

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

Characters

Robert Walton is the captain of nautical expedition into the arctic. Walton encounters Victor stranded out on the ice, and he saves him. Walton is the frame narrator, and he relays the story through letters he writes to his sister.

Victor Frankenstein is the creator of "The Monster". He studies alchemy as a boy, and later attends the University at Ingolstadt, where he discovers the secret of life and instills it in his creation. The narrative deals with the backlash of Victor's ill-considered actions. His life comes to an end in the Arctic Circle, after his entire life is brought to ruin.

The Monster is the name given to Victor's creation. He's never given a real name. His hideous visage makes it impossible for him to be part of society, despite his innate good-hearted nature. He is driven to exact vengeance on Victor, and eventually he too dies, presumably burnt alive on a pyre in the arctic.

Henry Clerval is Victor's good friend. He also studies at Ingolstadt. His enthusiasm and curious nature serve as a foil for Victor's melancholy and despair. Henry dies at the hands of The Monster.

Elizabeth is the stepsister and betrothed of Victor. Victor's mother, **Caroline**, adopted her from an impoverished peasant family in Italy. On her deathbed, the mother made Elizabeth and Victor promise to marry. Elizabeth has no substance as a character. She too is killed by The Monster on their wedding night.

Alphonse Frankenstein is Victor's father. He advises him not to study Alchemy when Victor is a boy, but Victor does not heed his advice. Alphonse is very supportive of Victor throughout the novel.

William Frankenstein is Victor's brother. He is strangled to death by The Monster.

Justine is another adoptee of the Frankenstein family. She is framed by The Monster for the death of William, and she is executed for it.

The De Lacey Family is a family of peasants viewed from the perspective of The Monster. They were formerly wealthy Frenchmen, but have since had to flee the country. The Monster takes shelter for the winter in a shack adjoining their home, and he learns to understand language and human culture by watching them. The monster entreats the old blind De Lacey, begging for friendship and shelter, but he is beaten and driven away by the son, Felix.

Waldman and Krempe are professors of Victor's who make very brief appearances in the novel. They both explain that Alchemy is a defunct science, and encourage him to pursue other areas of study.

Plot & Summary

Framing	Seclusion and Grave robbing
Walton/Walton's sister letters	The Creature's story
Victor's Appearance	Cottagers
The beginning of the transcription	Loneliness
Victor's back story	The "torment" of Victor
His early life and Connection to Elizabeth	Death of William and Justine
Beginning of his learning	Death of Cerval
The creation process/inspiration	Death of Elizabeth (honeymoon)
The old scholars	Victor's murder
	The end

Notable Quotes

"I have no friend, Margaret: ... would reply to mine"(4).

"As I said these words, ... What did he there? Could he be (I shuddered the conception) the murderer of my brother" (63)?

"I perceived as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created... while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes"(86).

"The pines are not tall or luxuriant, ... while rain poured from the dark sky and added to the melancholy impression I received from the objects around me" (84).

"The pleasant showers and genial warmth of spring greatly altered the aspect of the earth...and the future gilded by bright rays of hope and anticipations of joy." (Chapter XII)

"Of what a strange nature is knowledge! ... a state which I feared yet did not understand." (Chapter XII)

-“As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition... These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them.” (Chapter XV)

-“But Paradise Lost excited different and far deeper emotions... the bitter gall of envy rose within me.” (Chapter XV)

““Hateful day when I received life!’ ...-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred.”(Chapter XV)

-“This was then the reward of my benevolence! ... before gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth.”(Chapter XVI)

-“I am malicious because I am miserable...so that you shall curse the hour of your birth.”(Chapter XVII)

-“I must not be trifled with: and I demand an answer...from which I am now excluded.”(Chapter XVII)

-“The monster saw my determination in my face, and gnashed his teeth in the impotence of anger. "Shall each man," cried he, "find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I had feelings of affection, and they were requited by detestation and scorn. Man! you may hate; but beware! your hours will pass in dread and misery, and soon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness for ever. Are you to be happy while I grovel in the intensity of my wretchedness? You can blast my other passions; but revenge remains--revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food! I may die; but first you, my tyrant and tormentor, shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery. Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom. Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict.”(Chapter XX)

-“Yet I seek not a fellow-feeling in my misery. No sympathy may I ever find...when that imagination will haunt my thoughts no more.” (Chapter XXIV)

“Farewell! I leave you, and in you the last of human kind whom these eyes will ever behold... for the bitter sting of remorse will not cease to rankle in my wounds until death shall close them for ever.” (Chapter XXIV)

Notable Style Elements

Letters: the idea of letters is important to the gothic and to Frankenstein. Robert Walton is the one who is actually “writing” the story to his sister. But he is transferring Dr. Frankenstein’s terrible tale onto the page.

The letters are important because of the idea of reliability. How do we know Walton isn’t exaggerating at points, how do we know if he actually even talked to Dr. Frankenstein. The letters leave the reader with an insecure idea of what plot points are real and what aren’t. The letters are also fun, in the sense that they were written, but how did we as readers get a hold of these private letters to hear of this fascinating tale that was supposed to be for Walton’s sister’s eyes only!

Layers and perspective: There are many layers in the novel. The letters start the first layer of the novel, then Frankenstein’s tale, the monster’s tale, and then back to Walton where the layers all come together. In these separate perspectives, we learn about Frankenstein’s family, his love Elizabeth, and his friend Henry Clerval. Each minor character is also developed and adds to the layers and to the plot perspectives.

Why is it that readers do not get lost or confused in these layers? Shelley uses plot to connect one thing from another. The plot does not bounce around; it stays well organized from Walton’s letters, to Frankenstein (where he starts young and through the creation processes and its aftermath), to the monsters perspective, and then it connects with Walton again, no place to get lost.

Romanticism: Mary Shelley’s novel is a Romantic gothic novel. We know this because there is a lot of nature and a lot of man alone in nature. We have Walton alone at sea (yes, he has sailors with him, but we never hear from them), the monster out in nature alone (which can be compared as he is very unnatural himself), and Frankenstein in nature alone (see quotes for examples). Romanticism focuses a lot on the individual man, where nature heightens his senses, and opens his mind. The poetry at the time of Shelley’s writing, does this, and Shelley uses reference to these poets to bring in outside romanticism into her own romantic work: Tennyson’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and Walton and Elizabeth both have studied these poets, are inspired by them.