

# Defining literature: frankenstein vs. young goodman brown

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



The entire semester defining what Literature is has been the course's quest. Literature is always changing; its definition has developed and changed from time to time. To find an exact definition of what is literature, it is like looking for a needle in a haystack. There have been several attempts to decipher this puzzle, in "What Is an Author" written by Michael Foucault, he emphasizes on the idea that an author exists only as a function of a written work. The author's name holds considerable power and serves as an anchor for interpreting a text.

And "On the Sublime" written by Longinus, the writer states that the sublime implies that man can, in emotions and in language, transcend the limits of the human condition. This research paper consists in identifying the elements of literature by comparing two major pieces of work.

In Frankenstein, Mary Shelley warns that with the advent of science, natural questioning is not only futile, but dangerous. In attempting to discover the mysteries of life, Frankenstein assumes that he can act as God.

He disrupts the natural order, and chaos ensues. In "Young Goodman Brown", Hawthorne explores the nature of imagination and reality in this mysterious story by allowing the reader to actively question the reality of the night's events. He combines a multitude of elements into it creating a sense of mystery. The short story follows Goodman Brown's journey resulting in his loss of faith. Literature allows the reader to feel, experience, and inhabit a character or place.

It goes beyond the scope of everyday fiction, reaches new insights and allows the writer to reason with the audience. In Frankenstein the monster

exemplifies the sublime written by Longinus. Shelley's descriptions of the monster and his actions coincide with Longinus's definitions and his categories of obscurity, power, terror, difficulty and vastness, each of which facilitate sublime experiences: "the sources of all the good in us are also the sources of all the bad" (Longinus, 51).

Throughout the story the monster attempts to make connections with human beings. During his encounter with the old man, De Lacey, the monster hopes that his disturbing appearance will not be an obstacle to his desire to talk to the old blind man. Without his vision, De Lacey cannot perceive the monster through any means beyond conversation and that works in the monster's favor. De Lacey calls the monster: "my best and only benefactor" (Shelley, 137), clearly showing that blindness creates the distance between the terrible monster and the man.

De Lacey delights in his discourse with the monster, and continues to until the others returned and saw the monster's physical appearance, showing disgust and horror towards him. The monster instills great terror in the human character he encounters, but at the same time evokes feelings of astonishment, empathy, and caring. Longinus' concept is also showed in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown". The deep dark forest that Goodman Brown enters on his nighttime journey sets the stage for the doubt that consumes his mind for the remainder of his life.

However, despite this, the reader witnesses the real ramifications that the events have on Brown's life, which in turn leads them to question the very

concepts of imagination and reality. The society in the story strictly follows the rules and principles of its religion. Although Brown believes he is an upstanding person of a respectable family line, he allows his curiosity to betray his faith. Brown arrives late to his meeting with the evil figure and explains that: "Faith kept me back a while" (Gardner et. al, 4). Throughout the story, "Faith" represents the figure of his wife and the faith in man and religion.

Brown hesitates because he realizes that his journey with this devilish being is sinful. Hawthorne creates a paranoid monster from the once innocent Goodman Brown and the natural setting regresses into an unsafe, unknown forest of evil. In "What Is an Author", Foucault addresses the relationship between authors and text, emphasizing their role throughout the stories. From a very early age, Mary Shelley was surrounded by many powerful and influential writers, shaping her ideas as she grew and eventually leading to the writing of Frankenstein.

The Romantics of her time were fascinated with dreams and Gothic nightmares which were seen as predictors of what could happen. In order to thoroughly understand the influences that affected Shelley's writing, specifically in Frankenstein, readers must have an adequate knowledge of a few key events in Mary's life. On the other hand, Nathaniel Hawthorne's story is set in the 17th-century colonial American period, specifically in Salem, Massachusetts. According to James Mellow, Hawthorne was plagued by guilt by his grandfather's role as a judge during this time.

He wrote the story to vindicate his grandfather by featuring fictional victims of the witch trials who were witches and not innocent victims of the witch-hunt. Another major theme for both stories is the pursuit of knowledge. In Frankenstein, Victor is absorbed in the creation of the monster; he absents himself from society and forsakes human contact. Frankenstein begins his research with the good intention of helping people, but his thoughts soon turn to the quest for power over life and to be recognized as the creator of a species .

He became so caught up in his attempt to create life that he never thought about the consequences: " Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (Shelley, ). The unlearned creature is thrown out into the world and is forced to discover the hidden meanings behind human life and society, on his own. Similarly, the more that the monster learns about his creation, the more he realizes that he is miserable: " Accursed creator!

Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in a disgust" (Shelley, 133). His knowledge, too, causes him immense pain. In both cases, their quest ended in pain, suggesting that this is the inevitable result of the pursuit of knowledge. He reflects: " O what a strange nature is knowledge! ... I wished sometimes to shake off all thought and all feeling" (Shelley, 123). Victor's isolation is caused by his own greed for knowledge, whereas the monster has no choice, as he is rejected by society. Goodman

Brown is a puritan waiting to begin his conversion experience to the Puritan doctrine.

Although Goodman Brown was confident when entering into the forest with the devilish being, his temptations cause him to lose faith and become unsure of humanity and nature. However, at the end of Brown's conversion experience, he is shocked to see that Faith is interacting with the devil because he considers her to be the most pure person in society. Brown describes the fearful nature of the wilderness after proclaiming his faith is gone: "The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds - the creaking of the trees, the howling of the wild beasts, and the yell of Indians" (Hawthorne 395).

The nature of man continues to be questioned when Goodman Brown experiences total depravity in the forest. He is witness to powerful and religious figures from his society participating in various forms of devil worship and witchcraft. His shock and horror of seeing those he respects as active members of this evil cause him to question his own purity: "Goodman Brown stepped forth from the shadow of the trees and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loath full brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart" (Hawthorne 397).

Frankenstein and his creature are a prime example of the burden brought on one's life through incomplete knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge is not necessarily an evil thing, but it can cause destruction when it is pursued beyond natural limits. Victor Frankenstein becomes a slave to his passion for

learning in more than one way; first his life is controlled by his obsession to create life, and later he becomes a slave to the monster he has created.