



Frankenstein: Dissecting Mary Shelley's Monster

Charlie Murphy

INTRODUCTION

For my book review, I chose Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley. It tells the fable of a man who tries to play god, and loses everything dear to him in the process. Victor Frankenstein creates a monster in the warped image of humanity, who then, in being rejected by the world, endeavours to sow destruction and despair by exacting revenge against his unempathising creator.

I chose this book because the story of how it was written always amused me. Shelley, along with some of her friends, spent the summer of 1816 in Geneva, where she ends up setting the beginning of her story. The weather was often cold and rainy, and so she and her friends would tell each other German ghost stories around the fire. She and another two agreed to each write a story based on a supernatural occurrence, feeling inspired by these tales. However, the weather improved, and those two friends

forgot about their stories to go on a journey through the alps. Shelley was the only one to complete her story.

I find it endearing that she says of her writing friends “... *a tale from the pen of one of whom would be far more acceptable to the public than anything I can ever hope to produce*”.

THEME

The strongest theme of the book, in my opinion, is the theme of alienation. We see it in both Frankenstein and the monster. When Frankenstein sets out to find the secret to create life, he is alone in his pursuit. When he is creating the monster, he does it in secret. When he is in mental anguish over what he has created, he tells no one. One by one, his family dies by the hands of the monster, and he loses his connections. When he chases after the monster to kill him, he is still alone. And of course, throughout his whole life, the monster has no connections apart from his creator. When his creator dies, he is truly alone, and decides to take his own life.

SYMBOLISM

In terms of symbolism, here is a scene from the book that sticks out in my mind. The monster, upon discovering the comforting warmth of fire, throws his hands into the flames, but yanks them back out again howling in pain. The monster says of the incident, "How strange, I thought. That the same cause should produce such opposite effects!"

I interpret the fire here as symbolic of life itself. The way that life, while full of joy, is also crushing. The monster finds so much to love in his world, particularly in the cottage dwellers he spends so much time observing. But when he finally tries to bridge the gap between them, he is beaten and rejected. Maybe the fire represents the monster's life in particular, how he can only enjoy the company of other creatures from a

distance. If he gets too close, they attack and run from him, like a bird flees from a well meaning admirer.

TONE

The tone changes greatly over the course of the novel. In the beginning, Frankenstein is on his own in his pursuit create life, and feels almost obligated to do so. His anticipation of his success is palpable. But when he does succeed, all his excitement vanishes. His life becomes a foreboding horror, where anyone he holds close could have their life taken. The tone goes from being excited and curious, to despair and mourning.

SETTING

The story is set in Europe in the 1700s. It takes place over a few years. It begins in Geneva, Switzerland. Frankenstein travels to a few other places during the story, including Ireland in the final chapters.

ENDING ANALYSIS

At the end of Frankenstein, Victor has learned nothing. He still believes he has done nothing wrong, that the monster was the villain. Victor Hugo says in *Les Misérables*, “*If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but the one who causes the darkness.*” This quote perfectly summarises the message I was left with at the end of the book. Frankenstein was the true monster. He created a sentient being, and then refused to take responsibility for caring for it. He tossed it aside, believing its ugliness was enough to make it unloveable and evil. When he dies, it is not he, but the monster who feels regret. “*... the bitter sting of remorse will not cease to rankle in my wounds until death shall close them forever.*”

CONCLUSION

Frankenstein was, I admit, difficult to read sometimes, but has a truly rewarding conclusion. It's been a joy to think back on, to try to dissect Mary Shelley's monster. I know I will read it again. I recommend the novel to any horror fan.



Mary Shelley, 1840

