

# A critique of frankenstein

Literature, Russian Literature



Good v. Evil: Which is Which By: Logan Emlet Frankenstein is a literally fantastic novel, in which a gentle creation, the Monster, is shunned by his creator, Victor Frankenstein, as well as all other humans. The Monster becomes so dejected that he turns murderous and vows to destroy Victor's life. The book is definitely fiction, as the Monster happens to be eight feet tall and superior to humans in almost every way save looks. Although this is probably the most evident distortion from reality, many others appear although not quite so blatantly.

In her novel Frankenstein, Mary Shelly uses symbolism and distortions between the world of the book and the real world to demonstrate the truth of Romantic ideals. According to Webster's dictionary, symbolism is defined as, "artistic imitation or invention that is a method of revealing or suggesting immaterial, ideal, or otherwise intangible truth or states." The dictionary defines distort as, "to twist out of natural, normal, or original shape or condition," and as, "to cause to be perceived unnaturally. While these two words may not always mean the same thing, in the case of this essay, they complement each other to better describe the differences at hand. One of the principle beliefs of the Romantics was that symbolism is the cleanest way to communicate truth. Their literature supports their thought that symbolism has the power to mean many different things simultaneously. In their literature, romantics do not use literary realism, but instead use this symbolism to critique or comment on reality by distorting this reality.

One of the things that the Romantics strongly believed and is clearly portrayed in Frankenstein is the evil of the unnatural, and that nature is inherently good. For the Romantics, unnatural meant anything mechanical;

hell was unnatural as well, along with evil, and knowledge. The unnaturalness of knowledge is a particularly important part of Frankenstein. Repeating throughout the novel, examples are shown of knowledge that brings suffering to its seekers. What brings the most pain to Victor throughout the novel is the knowledge of how to bring life to a being.

This knowledge led to the creation of a creature that destroyed the lives of those around him. Before Victor actually undertook the creation of his creature, he first spent months of study and research in order to discover how to give life. After Victor possessed this knowledge it was human nature for him to test his theory. Like a child who is told not to do something, Victor was compelled to do something considered taboo by the standards of his society, and fulfill his curiosity. This fulfillment brought him untold tragedy and pain. The knowledge of creation directly ruined the rest of his life.

Victor actually says, although it is probably more likely Mary Shelly, “ 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 to sting you, as mine has been. ” This quotation fairly screams out the evil that knowledge has wrought upon Victor. In reality, of course, it was impossible to create life back then as it is impossible to complete such a feat today. According to the Romantics, all knowledge is bad, but the knowledge of creation was especially bad because life is supposed to be a very natural thing.

The Monster’s this life was manufactured and so not natural, creating almost a double evil. Another piece of evil knowledge shown in this novel is the Monster’s knowledge of human beings and their interactions. The Monster is

inquisitive and curious of the others around him. He feels inclined to observe the humans with the hope that some day he will be accepted by them. Yet this interaction is highly unnatural. It would have been far wiser for the Monster to live as a beast in the forest. Unfortunately he sought knowledge and was shunned by human kind as a disgusting lout.

Without knowledge of humans, he would never have been tempted to try to live among them and so would never have been feared. The Monster's inquisitiveness clearly symbolizes the evilness of knowledge; while we don't actually have creatures like the Monster trying to live with us, we can see how knowledge led to the Monster's downfall. Yet another discovery that leads to ill ends is the Monster's knowledge of murder as a way to hurt Victor. The first time the Monster killed someone, it was an accident and he did not even mean to hurt the boy. He reached out to quiet the child and only on accident, strangled the boy.

When the Monster observed how distraught this made Victor, he knew he had found a way to seek revenge. If the monster had never killed the boy, then the following pain on Victor's part and disgust on the part of the Monster, would have never taken place. Now in reality, there are no monstrous creations that try to destroy their creator's life; this revenge once again symbolizes the evil of knowledge. In the present, humanity has not discovered a way to give the gift of life by any other means than sexual reproduction, we do not actually have an eight foot living corpse walking around in our midst, but we can see how knowledge leads to pain.

A case can be made that knowledge in the real world can also lead to sorrow. From the simple knowledge of the death of a loved one, all the way up to something like knowledge that a prophesy that the world will end on 2012 is actually true, we can find much painful knowledge. The past two examples were clearly bad kinds of knowledge, but knowledge that we may think of every day as necessary for happiness, such as travel or a good education can also bring grief. When one travels the world, they are exposed to many sights and experiences that can destabilize their perception of the world and bring them anguish.

