Frankenstein

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARY SHELLEY

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was the daughter of the philosopher William Godwin and the writer Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote "Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792). Shelley's mother died in childbirth and she was raised by her father. At age 18 Shelley ran off with Percy Bysshe Shelley, a leading British Romantic poet, who she married in 1816. The couple had a son, but after her husband died in a shipwreck in 1822, Mary Shelley fell into poverty. She continued to write fiction to support herself. *Frankenstein* (1818) was her first and by far her most successful work of fiction.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Most critics consider the Gothic genre a reaction to the "Age of Reason," a movement in 18th-century British and European art and politics that stressed the power of the human mind above all. Empowered by an unchecked faith in humanity, people set out to reshape society: The American and French Revolutions erupted, and the Industrial Revolution forced people into long grueling days in factories. The Gothic novelists aimed to represent the dark side that accompanied this age of apparent human progress. At a time when writers and thinkers had begun to believe in the "infinite perfectability of man," Gothic novelists portrayed human beings as woefully imperfect and at the mercy of far more powerful forces, such as nature and death.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Gothic novel flourished in English literature from the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which established the genre in 1764, until about 1820. Gothic novels emphasized mystery and horror, and almost always contained dark forests, castles, the supernatural, trap doors, secret rooms, and other similar elements now familiar from "horror" movies. Yet while *Frankenstein* is one of the most famous novels in the Gothic genre, it was written at a time when the Gothic novel was slowly giving way to the literary movement of Romanticism, and the novel shares the Romantic emphasis on the "sublime" power of nature. In writing *Frankenstein*, Shelley also drew heavily on John Milton's seventeenth century *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem that traces humankind's fall from grace. The epigraph of *Frankenstein* is a quotation from *Paradise Lost*, in which Adam curses God for creating him, just as the monster curses Victor Frankenstein, his creator.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*
- **When Published:** 1818
- **Literary Period:** Switzerland and London, England: 1816–1817
- **Genre:** Gothic novel
- **Setting:** Switzerland, France, England, Scotland, and the North Pole in the 18th century
- **Climax:** The Monster's murder of Elizabeth Lavenza on her wedding night to Victor
- **Antagonist:** The Monster
- **Point of View:** Frankenstein is told through a few layers of first person narratives. Walton is the primary narrator, who then recounts Victor's first-person narrative. In addition, Victor's narrative contains the monster's first person story as well as letters from other characters.

EXTRA CREDIT

A ghost story. On a stormy night in June of 1816, Mary Shelley, her husband, and a few other companions, including the Romantic poet Lord Byron, decided to try to write their own ghost stories, but Shelley couldn't come up with any ideas. A few nights later, she had a dream in which she envisioned "the pale student of unhallowed arts" kneeling beside his creation—the monster. She began writing the story that became *Frankenstein* the next morning.

The Tale of Two Frankensteins. Shelley published the first edition of *Frankenstein* anonymously, perhaps due to her concern that such a grim and violent tale would not be well received by her audience if they knew her gender. She revised the novel and published it under her real name in 1831. Some key differences exist between the editions, namely that in the first edition, Elizabeth is Alphonse's niece and, therefore, Victor's cousin. (In the 1831 edition, the more popular version and the one used in this Outline, the Frankensteins adopt Elizabeth from another family).

PLOT SUMMARY

Robert Walton, the captain of a ship bound for the North Pole, writes a letter to his sister, Margaret Saville, in which he says that his crew members recently discovered a man adrift at sea. The man, Victor Frankenstein, offered to tell Walton his story.

Frankenstein has a perfect childhood in Switzerland, with a loving family that even adopted orphans in need, including the beautiful Elizabeth, who soon becomes Victor's closest friend,

confidante, and love. Victor also has a caring and wonderful best friend, Henry Clerval. Just before Victor turns seventeen and goes to study at the University at Ingoldstadt, his mother dies of scarlet fever. At Ingolstadt, Victor dives into "natural philosophy" with a passion, studying the secrets of life with such zeal that he even loses touch with his family. He soon rises to the top of his field, and suddenly, one night, discovers the secret of life. With visions of creating a new and noble race, Victor puts his knowledge to work. But when he animates his first creature, its appearance is so horrifying he abandons it. Victor hopes the monster has disappeared for ever, but some months later he receives word that his youngest brother, William, has been murdered. Though Victor sees the monster lingering at the site of the murder and is sure it did the deed, he fears no one will believe him and keeps silent. Justine Moritz, another adoptee in his family, has been falsely accused based of the crime. She is convicted and executed. Victor is consumed by guilt.

To escape its tragedy, the Frankensteins go on vacation. Victor often hikes in the mountains, hoping to alleviate his suffering with the beauty of nature. One day the monster appears, and despite Victor's curses begs him incredibly eloquently to listen to its story. The monster describes his wretched life, full of suffering and rejection solely because of his horrifying appearance. (The monster also explains how he learned to read and speak so well.) The monster blames his rage on humanity's inability to perceive his inner goodness and his resulting total isolation. It demands that Victor, its creator who brought it into this wretched life, create a female monster to give it the love that no human ever will. Victor refuses at first, but then agrees.

Back in Geneva, Victor's father expresses his wish that Victor marry Elizabeth. Victor says he first must travel to England. On the way to England, Victor meets up with Clerval. Soon, though, Victor leaves Clerval at the house of a friend in Scotland and moves to a remote island to make his second, female, monster. But one night Victor begins to worry that the female monster might turn out more destructive than the first. At the same moment, Victor sees the first monster watching him work through a window. The horrifying sight pushes Victor to destroy the female monster. The monster vows revenge, warning Victor that it will "be with him on [his] wedding night." Victor takes the remains of the female monster and dumps them in the ocean. But when he returns to shore, he is accused of a murder that was committed that same night. When Victor discovers that the victim is Clerval, he collapses and remains delusional for two months. When he wakes his father has arrived, and he is cleared of the criminal charges against him.

Victor returns with his father to Geneva, and marries Elizabeth. But on his wedding night, the monster instead kills Elizabeth. Victor's father dies of grief soon thereafter. Now, all alone in the world, Victor dedicates himself solely to seeking revenge against the monster. He tracks the monster to the Arctic, but becomes trapped on breaking ice and is rescued by Walton's crew.

Walton writes another series of letters to his sister. He tells her about his failure to reach the North Pole and to restore Victor, who died soon after his rescue. Walton's final letter describes his discovery of the monster grieving over Victor's corpse. He accuses the monster of having no remorse, but the monster says it has suffered more than anyone. With Victor dead, the monster has its revenge and plans to end its own life.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Victor Frankenstein – The oldest son in the Frankenstein family, the eventual husband of Elizabeth Lavenza, and the novel's protagonist and narrator of most of the story (he tells his story to Robert Walton, who relates it to the reader). From childhood, Victor has a thirst for knowledge and powerful ambition. These two traits lead him to study biology at university in Ingolstadt, where he eventually discovers the "secret of life" and then uses that knowledge to create his own living being. But Frankenstein is also prejudiced, and cannot stand his creation's ugliness. He thinks it a monster though in fact it's kind and loving. Victor's abandonment of his "monster" creates a cycle of guilt, anger, and destruction, in which first the monster takes vengeance upon Victor, and then Victor swears vengeance on the monster. In the end, Victor resembles the monster he hates far more than he would care to imagine.

