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April 4, 2014

Analyzing the Relationship Between Frankenstein and his Monster

 The totality of the human psyche consists of more complexity and subtlety than mankind will ever be able to fully grasp. Opposing forces and conflicting natures can wage war within one man’s subconscious and plays the most vital role in the life of that host, ultimately deciding the fate of the human before they realize it themselves. In her classic novel Frankenstein, Mary Shelley delves into this topic of opposing forces in the human psyche. However, she chooses not to describe it as the inner workings of a single human. Instead she uses two completely separate beings, in Victor Frankenstein and his creature, to symbolize conflicting subconscious forces of the same entity. While Victor is depicted as the nurtured, well-educated being who craves to uncover the secrets of science and gain the glory that come with it, the creature he ultimately creates is made up of everything Victor is not; cast away by his biological creator, Victor’s monster learns about society exclusively through distant observation and longs only to be part of it. As the epic story of Victor and his creature plays out, Shelley makes it clear that their relationship is not the traditional tale of entrenched hatred between two foes; the creature Victor makes is the sub-conscious opposite to himself, personified in physical form. This symbiotic relationship comes full circle as these two entities end their lives entrenched in battle for dominance over the other, just as opposing forces battle for supremacy in the subconscious of a single human mind. Despite possessing entirely conflicting characteristics, backgrounds, and desires, Mary Shelley uses Victor and his creature to represent two conflicting psychological makeups of the same human psyche, as evidenced by their eventual dependent, isolated relationship as their lives come to an end in the arctic wilderness.

 The most noticeable, fundamental difference between Victor Frankenstein and his creature is the way in which they were nurtured and cared for at the beginning of their lives. With Robert Walton as his audience, Victor begins his tale by describing his own family and upbringing as a child in Geneva. Fortunately for him, Victor was born to a well-respected, distinguished family who deeply loved and cared for him since his birth. Victor acknowledges “My mother’s tender caresses and my father’s smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me, are my first recollections. I was their plaything and their idol…(Shelly, 35). Not only did Victor grow up around loving parents, but he was also surrounded by dear siblings and friends that never allowed him to feel lonely or unloved. Victor’s background may explain his decision to eventually live in isolation at his university while he completed his work and research; his basic need for love and acceptance was already sufficiently satisfied during his upbringing. Thus, he never felt a strong passion for human contact in adulthood because it was all he had ever known, taking for granted the caring environment that he grew up in.

Another key psychological difference between Victor and the creature is the deep-rooted desires and passions they each have and make known throughout the novel. For instance, Victor goes into great description of his life at Ingolstatd, where he went to college and became enamored with the study of science. In particular, Victor becomes obsessed with uncovering the root of life and death, explaining how “in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder”(Shelley, 52). He spends months studying and researching the processes of life and death, when finally, he reveals “After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life…capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter”(Shelley, 53). This reveals that Victor made it his life goal to learn how to inject life into inanimate objects, blocking out his family, friends, and effectively the outside world, in pursuit of this goal. He spends months on end shielded from society by his own choice, not worrying about his own lack of human interaction.

Victor’s creature, however, was not as lucky as his master in terms of his upbringing. Immediately after he was given life, the creature is vehemently rejected by his creator. Victor claims after he sees his monster brought to life, “breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I created, I rushed out of the room…(Shelley, 58). This first real experience with the world would ultimately become the foundation on which the creature’s entire life builds on. Every human he comes in contact with thereafter will have the same reaction as his biological creator, and the creature is forced to learn and develop completely on his own. With no family or fellow beings to help, as was the case with Victor’s childhood, the creature gains his insight and knowledge by observing from a distance. It is no wonder, than, that he in turn rejects the world that has rejected him, and spends his years trying to bring pain to those who have been accepted by it. The rearing of a child plays a decisive role in how their life will unfold, and Shelley uses these two beings to exemplify the extreme effects it can have.

Although there are certainly differences in backgrounds and desires between Victor and Frankenstein, an all-encompassing difference between these two characters is that Victor, perhaps unknowingly, acts as God, while the creature personally likens himself to Satan. At first mention, it may appear that this representation simply means that Victor is good and the creature is evil, but upon closer examination it is clear that this is not as straightforward as it may seem. Most obviously, Victor behaves as God does by creating life out of lifeless matter when he creates his monster. Excited by the possibility of acting as a “creator” to some life form, Victor exclaims, “A new species would bless me as its creator and source, many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me”(Shelley, 55). Here, Victor blatantly acknowledges how eager he is to be to a species what God is to mankind. However, a less noticeable similarity between Victor and God lies in the fact that upon creating a lifeless being, he leaves it on its own much the same way God left humanity to grow and evolve without physical interaction with his creations. Victor’s creature spends his life trying to become closer and gain acceptance from his creator just as mankind has done since the beginning of time and the creation of religion.

