



English Extension 1

Worlds of Upheaval - Frankenstein,
Mary Shelley



Context

Context of composition:

- The novel was set in the 18th Century, at the end of the Enlightenment and Romanticism period
- The Enlightenment period: valued reason, analysis and individualism opposed to religious teachings
- The Romanticism period was an intellectual and literary movement that peaked within Europe

Shelley's inspiration for the novel:

- Within the 18th Century, people were extremely religious, with the idea of 'playing God' a foreign and unexplored concept
- Frankenstein also deals with loss of those close to us; another thing in which Shelley knew a lot about as a result of people within her life passing away

The Age of Revolution:

- Mary Shelley was born in a time, when there were various scientific, artistic and political revolutions → her father and husband were renowned radical thinkers and thus had an influence on Mary and her novel

Context continued

Familial influence:

- Shelley was largely influenced by her father and his worldviews which included:
 - Act in accordance for the good of mankind: the importance of this ideology was reflected in Victor's actions and how his selfishness results in the tragic ending
 - Poor behaviour should be punished: as reflected in her commentary on how Victor ultimately suffers as he refuses to take responsibility for his creation

Scientific Revolution:

- Shelley was influenced by the scientific revolution, particularly the works of Galvani and Aldini
 - Galvani had supposedly re-animated dead tissue
 - Aldini had wired a criminal's corpse to a battery, making his jaw move and fist clench

Plot

- Victor Frankenstein, a scientist, who is driven by his obsession with the secret life, creates a monster through experimentation and his collation of human body parts he gathers
- The results of the creation are disastrous, brining worry to the monster, as well as to Frankenstein and his family
- The creature roams the world, hiding from humans who reject him out of terror and repulse for the creature
- Through the monster learning to read, he realises the horror of himself and that it was Victor who created him into such a beast
- In revenge, the creature begins to hunt and kill Victor's friend and family
- As Victor, has fled to the Arctic, the creature searches for him but he has already died, further confusing the monster and heightening his sense of rejection within society
- The creature wanders into the Arctic alone, following his creator's death and plans to end his life

Style

- The style of the novel is elevated and formal with characters using complex diction to express their emotional experiences
- Both Walton and Victor are well-educated, highly driven men committed to achieving recognition and prestige in their chosen fields
- The employment of sophisticated language reflects the grandeur of their ambitions in exploring the unknown
- It is important to note that the monster similarly speaks in sophisticated tone, despite being created in isolation with virtually no human contact → the monster's sophisticated language in turn, reflects the comparison between Victor and the monster that occurs within the novel and highlights the monster's inherent sense of humanity
- Although Victor so desperately wishes to believe he shares no commonality with his creation, their shared style of speech suggests that they are more similar than he would like to believe

Tone

- The tone of Frankenstein is largely bleak and hopeless despite Captain Walton beginning the novel, excited and hopeful of his Arctic voyage
- The introduction of Victor however, instantly turns the novel dark
- The majority of the novel remains dark and is framed by the fatal acceptance that the novel's ending will be tragic
- The end of the novel sees Victor hopeless and disappointed as his happy childhood and intellectual ability, is overshadowed by his destructive actions, regret and death

Setting

- The majority of the story unfolds in the Swiss countryside, where Mary Shelley began writing the novel
- Within the novel however, various characters originate and travel throughout Europe
 - Frankenstein visits Germany, France, England and Scotland
 - Walton travels through Russia
 - Elizabeth is originally from Italy
 - The DeLaceys are a French family living in Germany
 - Safie is Turkish
 - Clerval plans to move to India
 - The monster considers relocating to South America
- Walton narrates the majority of the story from the Arctic Ocean however
- By being set throughout the entirety of the globe, *Frankenstein*, presents itself as a universal story