The Monster – The hideous-looking creature that Victor Frankenstein creates (though the name "Frankenstein" has become associated with the monster, the monster is, in fact, nameless). Though the monster is originally kind and sensitive and wants nothing more than to be loved and accepted, it is surrounded by people who judge it as evil because of its terrible appearance. The monster is isolated and demonized by human society, and soon becomes embittered and enraged at his treatment. Eventually, the monster becomes a killer, not from a criminal thirst to hurt, but from a desire for revenge against Victor and all of humanity for rejecting him.

Robert Walton – An explorer who rescues Victor from the ice, hears his harrowing story, and sets it down on paper in letters to his sister, Margaret Saville. Walton's quest for knowledge in the North Pole parallels Victor's search for education and enlightenment at Ingolstadt. Because he parallels Victor in this way, Robert Walton is a "double" of Victor, whose actions, by mirroring or contrasting Victor's own, serve to highlight Victor's character and various themes in *Frankenstein*.

Elizabeth Lavenza – Victor's sister by adoption, and later his wife. Elizabeth is a stunningly beautiful and remarkably pure girl whom Victor's mother adopts. All the Frankensteins adore Elizabeth, and Victor quickly begins to "protect, love, and

cherish" her. Eventually Victor and Elizabeth marry. Through all of it, Elizabeth remains gorgeous, pure, and passive. NOTE: In the first edition (1818) of Frankenstein, Elizabeth is Alphonse's niece and, therefore, Victor's cousin. In the revised 1831 edition, the Frankensteins adopt Elizabeth, as described above.

De Lacey – A blind old man who lives in exile with his children Felix and Agatha in a cottage and a forest. As a blind man, De Lacey can't perceive the monster's wretched appearance and therefore does not recoil in horror at his presence. He represents the goodness of human nature in the absence of prejudice.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Henry Clerval – Victor's dear friend from childhood. Victor describes Clerval as having a vast imagination, a sensitive heart, and boundless love of nature. Clerval serves as Victor's guiding light throughout *Frankenstein*, selflessly helping Victor but never prodding him to reveal his secrets. Clerval's optimism also stands in contrast to Victor's gloominess.

Alphonse Frankenstein – Victor's father. A devoted husband and parent, and a well-respected public magistrate. Alphonse is a loving father to Victor, and a man who believes in family and society.

Justine Moritz – A young woman who the Frankensteins adopt at the age of 12. She is convicted of the murder of William Frankenstein on circumstantial evidence and executed. Though all the Frankensteins believe she is innocent, only Victor knows that the monster is the true murderer.

William Frankenstein – Victor's youngest brother, beloved by everyone. The monster strangles him in a forest near Geneva.

Ernest Frankenstein – Victor's younger brother by six years. He is the only Frankenstein to survive the novel.

Caroline Beaufort – Beaufort's daughter, Victor's mother, and Alphonse Frankenstein's wife. Caroline is an example of idealized womanhood: smart, kind, generous, and resourceful. Caroline dies of scarlet fever when Victor is seventeen.

Beaufort – Caroline's father and a close friend to Alphonse Frankenstein. Beaufort was a merchant who fell into poverty and moved to Lucerne with his daughter. He died soon thereafter.

Felix – The son of De Lacey and brother of Agatha. Felix falls in love with Safie and marries her in exchange for helping her father escape from prison. When the monster enters his family's cottage in Germany, Felix pelts it with rocks and chases it away.

Agatha – De Lacey's daughter. She represents an ideal of womanliness: kind, gentle, and devoted to her family.

Safie – The young Turkish "Arabian" whose beauty captivates Felix. Though raised as a Muslim, she longs for a freer and happier life with Felix, a Christian.

Margaret Saville – Robert Walton's sister and the recipient of his letters, which frame the novel.

M. Waldman – Victor's chemistry professor at Ingolstadt. He supports Victor's pursuit of "natural philosophy," especially chemistry, and becomes a mentor to Victor.

M. Krempe – Victor's professor of natural philosophy at Ingolstadt. A short squat conceited man, Krempe calls Victor's studies "nonsense."

Mr. Kirwin – An Irish magistrate.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FAMILY, SOCIETY, ISOLATION

In its preface, *Frankenstein* claims to be a novel that gives a flattering depiction of "domestic affection." That seems a strange claim in a novel full of murder, tragedy, and despair. But, in fact, all that tragedy, murder, and despair occur because of a lack of connection to either family or society. Put another way, the true evil in *Frankenstein* is not Victor or the monster, but isolation. When Victor becomes lost in his studies he removes himself from human society, and therefore loses sight of his responsibilities and the consequences of his actions. The monster turns vengeful not because it's evil, but because its isolation fills it with overwhelming hate and anger. And what is the monster's vengeance? To make Victor as isolated as it. Add it all up, and it becomes clear that *Frankenstein* sees isolation from family and society as the worst imaginable fate, and the cause of hatred, violence, and revenge.

AMBITION AND FALLIBILITY

Through Victor and Walton, Frankenstein portrays human beings as deeply ambitious, and yet also deeply flawed. Both Victor and Walton dream of transforming society and bringing glory to themselves through their scientific achievements. Yet their ambitions also make them fallible. Blinded by dreams of glory, they fail to consider the consequences of their actions. So while Victor turns himself into a god, a creator, by bringing his monster to life, this only highlights his fallibility when he is completely incapable of fulfilling the responsibilities that a creator has to its creation. Victor thinks he will be like a god, but ends up the father of a devil. Walton, at least, turns back from his quest to the North

Pole before getting himself and his crew killed, but he does so with the angry conclusion that he has been robbed of glory. Neither Victor nor Walton ever escapes from their blinding ambitions, suggesting that all men, and particularly those who seek to raise themselves up in glory above the rest of society, are in fact rash and "unfashioned creatures" with "weak and faulty natures."

ROMANTICISM AND NATURE

Romantic writers portrayed nature as the greatest and most perfect force in the universe. They used words like "sublime" (as Mary Shelley herself does in describing Mont Blanc in *Frankenstein*) to convey the unfathomable power and flawlessness of the natural world. In contrast, Victor describes people as "half made up." The implication is clear: human beings, weighed down by petty concerns and countless flaws such as vanity and prejudice, pale in comparison to nature's perfection.

It should come as no surprise, then, that crises and suffering result when, in *Frankenstein*, imperfect men disturb nature's perfection. Victor in his pride attempts to discover the "mysteries of creation," to "pioneer a new way" by penetrating the "citadel of nature." But just as a wave will take down even the strongest swimmer, nature prevails in the end and Victor is destroyed for his misguided attempt to manipulate its power.

REVENGE

The monster begins its life with a warm, open heart. But after it is abandoned and mistreated first by Victor and then by the De Lacey family, the monster turns to revenge. The monster's actions are understandable: it has been hurt by the unfair rejection of a humanity that cannot see past its own prejudices, and in turn wants to hurt those who hurt it. As the monster says when Felix attacks it and flees with the rest of the De Lacey family, "...feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom...[and] I bent my mind towards injury and death." But in taking revenge, two things happen to the monster. First, it ensures that it will never be accepted in human society. Second, because by taking revenge the monster eliminates any hope of ever joining human society, which is what it really wants, revenge becomes the only thing it has. As the monster puts it, revenge became "dearer than light or food."

Revenge does not just consume the monster, however. It also consumes Victor, the victim of the monster's revenge. After the monster murders Victor's relatives, Victor vows a "great and signal revenge on [the monster's] cursed head." In a sense then, the very human desire for revenge transforms both Victor and the monster into true monsters that have no feelings or desires beyond destroying their foe.