The story of the Buddha is one such example. Buddha had never been outside the palace he grew up in, and when he did he was immediately assailed by things such as death, disease, old age, and poverty. This traumatized the Buddha enough that he left his wife and child bringing them pain, and him, six years of deprivation. One way the Romantics view of knowledge could be summarized is by the old saying, “ what you don’t know won’t hurt you. ” School is supposed to offer a higher state of enlightenment, but many things that are learnt in school subtract from your happiness.

Factoids that are learned can discredit a person’s dreams or prove them impossible. One such example is relativity theory; it could be a person’s dream to go back in time to see someone or something they miss, and then they are told that actually, it is impossible to go back in time. Another way the Romantics thought of knowledge could be a second old saying “ ignorance is bliss. ” One of the most powerful, and according to the

Romantics, most dangerous things about knowledge, is that once gained, one can never rid oneself of it.

If the Monster had been able to voluntarily rid himself of the knowledge that humans existed, he probably would have never have been disappointed by their close-mindedness. However, knowledge was not the only thing that the Romantics thought of as unnatural and so essentially evil. Mary Shelly also symbolizes the evil of the unnatural through one of the major characters throughout the book, Victor. Next to Shelly's clear support of the Romantics view of knowledge as unnatural, Victor supports the Romantic's criterion of un-natural. The things that were thought to be some of the most unnatural things were: wealth, education, productivity, and overnment. While Victor was not a part of government, he does display every other trait. He was wealthy; he grew up living in a mansion on the shores of Lake Geneva, living in leisure, playing in the Alps, getting the finest education. He was educated; he attended college in another country, and was always searching for knowledge. Victor was productive; he surpassed all his fellow students at college and made leaps and bounds in his field of study. He is nearly the definition of what the Romantics consider unnatural. The Monster on the other hand could be considered very natural.

The Romantics thought of nature as a work of art created from divine imagination, and subject to interpretation. They also thought of the human imagination as the human equivalent of the powers of nature or deity. So very literally, the Monster, nature, was a work of art created from Victor's divine imagination and subject to the interpretation of the human race. Not

only is the Monster the epitome of nature, he is almost the opposite of the Romantic's definition of unnatural. He was not wealthy, educated, or part of a government. The symbolism here comes directly from Mary Shelly's own life.

When she was writing this book, she was having a bad time. Her sister died and Shelly was angry at God. This translates to a Monster who is angry at his creator, Victor, for leaving him such a bad lot in life. The Monster says "When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I a monster, a blot upon the earth from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?" This must have been very similar to what Mary Shelly felt. But unlike some Romantics, Shelly did not feel that God and Nature were the same thing. In fact she felt that they were opposites.

God was deity; he was the divine, with the imagination that created nature, and she was the natural that was being stripped of all happiness. The Monster is a distorted version of Mary Shelly herself while Victor is a distortion of God. Through this symbolism, several things can be interpreted. First, Mary Shelly's own view and unhappiness with God, and secondly romantic ideals such as natural versus unnatural, and nature as a work of art created by divine imagination. As discussed earlier, it seemed that the Monster fulfilled the Romantics definitions of unnatural.

His life was created from knowledge that defiled natural life man-made so therefore unnatural. However, there seems to be an awful lot of evidence supporting the Monster as a natural being. He fitted to the definitions of being created by a "divine" imagination; he was not wealthy or educated.

So according to this argument he was a natural being. This direct clash between two seemingly true opposites demonstrates one of the principle Romantic ideals, cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is an immensely complex psychological topic, and is considered a mental problem these days.

Boiled down, cognitive dissonance means the holding of two or more contradictory ideas simultaneously. As much as Romantics despised and rejected knowledge, they also embraced it, because it was quintessential to achieving one's objectives. Romantics believed that myth and legend was not truth, but it communicated truth. And while Romantics believed that nature was the only way to encounter the eternal, they believed that nature is not the truth but rather symbolizes truth. The Romantics even thought of morality as something that changes perpetually.

So if an uncertain morality was not too hard to live with, a natural-unnatural monster was definitely not over the heads of the Romantics. Shelly used the monster as a perfect way to symbolize cognitive dissonance. The Romantics also believed that in order to have a truly pleasing and beautiful exposure, one must first experience robust emotions such as awe, horror, and trepidation. The novel Frankenstein presents all of these emotions and displays the uncontrollable wildness of rage, pain, and suffering, the novel is a truly enjoyable and thought provoking book.

The present, whenever the time of reference, can be confusing and can create uncertainties to what may actually be happening. Some people believe that saying it exactly how it is is the most helpful way to clear things up. The Romantics and many others besides thought that symbolism was a



much more successful way. Frankenstein exemplifies how distortion, when used properly, can distort reality into an exaggerated unreality, that however different, succeeds in pointing out the views of a group or individual.