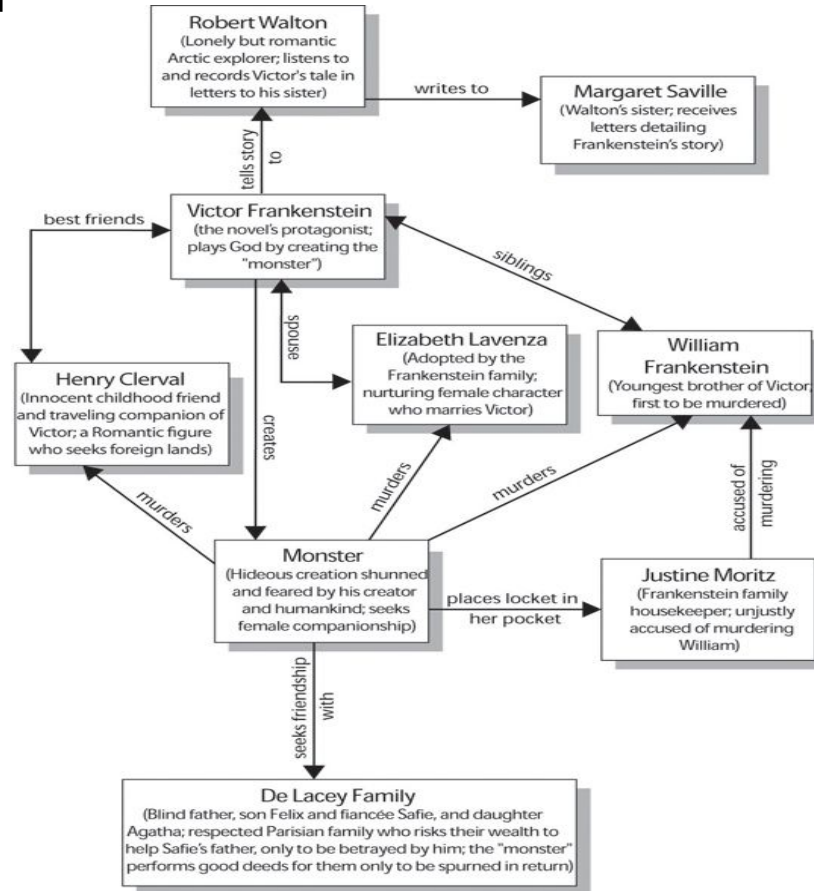
Setting - The Swiss Alps

- Much of Frankenstein's narrating is set within the Swiss Alps
- *Frankenstein's* Swiss and Arctic setting supports the novel's argument that the natural world is to be respected for both its power and its beauty
- Initially, the Swiss Alps are a place of great beauty, however, as Frankenstein climbs the Alps he begins to struggle and subsequently understands the challenges present within the setting
- This gradual struggle within the barren and foreboding setting is similarly reflective of the argument within the novel; not everything within nature is safe or wise for humans to discover and experiment with

Characters

Character	About
Victor Frankenstein	Doomed protagonist and narrator of majority of the story. He is the creator of the monster and over time his guilt of his creation begins to increase, as does his helplessness in taming the monster
The Monster	An 8 foot tall, hideous creation of Frankenstein. The monster has human-like qualities being intelligent and sensitive. Whilst he attempts to integrate into society, he is shunned by all who see him. His feelings of rejection ultimately lead to his revenge against Frankenstein
Robert Walton	The Arctic sailor whose letters open and close the novel. Walton saves Victor Frankenstein off of the ice and nurses him back to health, eventually hearing the story of the monster's creation. He records the tales and sends them to his sister, Margaret Saville, in England
Alphonse Frankenstein	Victor's father, who is sympathetic towards his son, and reminds him of the importance of family
Elizabeth Lavenza	An orphan 4-5 years younger than Victor whom the Frankenstein's adopt. She is an embodiment of the novel's passive women, as she patiently waits for Victor's attention
Henry Clerval	Victor's friend from childhood, who nurses Victor back to health when he is studying in Ingolstadt. After working for his father yet feeling unhappy, Henry follows in Victor's footsteps as a scientist. His cheerfulness counteracts Victor's miserableness

Character Map



Themes

Dangerous Knowledge:

- Pursuit of knowledge at the heart of the novel → Victor particularly wishes to access the secret of life, whilst Walton wishes to surpass previous human explorations by endeavouring to reach the North Pole
- The relentless pursuit of knowledge, ultimately proves dangerous as Victor's creation, results in the destruction of himself and those around him → proving that the thirst for knowledge can be extremely destructive

Sublime Nature:

- As heightened by the Romanticism era, the unrestrained emotional experience for the individual offers characters the possibility of spiritual renewal
- The influence of nature on mood is constantly evident throughout the novel
- The end of the novel in particular (when the monster chases Victor obsessively in the desert) serves as a symbolic backdrop for his primal struggle against the monster

Themes Continued

Monstrosity:

- The monster is rejected by society, however his monstrosity is not simply as a result of his horrific appearance, but his unnatural manner of creation → a mix of secretive animation, stolen human body parts and strange chemicals
- He is a product of a dark, supernatural working
- It can also be argued that Victor himself is a kind of monster, as a result of his ambition, secrecy and selfishness alienating him from society
- Critics have also described the novel itself as monstrous; fused together with contrasting voices, text types and tenses

Secrecy:

- Victor considers science a mystery to be probed, but once discovered, must only be kept to himself
- Victor's obsession with creating manufactured life is shrouded in secrecy, with his obsession of destroying the monster, also a secret to be kept

Themes Continued

Family:

- The novel presents family as central to life → most families within the novel are crafted to the point of idealisation, yet most of the book's tragedy is caused as a result of characters losing family members
- Frankenstein blames his isolation by his family, as the jump-start to create the monster, whilst the monster blames his suffering on the fact that he has no family

Alienation:

- The novel suggests that social alienation is the primary cause for wrong-doing by individuals → yet wrong-doings only increase alienation too (as when the monster murders as a result of his alienation; leading to further isolation)
- When Frankenstein creates the monster, he too creates him in a solitary chamber and after his creation, he becomes alienated from others, alone with the secret of his creation