PREJUDICE

Frankenstein explores one of mankind's most persistent and destructive flaws: prejudice. Nearly every human character in the novel assumes that the monster must be dangerous based on its outward appearance, when in truth the monster is (originally) warm and open-hearted. Again and again the monster finds himself assaulted and rejected by entire villages and families despite his attempts to convey his benevolent intentions. The violence and prejudice he encounters convinces him of the "barbarity of man." That the only character who accepts the monster is a blind man, De Lacy, suggests that the monster is right: mankind is barbaric, and blinded by its own prejudice.

LOST INNOCENCE

Frankenstein presents many examples of the corruption of youthful innocence. The most obvious case of lost innocence involves Victor. A young man on the cusp of adulthood, Victor leaves for university with high hopes and lofty ambitions. He aims to explore "unknown powers" and enlighten all of humanity to the deepest "mysteries of creation," but his success and his pride brings an end to his innocence. He creates a monster that reflects back to him the many flaws inherent in his own species (an unquenchable thirst for love, a tendency toward violence, and a bloodthirsty need for justice and revenge) and in himself (prejudice based on appearance). And, in turn, Victor's cruel "un-innocent" behavior also destroys the monster's innocence.

Victor and the monster's losses of innocence ultimately lead to the deaths of William, Justine, Elizabeth, and Clerval, four characters whom the novel portrays as uniquely gentle, kind, and, above all, innocent. Through these murders, Shelley suggests that innocence is fleeting, and will always be either lost or destroyed by the harsh reality of human nature.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

LIGHT

Light symbolizes enlightenment in *Frankenstein*. Walton expects to find the secrets of the universe unveiled in the North Pole, which he describes as "a country of eternal light." Light also accompanies nearly all of Victor's epiphanies. When he first discovers natural philosophy, he says, "A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind." When he discovers the secret to creating life, he describes his feelings as if "a sudden light broke in upon me." He envisions pouring a "torrent of light into our dark world" through the creation of a

new species. Yet light that's too bright is also blinding, and both Victor and Walton fail to see or consider the dangerous consequences of their quests for enlightenment.

FIRE

The complete title of Shelley's novel is *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus*. Prometheus was the titan who, in Greek mythology, gave the knowledge of fire to humanity and then suffered severe punishment at the hands of the Gods for his generous actions. In *Frankenstein*, Victor attempts to give the gift of the secret of life to humanity, but ends up suffering grave punishment as a result: the monster he creates destroys his family and his life. Fire appears throughout the novel as a dangerous force used for sustenance (as when the monster discovers fire) and punishment (as when the monster describes demons suffering in the lake of fire in hell).

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W. W. Norton & Company edition of *Frankenstein* published in 2012.

Letter 2 Quotes

I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection.

Related Characters: Robert Walton (speaker), Margaret Saville

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of his second letter, Robert Walton confesses to his sister, Margaret, that he longs for a companion, another person with whom he can share the joys and sorrows of exploration. While the first letter introduces the reader to Walton's quest – he hopes to discover a new passage to the North Pole – this second letter offers more insight into his personality.

Walton writes with the arrogance that unites many of the book's male characters: he does not consider his travel companions to be his intellectual equals. He doesn't believe his peers can understand his lofty ideals. This quote foreshadows the arrival of Victor Frankenstein, who appears in the fourth letter and goes on to become Walton's close friend. Victor will tell Walton a cautionary tale about ambition and pride – a tale full of even more extreme success and dejection, and which serves as the novel's central plot line.

In addition, this quote introduces loneliness as one of the book's major themes, a state of being that plagues both Walton and Victor, as well as the Monster himself. Isolated and unable to assimilate into human society because of how he looks, the Monster blames Victor for his predicament, and much of the action of the novel rests on the monster's efforts to get his creator to build him a female companion.

Letter 4 Quotes

You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been.

Related Characters: Victor Frankenstein (speaker), Robert Walton

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Here Victor Frankenstein prepares to tell Walton his story, a story driven by Frankenstein's own brush with maddening ambition. Once again Mary Shelley draws the reader's attention to parallels between Victor and Walton: the men are both well-educated, adventurous, and hungry for glory. Here, though, Victor speaks of his own goals in the past tense, and the reader can infer that he has suffered a dismal reversal of fortune, that his quest for glory and knowledge has ended in despair.

Victor's mention of a metaphorical "serpent" in this section is one of the novel's many allusions to the Bible and John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* an epic poem that dramatizes Satan's rebellion against God and his subsequent role in Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden. Once an angel, Satan led an unsuccessful rebellion against God, who cast him from Heaven. He later appears in Eden as a snake and corrupts Adam and Eve, encouraging them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (This transgression, in which Adam and Eve disobeyed God's laws and gained corrupting knowledge, matches Victor's transgression in creating the monster, which was a perversion of natural laws.) Many Romantic writers (including Mary Shelley) actually saw Satan as a sympathetic character, awesome in his ambition and intellect. Victor and the Monster have much in common with Milton's Satan: they lead isolated

lives, they have sinned against mankind, and they usually act with passion. In this quote, Victor describes the Monster as the "serpent," a manifestation of Satan himself—though it is certainly possible to argue that Victor is misguided in identifying the Monster, rather than his own ambition, as being the serpent.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world.

Related Characters: Victor Frankenstein (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 4, Victor describes how he pursues his scientific studies under Waldman's tutelage and discovers the "cause of generation and life." He decides to put this knowledge to use and build a new, gigantic human being. Here, Victor is still describing his unflagging enthusiasm to Walton: he has not yet made the Monster and come to regret it.

Shelley highlights Victor's arrogance and ambition in this section, and the obvious absurdity of his goal, by using the verb "appeared." Only in retrospect does Victor understand that life and death are vast, complicated concepts that cannot simply be manipulated by science. But at the time, in his ambition and belief in the primacy of knowledge, Victor ironically lacks the wisdom to see these deeper truths. The symbol of Light plays into this relationship between enlightenment and blindness.For instance, a "flash of lightning" illuminates the Monster in Chapter 7.Victor wants to bring light (i.e. scientific knowledge) into the world, and yet he cannot control its radiance and the light becomes terrifying, dangerous. Put another way: the "light" Victor seeks is so bright that it blinds him to the consequences of his actions.In this way, Victor is indeed the "Modern Prometheus," following in the footsteps of the Classical Greek Titan who first gave humans fire, and in so doing disobeyed the Gods and was terribly punished.

Finally, Shelley shows us here that Victor has the violent impulses (as shown by the words "break" and "torrent") and lofty dreams that are typical of a Romantic hero. He refuses to abide by conventions and exists outside society, tormented by a heightened understanding of the world. Interestingly, the Monster will go on to exhibit many of these same traits.

❝ Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.

Related Characters: Victor Frankenstein (speaker), Robert Walton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Victor begs Walton to reconsider his own ambition and look for fulfillment and satisfaction not in discovery but in daily life. Shelley shows us again that the two men share several qualities, including an obsession with knowledge and glory. She makes it clear that ambitious men are doomed, using the words "dangerous" and "allow."

In this sentence, Victor establishes a distinction between two types of men: one who "believes his native town to be the world" and one who "aspires to become greater than his nature will allow." The first is a happy member of society because he is "native" to the world — he considers his fellow men to be his peers and does not reject them in favor of scientific discovery. The second, on the other hand, resembles a Romantic hero in his isolation, ambition, and misery. He has no "native town," no real domestic comforts, and in trying to become great cuts himself off from the rest of the world. Victor's mastery of life and death made him such a person, and Walton risks becoming one if he does not abandon his plans.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.

