

The End of *Frankenstein* Reflection¹

What struck me most was a sense of extreme contrast, but no middle ground. White and black, but no grey. No happy medium. Throughout the course of the story, Victor experiences extreme love and happiness, and he also delves into the deep darkness of despair as he leaps into immoral science and faces “the utmost extent of malice and treachery” (171). But I found these two sides of him almost exclusive of each other— when he focuses or thinks about one, there is little to none of the other in his mind. When he encounters the monster, there is no love; when he is with family, he often loses himself in the joy of his family and Clerval— this blissful ignorance of the monster only ceases when he gains a mortal fear of the monster and effectively “switches” back over to his Enlightenment side, his mind “only thing[ing] of the bourne of [his] travels.” (159) and his sufferings indeed “satisfy [the monster’s] everlasting hatred” (209). He leaves to a love of nature and family to elude the monster, and he leaves his family to tend to or pursue the monster.

I reflected in our studies in the Enlightenment versus the Romantic ideals, and how we noticed little overlap besides the presence of man. But is there more than that? Is there a way that Victor can be a “complete” human being by sharing his compassion from his family with the monster, and taking some of his hatred out on his family? What is his dividing force, the nonporous wall that doesn’t allow any of his personality to switch or leak? Must life be so rigid?

In such a situation, I feel that I would have sympathized with the “monster” and somehow found a way to ease him into society by introducing him by strength of character rather than physical appearance— by mixing in a Romantic ideal of immaterial morality with the Enlightenment idea of the physical appearance— because he is, after all, (made of) human. But Victor, after regarding him for so long in his toils as a scientific discovery, cannot wrap his head around the fact that he had created a sentient being, a man. His mind has become closed to the result of his labors; he cannot picture the end result any differently, so when his experiment is done, his exhausted mind sees it as he might on a first impression: as a “monster,” and this remains in his mind. He remains “shut” in the moments of his jail at Ingolstadt, unable or unwilling to escape from the confines of a traumatized mind. Now, there is no doubt in his mind that he is a monster: it was always referred to as a “monster” with some other derogatory term such as “fiend” (206) or “wretched” (207) or “horrid apparition” (207). Perhaps it is even this idea of certainty in scapegoating that drives his insanity: his fierce opposition and singular perspective of the monster gives him a purpose when all others seem lost— a certainty that means that “mere presence of the idea [of the malignity of the monster] was an irresistible proof of the fact” (78).

I believe that this is also the cause of his close mindedness in the alternating joy and fear he feels: when he grows up, he lives in a state of love and comfort to the maximum; and, suddenly, a death and toils to create a despicable killer had turned the other extreme. He

¹ I had somehow totally forgotten that my first *Frankenstein* reflection also focused on the idea of opposites and contrast— it seemed to be the piece of the novel that stood out so strongly to me. But do not disregard this one— they are far from the same. My first reflection dealt with contrast as a motivator of juxtaposition and contrast, a way to find balance and equality in his life. In this one, I realize that it is this same force, when they are extreme and exclusive of each other, that rips, shreds and bites— hence Victor’s resting state. In other words, I felt very differently about the same driving force in the story.

develops such extreme opposites that, in his mind, only one could be true. The words "good" and "evil" were now one-sided to him, and he loses the true, double-sided nature. In his insanity, "[his life] ... was indeed hateful, and it was during sleep alone that [he] could taste joy" (207)— he could never truly put the two sides together, and this led to the fractured self that remained with him for the remainder of his life. He separates the "hatred" into life and "joy" into the escape of death: no longer does he feel capable of both in his waking hours.

But this idea of strictly-defined opposites ties in strongly to the idea of certainty and an associated peace: it seems that Victor is only doing such miserable actions, making a mate and then chasing the killer, because it leaves him with a firm, seemingly-sensible stance on the matter. He would rather not stand in the middle, even a shade of self-doubt covering his arrogant self— no, this gray spectrum of uncertainty would throw him even farther into insanity, allowing him to waste his hours, deliberating, worrying, thinking, regretting. And this can further be extrapolated into the whole of society: we live in a world of self-believing and selfish people, many of them stuck on one path and one mindset, no matter how wrong it may seem from an outside perspective, simply to prevent the spinout that would result from change. So Victor, on his extreme, tries to eliminate change; and his goal was to maintain stability and attain joy by continuing through.

I thought that an effective analogy would be one to "a long stare at the sun blinds you" — the glorious prospect of scientific recognition and fame turns him to the Enlightenment side, and the sense of belonging he feels with his family lead only to split him apart: he sees only a single ideal, losing sight of everything else in a tunnel vision, and then losing vision of it because of the damage of over-exposure. This could explain Victor's "dead-ness" to the world nearing the end of the novel, and his inconsistent feelings: he loses his heading in life, and the "ardent desire of [his] soul" (208) is misguided and leads to his untimely, unpeaceful demise.

So it seems that *Frankenstein* ends up in the same way as *Romeo and Juliet*— a passionate youth, ruined in vain by his own ardent desires. He stubbornly sticks to his original path, unable to change and switch into the plastic phase of the "middle"— I think *this* is the foremost reason that Victor has such a tumultuous life and his decisions so interesting and negative. Although they brought a nice contrast at the beginning that showed both sides of his personality, it grew to an incessant nagging that tore his life apart.