Themes Continued

Ambition:

- The novel suggests that ambition is to be dealt with carefully, as a result of the destruction it can cause
- It is important to note however, that the novel does not solely suggest that ambition alone will result in evil and suffering, but that it is how much ambition individuals choose to use and whether or not they choose to use it for their own personal benefit

Protagonist

Victor Frankenstein is the main protagonist of the novel

- His goal is to achieve impressive and morally good, in order to leave his place in the world
- However, in pursuit of such a goal, he creates the Monster and in turn, cannot tolerate the flaws of his creation
- When the monster demands a female companion, Frankenstein's goal of achieving greatness conflicts with the monster's desires
- He constantly struggles with the notion that his actions may impact his desired reputation

It can also be argued that the monster itself is also a key protagonist of the novel

- The monster attempts to pursue a connection with society and his drive for human contact propels the novel
- Upon the monster's realisation that he will never be accepted by society, he is driven by revenge for his creator
- He is contrasted to Frankenstein in the sense that he evolves as a character within the novel, comprehending the flaws in his destructive behaviour and even expressing remorse for his actions
- Unlike Frankenstein again, he also dies with regret and remorse for his actions

Antagonist

The Monster can also be argued to be the antagonist within the novel

- The monster eliminates Frankenstein's goal of recognition and success and is a constant reminder of the terrible creation Frankenstein has discovered
- As a result of the monster's destruction and killing, Frankenstein must accept that his creation has the potential for evil

It can be argued that Frankenstein is also an antagonist in the novel

- Frankenstein can be argued to be the antagonist as a result of his denial in creating a female companion for the monster, which further drives the monster's destruction and downfall
- The monster initially perceives Frankenstein to be a father figure, however Frankenstein denies any connection between the two and continues to deny the requests of the monster, further antagonizing him

Motifs

Passive Women:

- Frankenstein features various passive women, who suffer and are rarely considered further:
 - Caroline Beaufort: a self-sacrificing mother who dies with her legacy simply being looking after her adopted daughter
 - Justine: is executed for murder, despite her clear innocence
 - Elizabeth: waits impatiently for Victor to return to her, yet she is completely helpless and is eventually murdered by the monster
- Critics have argued that Shelley purposely creates passive female characters in order to draw further attention to the destructive behaviour that Victor and the monster present

Abortion:

- The motif of abortion occurs frequently as both Victor expresses the hideousness of his creation
- Both the monster and Victor perpetually reflect on the monster's existence and wish that Victor hadn't engaged in the creation of the monster to begin with
- The motif continues when Victor destroys the creation of the female monster, literally aborting his creation and preventing the monster from coming alive

Symbols

Light and fire:

- Within the novel, Frankenstein symbolises knowledge, discovery and enlightenment
- The natural world is perceived to be a place of dark secrets, hidden passages and unknown mechanisms → and it is regarded the role of scientists to consider how this darkness can be illuminated
- Fire on the other hand, is regarded as the more dangerous version of light
 - The monster's experience with fire is an exciting discovery, however it also results in the monster being harmed by fire when he touches it
- The presence of fire in the novel also relates to the full title of the novel, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*
 - The reference to the Modern Prometheus links to Greek mythology and the Greek God Prometheus; who gave the knowledge of fire to humanity and was subsequently punished for doing so

Foreshadowing

- Foreshadowing is a crucial element of the novel
- Victor Frankenstein repeatedly and clearly states the tragic events that are to unfold within the novel
- It can be argued that the use of foreshadowing allows Victor to minimise the responsibility he has for his own action, and instead blame the tragic outcome on the fact that there was never a possible alternative

The death of Justine:

- Justine's death is foreshadowed in multiple ways also:
 - Prior to William's murder, Elizabeth introduces Justine in a letter to Victor, indicating she will play a quintessential role within the plot
 - As well since Justine's life rests on Victor's ability to be honest (and he has continually acted in a deceptive and secretive way), it can be argued that his past behaviour similarly foreshadows his refusal to save her

Foreshadowing - continued

The death of Justine:

- Elizabeth's death upon her wedding night is also heavily foreshadowed.
 - Following the monster's creation, Victor has a nightmare involving a vision of Elizabeth dead
 - This vision foreshadows that Elizabeth will die and her death will be connected to the monster

Questions to consider

1. Why does Frankenstein create the monster in the first place?
2. Why does the monster ultimately want revenge?
3. How does the monster learn to speak and read?
4. Why does Frankenstein destroy the monster's female companion?
5. Why does Walton turn the ship around?
6. Discuss what is meant by the Romantic patterns found in the novel
7. Describe the personality of Victor Frankenstein and the monster he creates
8. How does the monster learn about the world in which he lives?
9. Is the ending inevitable? Do the monster and Victor have to be destroyed in order for there to be order restored among men?
10. How is *Frankenstein* both a Romantic novel and a Gothic horror novel?