Related Characters: Victor Frankenstein (speaker), The Monster

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Victor has finally accomplished his goal: he has brought the Monster to life. However, he is immediately disgusted by his creation, such as the Monster's pale eyes and taut skin. In this section, he explains to Walton how his scientific enthusiasm suddenly morphed into repulsion.

This is an essential moment in the novel, as it marks the beginning of Victor's disillusionment, a progressive loss of innocence. While his innocence is certainly beautiful, Shelley shows us that it is necessarily fleeting — the noun "dream" implies that reality and innocence are at odds with each other. They cannot coexist, and not one of the novel's characters escapes unscathed, unharmed by human ambition or injustice.

Here, Shelley also introduces us to the Monster's unfortunate appearance, one that elicits "horror and disgust" in Victor. The creature will face such visceral reactions and intolerance from everyone he meets throughout the novel. Yet Shelley depicts the Monster as a complex, intelligent, and sympathetic figure, asking us to think about prejudice and empathy as we form our own opinions of him.

Chapter 7 Quotes

[A] flash of lightning illuminated the object and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy demon to whom I had given life.

Related Characters: Victor Frankenstein (speaker), The Monster

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 7, Victor learns that William, his brother, has been strangled in a cemetery. He makes immediate plans to return to Geneva, where he will console his family. Entering the city at night as a thunderstorm breaks out overheard, he heads first to the cemetery in question. He sees the Monster's shape as a bolt of lightning floods the landscape, and understands that his own creation has murdered his brother.

Again, Shelley depicts Victor's disgust for the Monster: though Victor has only seen the Monster (and not spoken with him) at this point, he already looks upon him with hatred. The words "demon," "hideous," and "wretch" betray his prejudice. He doesn't acknowledge that the Monster's appearance might not correspond to its emotional or intellectual state.

Light, too, plays a crucial role in this section. Many of the novel's important scenes involve bright, blinding lights, both literal (as in this case) or metaphorical. Light can stand for scientific discovery, on the one hand, but also the harsh reality of lost innocence — as the lightning shows Victor the horrible truth of the situation.

Chapter 10 Quotes

All men hate the wretched; how then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us.

Related Characters: The Monster (speaker), Victor Frankenstein

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Victor travels to Chamounix, an Alpine village, following the death of his brother and the execution of Justine. He finds solace in the "sublime" mountains and spectacular views, all of which soothe his troubled mind. However, as Victor crosses a glacier one day, the Monster confronts him for the first time.

The Monster makes an impassioned speech, accusing Victor of intolerance, and yet also aligning himself with his creator. Shelley makes it clear that both figures are "miserable," physically and psychologically isolated: both are Romantic heroes, tormented by guilt and loneliness. Not only are the words "creature" and "creator" similar, but they remind us of Satan's relationship to God in *Paradise Lost*. Satan, too, is God's "creature," cast from the heavenly realm and sentenced to a miserable existence.

Victor has treated the Monster with fear and disgust up until this point — and in the conversation following this quote, the Monster describes this injustice and his first

painful months in the world. Shelley does not dismiss or caricature the Monster. Yet this quote foreshadows the inevitable mortal conflict between the two characters, as only "annihilation" can break the ties that bind them.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, a monster, a blot upon the earth from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?

Related Characters: The Monster (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

The Monster has taught himself to speak and read by careful observation of the cottage dwellers. Their discussions become increasingly complex with Safie's appearance and, as they discuss man's nature, the Monster questions his own identity, his unusual origins and appearance.

This heightened awareness and new knowledge are crucial to the Monster's development, yet also dangerous and disturbing — he longs for a state of innocence, a wordless "native wood." The Monster feels a justified anger, but this anger comes only from a newfound knowledge of his own abnormality.

Shelley does not mock or scorn his isolation: instead, it is a horrible thing, devastating to the Monster and readers alike. A life at the fringes of society is not always an admirable one, and Shelley does not glamorize or idealize the novel's Romantic heroes, solitary and conflicted figures. Prejudice will indeed push men to run from the Monster, and prejudice will deny him the chance at a happy, domestic life.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ I am alone and miserable: man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects. This being you must create.

Related Characters: The Monster (speaker), Victor Frankenstein

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

The Monster has just shared his tale with Victor, from his first nights in the wilderness to William's murder in the cemetery. He concludes with a demand: since all humans despise the Monster's appearance, and the Monster finds himself entirely alone and hated in the world, Victor must fashion an equally deformed female companion for him.

The questions of isolation and community are pertinent here, as the Monster seeks exactly the kind of companionship that the world, full of prejudice and intolerance, has denied him. To Shelley, a healthy man is one who does not lead a solitary existence: by this logic, Victor and the Monster are consumed and destroyed by their single-minded and lonely obsessions.

We should also note that Shelley gives another nod to Milton here. In an earlier chapter, the Monster had pored over *Paradise Lost*, noting the obvious parallels between himself, Satan, and Adam. And so his desire for a female companion, in a way, comes from his identification with Adam, the first man. Eve is the only other human being in Eden, and is Adam's only companion, created because Adam was alone: a female Monster would play a similar role. The Monster demands that this companion belong to his "species."

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ You can blast my other passions, but revenge remains—revenge, henceforth dearer than light of food! I may die, but first you, my tyrant and tormentor, shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery.

Related Characters: The Monster (speaker), Victor Frankenstein

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 20, Victor toils in his laboratory, creating a female companion for the Monster. However, as he considers the Monster's many crimes, he concludes that a female companion might exacerbate rather than solve the problem. He destroys his work and the Monster eventually confronts him, vowing revenge.

Victor has eliminated the possibility of companionship and love in the Monster's life once and for all: in consequence, revenge becomes the Monster's only motivating desire. (The repetition of "revenge" and the exclamation mark indicate that this is a pivotal moment, in which the stakes are high.) The Monster has watched humans (notably the De Lacey family) reject him, and has now seen Victor destroy the very creature that could have secured his happiness.

Light appears again in this section, bearing its telltale ambiguous significance. Here, the sun seems particularly foreboding (prompting a curse from Victor) and the quote itself is a threat, an assurance of miseries still to come.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ If for one instant I had thought what might be the hellish intention of my fiendish adversary, I would rather have banished myself forever from my native country and wandered a friendless outcast over the earth than have consented to this miserable marriage. But, as if possessed of magic powers, the monster had blinded me to his real intentions; and when I thought that I had prepared only my own death, I hastened that of a far dearer victim.

Related Characters: Victor Frankenstein (speaker), The Monster, Elizabeth Lavenza

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

Victor has returned to Geneva, following Henry's death and his own nervous illness. He has become engaged to Elizabeth — and though he thinks about the Monster's final threat a great deal ("I will be with you on your wedding night"), he fails to understand that Elizabeth is in danger.Shelley makes no attempt to disguise Elizabeth's future demise in this section: we have no doubt that the "far dearer victim" is Victor's fiancée.

Victor believes he has grasped the situation, and this arrogant certainty "blinds" him to the truth. (He even announces that the Monster "blinded [him] to his real intentions.") Victor's ambition and his fallibility are inextricable: beset by lofty desires (either for revenge, glory, or the peace of death), he cannot always see the reality of a situation.

Shelley reminds us of Victor's curious position, at once a loving family member and an outcast, and the word "native" is crucial to this quote. It should remind us of Chapter 4, when Victor tells Walton that a "man who believes his native town to be the world" is happier than an ambitious one. Victor is too caught up in his research to belong to his family or his environment; like Robert Walton and the Monster, he is not at home in the world. Shelley does not present this as a desirable state.

Walton, in continuation Quotes

❝ Seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries.

