees “ the future gilded by bright rays of hope and anticipations of joy” (65).

Despondently speaking to Walton he describes himself as “ the miserable and the abandoned, [...] an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on” (133). The only possible interrelation with the surrounding world is violence. His crimes are a natural reaction, a rebel against the complete solitude. Otherwise the monster “ could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, [...] when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased, and I turned away with disgust and loathing” (68). He clearly declares: “ I was the slave, not the master, of an impulse which I detested, yet could not disobey” (132).

The wretched interprets his lot as worse than Satan's from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for "Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred" (74). He is the only one of the tree, the only one in the world, who completely rejects society with its gall, the only one who crosses the "border," laid by society, and fades in "no land." He fades for there will be no one to see him. The "eternal frosts" have frozen all the hatred into his "ice-raft" and he is "soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance" (143).

The hopes of "poor" Frankenstein also fade with his death. He remains at the icy border, between "eternal light" and "darkness and distance." The only thing he succeeds in is revealing these two possibilities for the future human nature: "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."