Conversely, the most obvious trait that the creature shares with Satan is his capacity for evil, as evidenced by his murdering of many of Victor’s friends and family. However, the creature mentions other traits he shares with Satan, declaring, “Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me”(Shelley, 132). Here, the monster sympathizes with the devil and claims that envy and evil only bared itself in him due to the more loving way others were treated over him; Victor’s monster is a rejected angel just as Satan is. Considering the life this being lived, he is arguably the most wronged and misunderstood character in the story; the malice he showed was only in retaliation for the unjust life he was given. Although Victor and his monster clearly symbolize the forces of God and Satan, Mary Shelley does not make it blatantly clear which force she or the reader should sympathizes with more.

Victor’s actions and goals during his time at Ingolstadt represents the exact opposite desires of his creature. After being fiercely rejected in his attempted to join society after his “birth,” the creature’s only desire is to have a companion to share his life with, ending his years of loneliness and despair. Because no human would ever “associate” with the monster, he goes to Victor to request that he make a female counterpart to the creature. He tells Victor, “You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary to my being”(Shelley, 147). After observing a family of cottagers for months, he learned the importance of companionship and love, creating a burning desire to feel those emotions just as humans do. By observing the cottagers, the creature realizes that he never had the love of family and friends the way Victor did his entire life, creating an intense longing to satisfy that need. The creature has no other goal in life besides finding a mate, and the murders he committed were done with the ultimate intention of forcing Victor into acquiescing to his request. This desperate yearning for companionship directly contrasts Victor’s pursuit of knowledge, as he essentially avoids human interaction in the process. Here, Shelley uses her two protagonists to symbolize the conflicting desires any human may have at different points in their life.

Though the complex relationship between Victor and his creature is made apparent throughout the novel, their unworldly bond becomes most evident as their lives come to an end. Despite the immense differences in essentially every psychological term, Victor and his creation ironically end up in the same situation at the end of Victor’s tale; chasing each other around in isolation in the desolate arctic wilderness, eerily dependent on each other for survival. This dependency brings the lives of these two characters full circle, as one cannot live if the other is dead, much like two distinctive psychological forces of the same human mind. After Victor’s life is essentially ruined by the creature’s monstrous actions, he devotes his life to finding and killing his creation. Though he comes so close to death on the bitter artic tundra, his will is kept alive by the hints, messages, and clues the monster leaves behind for him, almost baiting him to follow. Victor tells Walton, “Sometimes, when nature, overcome by hunger, sunk under the exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspirited me”(Shelley, 207). In this sense, Victor would have fallen dead in his pursuit had the monster not given him the physical and emotional strength to persevere.

However, when Victor eventually does succumb to death on Walton’s ship, the monster comes to his creator’s deathbed, haunted and pained by his mortality. He expresses genuine remorse for the pain he caused Victor and yearns for his forgiveness. On his leave, the monster tells Walton, “Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?”(Shelley, 225). With his physical counterpart dead, the monster now feels grief and regret for his actions, and cannot live on with the burden of having caused Victor’s death. He disappears into the darkness, prepared to face his final days on earth alone. Shelley uses Victor and his monster to illustrate the battle that rages in one human’s psyche between two opposing psychological forces; although the tension and conflict persists between these two forces of nature, they are truly dependent on each other for survival and cannot live alone. When the human dies, so too does every aspect of the psyche. In this sense, there is never truly a victor in this subconscious struggle. Though Victor dies first, he very well may have succumbed to destiny if he had realized the creature was dead. There would be nothing left for him to live for, and thus be ready to accept death just as the creature did. The conflict between good and evil within one mind is truly obscure, Shelley explains, and lasts up until the entire entity perishes.

In her classic novel, Frankenstein, author Mary Shelley uses Victor Frankenstein and his creation to personify two opposing psychological components of one human psyche. Just as the different forces within a subconscious mind behave, Victor and the monster perfectly contrast each other and battle for ultimate supremacy, yet depend on each other for survival. When one component dies, the other is left half-complete, and thus must die as well. The tug-of-war that exist in one human’s subconscious is as multifarious and mingled as any aspect of our world, and Shelley is revolutionary in her attempts to help visualize this conflict for her readers in using two separate entities to illustrate the inner workings of the mind. While we may never fully understand the complexity within a human psyche, just was we may never fully grasp the relationship between Victor and his monster, it is undoubtedly clear that a battle exists and rages on until there is nothing left, physically or emotionally, to fight for.