Related Characters: Victor Frankenstein (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

These are Victor's final words to Walton, as he breathes his last aboard the ship. It is a final, explicit statement of advice that both Walton and the reader have already inferred from earlier conversations (including Victor's statement "Learn from me [...] how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge" in Chapter 4). Shelley writes these statements as commands (in the imperative), lending them even more weight and solemnity.

Not only does Victor tell Walton that he should "avoid ambition," but the dying man goes on to condemn "science and discoveries" in particular. Scientific ambition is only "apparently innocent:" it appears noble and worthwhile, yet leads to the same misery and arrogance. Tranquility, then, is of the utmost importance, and Shelley seems to support this point of view. The Romantic heroes in the novel (e.g. the Monster, Victor, Walton) have either endured a solitary, abnormal life or sought out such an existence. Ambition leads to isolation; isolation, in turn, leads to misery and anger.

Victor does not die a fully reformed man, however. In the sentences leading up to this quote, he asks Walton to take on his burden and exact revenge against the Monster. We see that he remains conflicted until his final breath, wavering between revenge and forgiveness, ambition and tranquility.

> The fallen angel becomes the malignant devil. Yet even the enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone.

Related Characters: The Monster (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

Victor has just died: as Walton mourns his friend, the Monster comes onboard the ship and tells Walton of his lonely existence, the months spent wishing for friendship and love and finding nothing but disgust and fear in men.

Here, the Monster compares himself to Satan and then concludes that he is even more wretched than the Devil, who has a community even in Hell. The Monster alludes again to *Paradise Lost*, one of his favorite literary works: in Milton's version of the story, Satan is cast from Heaven but lives among other demons and devils in Hell. Like Satan, the Monster once believed in virtue and goodness, only to become violent and cruel following his disillusionment and loss of innocence. Here, the Monster's anguish is striking; not only does he see himself as more wretched than literature's most wretched character, but he ends the sentence with the simple words "I am alone." This brevity is uncharacteristic, proof that Victor's death has had an effect on the Monster, who has reached new depths of despair.

> Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me?

Related Characters: The Monster (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

The Monster utters these words mere moments before he abandons the ship, promising Walton and Victor's corpse that he will seek death and soon throw himself onto a funeral pyre. In the first rhetorical question, the word "this" refers to the scorn and cruelty that the Monster has suffered at the hands of men.

The Monster's final speech is a rousing one, and we cannot help but feel sympathy for the tormented figure. Neither question demands an answer, and yet Shelley makes it clear that men's prejudice was indeed an injustice, and that all prejudiced men are sinners. The inconsistencies in the human worldview are laid bare, here: men who claim to be good and virtuous are blind to their own intolerance.

Again, the Monster's loneliness has pushed him to commit his many crimes. He only became cruel and vengeful following the De Lacey family's betrayal and Victor's destruction of the female creature. Shelley indicates that isolation, be it the isolation of intellectual ambition or the isolation borne of prejudice, is an important root cause of evil.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE PREFACE

The Preface explains the origin of the novel. Shelley spent the summer of 1816 near Geneva, Switzerland, where much of the novel takes place. One rainy night, Shelley and her friends challenged each other to write ghost stories. *Frankenstein* was the only one of the stories to be completed. The Preface also reveals Shelley's aim in writing the novel: to present a flattering depiction of "domestic affection" and "universal virtue."

The origin of the novel as a ghost story places it squarely within the Gothic genre. The statement that the novel is meant to provide a positive image of "domestic affection" indicates that family will be a major theme.

LETTER 1

Frankenstein begins with a series of four letters from Robert Walton to his sister, Margaret Saville. The first letter is written on December 11 from St. Petersburg, Russia, sometime in the eighteenth century. Walton is about to set out on a journey at sea to reach the North Pole, which he considers a region of warmth, "eternal **light**," and unparalleled beauty.

Walton's description of the North Pole reads like a Romantic poem full of beautiful images of nature, and establishes that nature and its beauty will play a major role in the novel.

Walton's purpose in venturing to the North Pole is twofold: to discover a northern passage to the countries on the other side of the world; and to determine the origin of the North Pole's magnetism. Walton says he once hoped to become a famous poet, but failed. Yet he has kept his childhood dream of reaching the North Pole. He adds that he could have lived his life in wealth and ease, but did not. For this reason, he feels that he deserves to "accomplish some great purpose."

Ambition motivates Walton, but it is an ambition that stems from an arrogant sense of entitlement. He feels that he deserves to make his mark on history. Yet Walton's ambition also emerges from a childhood dream. This combination of ambition and innocence is also, as it will be made clear, what motivated Frankenstein.

Walton plans to rent a ship, hire a crew, and depart from northern Russia in June, unsure of when or if he will ever return.

Walton is willing to give up his life to achieve his ambitions.

LETTER 2

In his second letter on March 28th of the following year, from Archangel, Russia, Walton describes himself as lonely. He worries that his refined upbringing has made him too sensitive for the "brutality" of life at sea.

Walton's experience of loneliness as a terrible experience establishes the idea of the horror of isolation that is so important throughout he rest of Frankenstein.

Walton writes that his resolution to carry out his journey is "fixed as fate." He confesses his "romantic ... love for the marvellous" and his passion for the dangers of the sea, which he attributes to his fondness for Coleridge's poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Note the influence of Romanticism (and poets like Coleridge) on Shelley's work. Yet the fact that his view of the sea is based on books, not experience, establishes his innocence (and ignorance).

LETTER 3

Written on July 7th, this short letter describes Walton's journey so far as a "triumph." His men remain resolved and loyal, and the weather has been fine, though sheets of ice in the ocean suggest worse conditions may soon threaten. Walton closes his letter with the rhetorical question, "What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?"

Walton's confidence reveals his faith in man as an almost divine being. But there is an answer to his question, suggested by the ice in the sea: Nature.

LETTER 4

In the first entry of this three-part letter, Walton says his crew has observed a huge "savage" figure in a dogsled speeding across the ice. The next morning his crew members discover another man, this one normal sized and European, within reach of the ship.

Walton's use of the word "savage" places him alongside the many other characters in Frankenstein who prejudge the monster based on appearance alone.

The man comes aboard. Walton says he showed a "benevolence and sweetness" unequalled by anyone else he had ever met. As the days pass and the stranger recovers his strength, Walton comes to love him as a brother and considers him the friend he never thought he would meet on his voyage.

Walton loves the stranger because he is similar, and therefore offers the promise of an end to isolation. His acceptance of the stranger shows that it is Walton who is truly innocent and full of "sweetness."

In the second part of the letter, Walton tells the stranger that he is on a quest for knowledge, which upsets the stranger. The stranger tells Walton that he has lost everything and is at the end of his life, yet Walton is more interested in the stranger's sensitivity to nature.

Walton holds tightly on to his innocence. He focuses on Victor's romantic love of nature rather than his warning against an ambition-fueled quest for knowledge.

In the third part of the letter, the stranger says he's decided to tell his story to either help Walton in his quest for knowledge, or convince him to give it up. He hopes that Walton might "deduce an apt moral" from hearing his tale.

Victor sees himself as a man of "experience" instructing another, "innocent" man. He clearly has something to say on the subject of ambition.

Walton tells the stranger that his destiny has already been determined. Walton then promises his sister that he will take down the stranger's story in a narrative. His "notes" frame the book's main narrative, which begins in Chapter 1.

Shelley portrays Walton as a stubborn innocent fool. He chooses to ignore Victor's warnings and, believing himself to deserve achieving his ambition, trusts "fate" instead.

