

To be or not to be: destiny and fate in frankenstein

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Destiny, known as “ a predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power or agency,” is quite omnipotent (Merriam-Webster). While the power of destiny is not tangible, strangely enough, it causes people around the world to act in ways they would not.

Ironically, it also prevents people from acting at all. Whether it be lack of responsibility, laziness, or fatigue, something induces humans to blame the negative events of life on destiny, saying “ it was not destined to be.” Yet on the other hand, people are able to use fate as motivation for accomplishing challenging feats, as if saying “ it is destined to be” will make one’s success rate any higher. The uses of destiny seem so versatile, but what, then, is its true purpose? Destiny and fate have had and will always have a strange power over the minds of humans, playing with their desire for change and action. Extending across the spectrum of human activity, one can even find fate’s influence in literature and cinema. In the novel *Frankenstein* destiny is the catalyst in many of the character’s actions and resolutions, and author Mary Shelley explores the varying effects that fate and destiny have on each of her characters, including Victor Frankenstein, Robert Walton, and the creature.

Throughout the novel, Mary Shelley uses fate and destiny to both motivate Victor Frankenstein’s character and to provide excuses for why his choices are necessary. His character is in perpetual search of cause, reason, and explanation for the things that befall him and the glories that elude him. At the onset of the novel, Victor’s “ destiny [is] too potent,” and he feels himself drawn to follow the path of creation and to unraveling nature’s secrets of life (Shelley 23). Victor believes himself obligated to follow his destiny and

explore the possibilities of creation. This strong belief in destiny proves itself crucial to the story because it drives his actions and also forces the plot to develop.

Frankenstein, in the retelling of this portion of his life, charges “ destiny[’ s] immutable laws” with his own “ utter and terrible destruction” (23). Victor’s willingness to blame his life’s resolution on fate shows weakness in his character and an inability to take responsibility for his personal volition and judgement. 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. A similar example of Victor’s relationship with fate can be found a little further along in the story. In one of Victor’s encounters with his professor, M. Waldman, the professor explains to him the stance that must be taken when learning from the studies of both traditional and modern-day scientists.

Moved by the professor’s great words, or “ rather...the words of..

. fate,” Victor feels initial sparks of inspiration, and begins to formulate his plans and ideas for the future (27). The fact that Victor believes so strongly in fate’s presence in his life truly shows how reliant he is on fate and destiny to guide him. Following his professor’s fateful words, he further delves into the study of natural philosophy and chemistry, and upon the end of that “ day memorable to [him, his] future destiny [is] decided” (29). Here again Victor sums up his own choices, ideas, and decisions to the capacity of destiny, not himself. His fixation with fate affects his mental strength, and is the reason for his frequent mental breakdowns.

As he is not able to take matters into his own hands and act for himself, his mental perseverance falters repeatedly when his desires fall through. Robert Walton, explorer of the poles, while full of hope, ambition, and curiosity, has a different link with fate and destiny than his good fellow Victor. Shelley's character Walton is by no means unaware of fate, but he chooses to let it affect him in contrasting ways. Possessing more free will than the majority of characters in the novel, Walton appears generally uninfluenced by fate and destiny. As the novel opens, readers learn about the goals of Robert Walton's polar exploration. Despite a multitude of bad omens, Walton remains "[un]wavering in [his] resolutions.

[They] are as fixed as fate" (6). While Robert does mention the influence of fate, he does not let its impact affect his determination. Walton stays completely focused on his studies, and he does not let the power of fate, which could very possibly be leading him away from his journey, affect his dedication to the poles. In fact, one could say that Walton uses destiny to drive his conviction, whether he would be proving fate right or wrong. During the majority of the novel, readers do not have access to Walton's thoughts or his progress. However, when Shelley ties the novel together with Walton's character, readers see a slight change in his mental fortitude.

Upon being asked to carry out Victor's pursuit of killing his creation in the event that Victor dies without success himself, Walton expresses hesitation that is not a distinguishable part of his character in the beginning of the novel. One would expect Walton to show ambition and drive, but instead he shows weariness. Later on when his crew explains their wishes to return home, Walton does not argue long. He is easily convinced into quitting and <https://assignbuster.com/to-be-or-not-to-be-destiny-and-fate-in-frankenstein/>

accepts their point of view quickly. Perhaps he has given in and believes the mission to be ill-fated and not meant to be? This evident change in Walton's character could be the result of many things, but a probable cause is Victor himself.

With failure on the horizon, Victor's depressing demeanor could have likely affected Walton's stance on the world and on his destiny to explore the poles. Walton's change in character is proof of destiny's power over the minds of humans, and that when destiny does become too powerful, it can be a detrimental infection in the mind of a person. Unlike Frankenstein's cushioned childhood and Walton's vast opportunities, the creature lives nameless and without family or friend. Angered by his situation and upon accepting his terrible fate, the creature chooses to use his gruesome circumstances to fuel his fury and hatred towards his creator, Victor Frankenstein. After killing Victor's younger brother, William, the creature "gaze[s] on [his] victim, and [his] heart swell[s] with exultation and hellish triumph," as he realizes that he "too can create desolation" (102).

The tremendous power that the creature feels gives him reason to overcome his lonely circumstances and prove his fate horribly wrong. This instance shows one extreme way that fate and destiny drive people to act radically and without sense. Another example of the creature tossing his fate aside and carving his own path is found shortly after this first murder. Deciding that if he "cannot inspire love, [he] will cause fear," the creature vows to "work at [Victor's] destruction, nor finish until [he] desolate[s] Victor's heart, so that [he] shall curse the hour of [his] birth" (104-105). His willingness and

ability to make this decision for himself, however harsh, shows a strength that cannot be seen in other characters of Shelley's novel.

In the creature's case, fate acts not as a motivator or a detriment, but as something to be proved wrong. Desperate to authenticate his capability, the creature argues with fate and uses his frustration to stimulate his next response. Choosing to overcome what the world has handed one is difficult, and while the creature may harm some people along the way, he makes his own destiny, regardless of what fate has to say. In Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, destiny and fate play large roles in the motivation and hindrance of the author's characters. Specifically, Shelley examines the ways fate and destiny motivate, hinder, and cause the overcoming of obstacles in characters.

As the novel concludes, the personalities of Victor, Walton, and the creature collide—or rather harmonize—in a final episode of interaction. 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” (35; 158).

The creature however, says his final words of the novel with regret and remorse dripping from his tone. Could the reason for the discrepancy in the two character's finishes be the way they allowed fate and destiny to play them? While Victor lets his life be led by the power of destiny and the creature only lets his fate throw him into animation; both act and end in extreme ways. Through her novel, Mary Shelley teaches *Frankenstein*, Walton, and the creature the valuable lesson that while destiny and fate may

conjure a fantastic game, it is up to each individual to decide the way in which they will play it. Works Cited Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, n. d.

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