CHAPTER 1

The stranger, Victor Frankenstein, says he was born in Naples and grew up in Geneva, Switzerland. His father, Alphonse, and his mother, Caroline, first became close when Alphonse's friend and Caroline's father, Beaufort, died. Alphonse became Caroline's protector, and eventually married her.

Victor's childhood is innocent and perfect. His family life is perfect domestic bliss.

When he was five, his mother discovered a beautiful blond orphan girl named Elizabeth Lavenza in an Italian village and adopted her.

In the 1818 edition of Frankenstein, Elizabeth is Alphonse's niece (and Victor's cousin).

Victor, his parents, and all the Frankensteins adored Elizabeth. She became to him a "more than sister." The two children referred to each other as cousins, rather than brother and sister.

More domestic affection, and the relationship between Victor and Elizabeth hints at future romantic love.

CHAPTER 2

Victor describes his perfect childhood. He and Elizabeth got along perfectly, though she favored poetry while he longed to unravel the "physical secrets" of life, including the "hidden laws of nature."

An early hint at Victor's dangerous ambition, and his innocent belief that man is powerful and wise enough to comprehend nature.

In addition to Elizabeth, Victor shares a close friendship with Henry Clerval, his well-read schoolmate. Like Victor, Clerval possesses a "soaring ambition" to leave his mark on human history.

Like Victor, Henry is also too young and innocent not to see the vanity and futility of his ambitions.

As he grows up, Victor becomes fascinated with "natural philosophy," and reads widely among the thinkers in this field who want to penetrate the "citadel of nature."

Nature portrayed as a fortress that will yield to an assault by man. This antagonistic relationship between Victor and nature bodes poorly.

One day, when Victor observes lightning strike a tree, he realizes that the laws of science are beyond human understanding and decides to focus on studies based in fact, like mathematics, rather than natural philosophy. Yet he notes that he eventually returned to it, leading to his "utter and terrible destruction."

Romantic writers viewed Nature as a sublime force beyond the power or understanding of man. Here Victor senses that too. But his final comment indicates that his ambition overcomes his sense, resulting in disaster.

CHAPTER 3

Just before Victor turns seventeen, Elizabeth catches scarlet fever and passes it on to Victor's mother, who dies. Her dying wish is for Victor and Elizabeth to marry. Still in grief, Victor says goodbye to Clerval, Elizabeth, and his father and leaves to study at Ingolstadt, a university in Germany.

Victor's perfect family suffers its first pain. His loss of innocence begins with his mother's death and continues with his quest for knowledge at University.

He meets with his professor of natural philosophy, M. Krempe, who tells Victor that his previous studies have all been a waste of time. Yet Victor then attends a class with M. Waldman, a chemistry professor, whose lecture on the power and recent successes of science inspire Victor to dedicate himself to revealing "to the world the deepest mysteries of creation." The next day Victor visits Waldman, who supports his plan.

Victor's ambition is both to gain glory and an innocent desire to aid society through his scientific achievements. Note how Victor ignores Krempe just as Walton ignores Victor: both are blinded by ambition. It's interesting to ponder whether his mother's death inspires Victor's ambition.

CHAPTER 4

Victor becomes so caught up in natural philosophy that he ignores everything else, including his family. He progresses rapidly, and suddenly after two years of work he discovers the secret to creating life.

Victor's intense focus allows him to fulfill his ambition and conquer nature, but also cuts him off from society.

Victor decides to build a race of beings, starting with one creature. He spends months alone in his apartment building a body to reanimate, spurred on by the lure of fame and glory, imagining a "new species" that will bless him as its creator.

Cut off from society, Victor seeks glory rather than what's best for society. He foolishly believes he can replace Nature (and God) as the creator of a species.

CHAPTER 5

After months of effort, Victor is successful in bringing his creature to life. But once alive, the creature's appearance horrifies him—he thinks of it as a monster.

Victor, a flawed man, messes with Nature, and things literally get ugly.

Victor runs from the room and tries to sleep, but nightmares of death and tombs wake him, and he opens his eyes to see the monster by his bed, reaching out and grinning. He runs, and spends the night outside.

Victor, the creator, abandons his creation. Because it's ugly he imagines that it's evil. Victor's innocent belief in himself is gone.

Still avoiding his apartment, Victor wanders Ingolstadt, and runs into Henry Clerval, who has come to university to embark on "a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge."

Clerval's words, though innocent and earnest, now sound dangerously ambitious and naïve.

Victor checks to see if the monster is still in his apartment, and is overjoyed to find that it isn't. He invites Clerval up, but once there falls ill with a "nervous fever," which lasts for months. Clerval nurses him, not revealing the illness to anyone. When Victor recovers, Clerval asks Victor to send a letter to his father and family, and gives him a letter from Elizabeth.

Victor makes the mistake of isolating himself and keeping his secret all to himself; it eats away at his peace of mind and ruins his health. Knowing he has a secret but not what it is, Clerval tries to reconnect him to society.

CHAPTER 6

In her letter, Elizabeth updates Victor on his brothers, and says that Justine Moritz, a former servant of the Frankensteins, has come to live with them after the death of her mother.

The Frankenstein family continues to be blissful and innocent.

Victor introduces Clerval to his professors, but though they praise him Victor finds anything connected with natural philosophy causes him distress. So he gives up such studies for a while, and studies Middle Eastern language with Clerval.

Victor's innocent joy in natural philosophy has been destroyed; now he seeks to isolate himself.

Near the end of term, as Victor and Clerval wait to travel back to Geneva, they take a tour around Germany which rekindles Victor's love of nature and raises his spirits.

Victor views nature as a Romantic poet would: sublime, impenetrable, free from the burdens of fallible human life. It provides him with relief.

CHAPTER 7

On returning from the tour, Victor receives a letter from his father saying that his youngest brother, William, has been murdered. Shocked and upset, Victor and Clerval rush to Geneva. But the town gate is locked when they arrive. Victor visits the spot where his brother died. On the way he sees **lightning** playing over the peaks of the mountain Mont Blanc.

As family bliss and innocence are destroyed, Victor's descriptions of nature turn dark, reflecting his psyche. Lightning is a reminder of his earlier realization that mankind can never understand nature. It's a lesson he forgot, to his detriment.

Near where his brother died, Victor sees a figure resembling the monster. He realizes that the monster killed William, which means that he, Victor, is really responsible since he created the monster.

Victor realizes the cost of his arrogant assault on nature and begins to lose his innocence. And he realizes the monster is revenging itself on him.

When Victor arrives home the next day, his brother Ernest tearfully informs him that Justine has been accused of William's murder: in her pocket the police found a portrait of Victor's mother that William had been wearing.

Victor, who thought himself a creator of life, will now be responsible for the death of two innocents.

Victor announces to his family that Justine is certainly not guilty, but says no more since he fears anyone hearing his story would think him insane. But Victor is confident that Justine could not be convicted for a crime she did not commit by circumstantial evidence.

By concealing his role in William's death and Justine's fate, Victor isolates himself and must bear all the consequences of his ambition alone.

CHAPTER 8

Victor wishes he could confess in Justine's place, but his absence at the time of the murder would make his confession sound like nonsense.

Victor could confess everything, including his secret, but instead he chooses silence and isolation.

At the trial, Justine maintains she is innocent, but cannot explain how William's portrait of his mother wound up in her pocket. She is sentenced to death.

The monster must have framed Justine as part of his revenge on Victor.

Victor speaks with a member of the court, who says that Justine has already confessed to the crime. Victor and Elizabeth visit Justine in prison, and she explains that she was pressured into confessing by her jailors. She succumbed, and confessed a lie. Justine says she's ready to die and leave behind the "sad and bitter world."

Justine confesses to a crime she did not commit, she gives up her innocent honesty, to "save" her soul. She has given up her innocence, and now no longer sees the world as innocent either.

The next day Justine is executed. Victor feels guilt overwhelm him for his secret role in William and Justine's deaths.

Victor now understands the grave consequences of his ambition, but he continues to keep his secret.

CHAPTER 9

Victor despairs that his good intentions have resulted in such horror. Soon the Frankensteins go to their vacation home in Belrive to escape the bad memories of what's happened. Yet Victor still has thoughts of suicide and begins to desire revenge against the monster.

Victor's response to the monster's betrayal of him mirrors the monster's response to Victor's betrayal: both isolate themselves in nature and seek revenge.

One day Elizabeth tells Victor that she no longer sees the world the same way after witnessing the execution of an innocent.

Elizabeth, for so long a perfect model of innocence, begins to lose her innocence.

A while later Victor decides to travel to Chamonix, France, hoping the trip will provide relief from his "ephemeral, because human, sorrows." Along the way he gazes at waterfalls and the towering Mont Blanc. At times the sights remind him of happier times, but never for long.

A sentiment typical of Romantic literature: human concerns are "ephemeral," or short lived, whereas Nature is as enduring as God.

CHAPTER 10

At Chamonix, Victor continues to feel despair. He again tries to escape it through nature: he climbs to the peak of a mountain called Montanvert. But just as the view begins to lift his spirits, Victor sees the monster. He curses it and wishes for its destruction.

Victor curses the monster without knowing its intentions, and without knowing for sure that the monster murdered William. He blames the monster, but he's responsible for its creation.

But with great eloquence the monster claims to be Victor's offspring. "I ought to be thy Adam," it says.

Victor is a creator, but he is no god. He abandoned his creation.

The monster continues that it was once benevolent, and turned to violence only after Victor, its creator, abandoned it. It begs Victor to listen to its story. Victor, for the first time thinking about his responsibilities as a creator, follows the monster to a cave in the glacier, and sits down to listen.

The monster admits it took revenge, but claims that Victor destroyed its innocence by isolating it.

CHAPTER 11

The monster describes its early days after being created: running from Victor's apartment, seeing light and dark and feeling hunger and cold, and discovering fire and its ability to both cook and burn.

The monster's development mirrors the development of man. But as they went from beasts to men, men also lost their innocence.

Wherever the monster goes its appearance terrifies humans, so it decides to avoid them. Eventually it finds a place to hide in the darkness near the side of a cottage. Inside it observes a man, woman, and an old man, and it watches them at their daily tasks.

The monster is pained by the isolation it must endure not because of its nature, but because of its appearance. The family is an example of the "domestic affection" it craves.

CHAPTER 12

The monster wonders why the family seems unhappy and realizes it is because the old man is blind and the family is poor and hungry. To make up for adding to their misery by eating their food, it gathers wood for them and leaves it outside their cottage at night. It also realizes they communicate through sound, and sets about learning their language. It learns that the young man is named Felix, and the girl, Agatha.

Here is proof that the monster is actually kind and generous. But most people are prejudiced, and judge it solely on what it looks like.

One day the monster sees itself in a pool of water. He realizes finally why people have screamed and run when they see him. Yet the monster becomes convinced that with gentle words and actions he could get the family to see past his awful appearance. Spring comes, lifting everyone's spirits. The monster looks to the future with hope.

The monster discovers its own ugliness, and realizes that people judge it on its looks rather than its nature. Yet it remains innocent enough to believe that it can overcome these prejudices, especially when Nature gives it joy.

CHAPTER 13

When a dark and beautiful "Arabian" woman named Safie arrives at the cottage, the family's mood, and Felix's in particular, brightens. Safie does not speak the family's language, and Felix teaches her from a history book. As she learns, so does the monster, which is disgusted that a race as noble as mankind is also capable of such evil.

The notion that a "noble and godlike" species like man can also be "evil" disgusts the monster and leaves it with a feeling of loathing. The gaining of language and the knowledge it offers can be seen as a loss of innocence.

As he learns about society and humans, the monster realizes that it has no society of its own. It is a monster, doomed to be always without family or people. It wishes it had never gotten this knowledge about society, which makes it so miserable.

A key turning point for the monster. In realizing humanity's shallowness, he also realizes his own sorry fate as an outcast, a monster.

CHAPTER 14

The monster figures out the history of the family, the De Laceys. Safie's father was a wealthy "Turk" living in Paris, who was wrongly accused of a crime. Felix offered to help the Turk escape from prison, and meanwhile fell in love with Safie. The Turk offered Felix his daughter's hand in marriage in exchange for helping the two escape. Felix, Safie, and her father escaped and made it to Italy, but then Felix's role in the conspiracy was discovered, and as a result the De Laceys lost their wealth and were exiled by the government. Felix returned to help his family, assuming that the Turk would uphold his end of the bargain, but the "treacherous Turk" decided he didn't want his daughter to marry a Christian. Safie's "Christian Arab" mother had taught her to be independent and intellectually curious, however—traits not encouraged among women in her father's Islamic society—so when Safie's father tried to force her to return to Turkey with him, she escaped and came to find Felix.

All kinds of human fallibilities are at work here: Safie's father is a falsely condemned criminal and promise-breaker, Felix is a conspirator, and marriage, a supposedly pure union of souls, needs to be brokered like an illicit business deal. It should also be noted that Shelley draws a clear divide between Christianity as "enlightened" and Islam as "childish"—a biased, Eurocentric vision of the world typical for her time and place.

CHAPTER 15

The monster next tells how it found three books in the woods, including John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (an epic poem about humankind's loss of innocence in the Garden of Eden). The monster at times sees itself as similar to Adam. Yet at others he sees himself as more like Satan, because he does not have the love of his creator.

Adam lost his innocence by disobeying God, his creator. The monster loses his innocence after being abandoned by his "god," Victor. Victor hasn't acted like a god, but like a flawed man, and thereby made the monster a devil.

The monster adds that when it fled from Victor's apartment it accidentally took some of his journal entries, which turned out to describe its creation. It curses Victor for having created something so ugly.

Victor created a monster unlike any other being on earth, dooming it to isolation.

The monster decides to reveal himself in the hope that men will be able to see past his ugliness. One day when Felix, Agatha, and Safie are out for a walk, he enters the cottage and introduces himself to De Lacey, sensing that the blind man will not be prejudiced against him. The conversation starts well, but just then the family returns. Felix attacks the monster, Safie runs in terror, and Agatha faints. The monster flees.

The first and only kindness the monster receives comes from a blind man incapable of prejudice. The rest of the family, like the rest of humanity, responds to the monster cruelly, based on looks alone.

CHAPTER 16

The family's rejection plunges the monster into a fit of rage. But the beauty of the next day calms him. He decides to approach De Lacey again to try to make amends.

The monster's faith in old De Lacey shows its last gasp of innocence, saving it from the rage born of rejection.

But by the time the monster reaches the cottage, the De Laceys have moved out. He sees Felix terminating his lease with the landlord, and never sees any of them again. His last link with society destroyed, the monster gives in to rage and a desire for revenge. He burns down the cottage and heads for Geneva and Victor.

Its innocence and hopes of inclusion in society dashed, the monster is left with only pain, and naturally wants to hurt those who hurt it. That includes human society (symbolized in the house he burns) and its creator, Victor.

At one point along the way the monster saves a beautiful little girl from drowning in a stream, only to be shot by her guardian. It takes weeks for him to heal, and his suffering only feeds his anger and desire for revenge.

Another example of humanity's tendency toward prejudice, which only increases the monster's desire for revenge.

After a few weeks, the monster makes it to Geneva. There he encounters a young boy. Thinking the boy would be too young to be horrified by his appearance, and thus could be a companion for him, the monster approaches him. But the boy is terrified, and shouts that his father, a Frankenstein, will punish the monster. The monster becomes enraged at hearing the name Frankenstein, and strangles the boy. The boy dies.

Again the monster shows an innocent belief in man, this time that the young will be less prejudiced than the old. His hopes again dashed, coupled with the boy's connection to Victor, spur the monster to uncontrollable revenge. All this explains the murder of William Frankenstein (the boy).

The monster then finds a barn in which to spend the night, but finds a beautiful sleeping girl inside. Enraged that he is forever cut off from the delight of female beauty, the monster places a picture the boy wore and plants it in the girl's pocket.

The monster revenges itself on Justine (framing her for William's murder) because to the monster, she symbolizes the society it can never have.

The chapter ends with the monster's demand that Victor create a female counterpart for him.

All the monster wants is a family, a community.

CHAPTER 17

The narrative returns to Victor's voice. Fearing that two monsters will just cause more murder and destruction, Victor refuses to agree to the monster's demand to create a female.

The monster's point was that it became vengeful only because of human prejudice and abandonment. But Victor is still prejudiced.

The monster argues that its violence stems from its misery, and that Victor, as its creator, is responsible for that misery. The monster adds that if Victor creates a companion for it, the pair will flee to South America and avoid human contact forever. Victor feels compassion at the monster's words, but feels hatred whenever he looks at it. Still, he agrees to the bargain. The monster tells him it will monitor his progress, and departs.

The monster's argument wins Victor over intellectually, and Victor is forced to recognize that he failed the monster in a terrible way. And yet, at the same time, Victor cannot completely overcome his prejudice.

CHAPTER 18

Almost immediately, Victor begins to question the wisdom of creating a companion for the monster and delays. He also realizes that to complete the project he'll have to do some research in England.

On the mountain the monster's argument barely won out over Victor's prejudice. Now the scales start to tip.

Alphonse senses Victor's distress, and thinks it might stem from some reluctance on Victor's part to marry Elizabeth. Victor assures his father he'd like nothing more than to marry Elizabeth. Alphonse suggests they marry immediately as a cure for the family's recent sorrow. But Victor does not want to marry with his bargain with the monster hanging over his head, and uses the trip he has to take to England as an excuse to put the wedding off.

Alphonse's hope in Victor and Elizabeth's marriage again shows the importance of family and connection, which is just what the monster lacks. But Victor continues to isolate himself from his family and keeps secrets, which will ultimately lead to disaster.

Alphonse and Victor agree that he will go to England for a time not to exceed a year, and that Clerval, looking to pursue his studies after having to spend some time working for his father, will accompany him. Yet Victor continues to feel like a "wretch."

"Wretch" is also the word the monster uses to describe itself, drawing a parallel between the two isolated beings. But Victor is isolated by choice, while the monster is forced into isolation.

CHAPTER 19

Victor and Clerval arrive in London in October. Victor continues to despair, avoiding people unless they have information that can help him create a second monster. Clerval, in contrast, is how Victor used to be: excited by learning and wanting to meet and talk to everyone.

Clerval's innocence contrasts with Victor and shows the joy and delight Victor's ambition cost him.

Victor and Clerval travel to Scotland. There, Victor leaves Clerval with a friend and travels on alone. He goes to a remote island in the Orkney's, sets up a lab, and works in solitude on his secret project.

Once again Victor isolates himself from society. Whenever he does this, he makes bad, reckless decisions that cause disaster.

CHAPTER 20

One night in his lab, Victor worries that the new creature he's creating might refuse to live away from humans, or that the two monsters might produce a "race of devils." Just then he looks up and sees the monster "grinning" at the window. Overwhelmed by loathing, Victor destroys his work. Outside, the monster howls in agony, and disappears.

The monster might have been grinning in joy at the sight of its companion. But Victor's superficial prejudice is too powerful. He once again betrays the monster's trust and sentences it to permanent isolation.

Hours later, the monster returns to Victor's lab. It now refers to Victor only as "Man" and vows revenge. It promises: "I shall be with you on your wedding night." Victor thinks the monster means to kill him on that night, and fears for Elizabeth left alone as a widow.

The monster now sees Victor only as its enemy, as "Man," and vows revenge. Victor's fear for his own life shows he doesn't understand the monster's true misery: isolation.

A letter soon arrives from Clerval suggesting they resume their travels. Victor gathers up his laboratory materials and rows out into the ocean to dump them. Victor is so happy he takes a nap in his boat. But he wakes into rough weather and can't get back to shore. Just as he begins to panic, the winds ease.

Victor panics in the boat because he fears being cut off from land, from human society. It is the same fear as the monster's, but Victor's prejudice doesn't let him recognize it.

When Victor lands a group of angry townspeople gathers around his boat. He's a suspect in a murder that occurred the previous night, and sent to meet with Mr. Kirwin, a local magistrate.

A cliffhanger ending; it seems likely the monster has already taken some revenge, but how?

CHAPTER 21

At Mr. Kirwin's office, Victor learns that a man in his mid-twenties was found dead on the shore with black marks on his neck. And various witnesses testify that a boat much like Victor's was seen at sea. Victor is taken to see the body. It is Clerval. Victor falls into convulsions, and remains bedridden and delusional for two months.

The monster's revenge and Victor's ambition cost another innocent life. The monster intentionally targets Victor's closest family and friends, making Victor's isolation as enforced as its own.

When Victor regains awareness he is still in prison. Mr. Kirwin treats him kindly, advising him that he'll likely be freed. He also tells Victor that his father has come to see him.

Yet unlike the monster, Victor still does have connections to other men and a family.

Two weeks later Victor is released because the court has nothing but circumstantial evidence against him. Despairing and determined to protect his family from the monster, Victor returns with his father to Geneva.

Victor's release stands in contrast to Justine's conviction. But Victor has his father helping him, while Victor stayed silent and did not help Justine.

CHAPTER 22

En route to Geneva, they stop in Paris so Victor can regain his strength. His father tries to help by getting him to engage with society, but Victor feels he has no right to. Victor even tells his father he murdered Justine, William, and Clerval. His father considers him deranged, and Victor says no more.

As Victor's father seeks to draw him into society, Victor increasingly resembles the monster in his sense that he's an outcast. As part of his isolation, Victor continues to keep his deadly secrets.

While in Paris, Victor receives a letter from Elizabeth. She expresses her desire to marry Victor, but worries he may have taken another lover during his long absence. Victor remembers the monster's vow to "be with him" on his wedding night, and decides that whether he kills it or it kills him, at least he will be free. Victor writes back that he wants to marry immediately, but adds that he has a terrible secret he will tell her the day after they are married.

Victor's cutting himself off from society makes Elizabeth doubt his love for him. But won't waiting until a day after his wedding to tell his secret be too late? A selfish half-confession by Victor, who thinks more about himself than Elizabeth.

A week later Victor and his father arrive in Geneva. The wedding takes place ten days later. Yet as Victor and Elizabeth sail to a cottage by Lake Como in Italy for their honeymoon, Victor's fear of facing the monster dissolves his happiness. Elizabeth tries to cheer him by pointing out the beauty in nature. It doesn't work.

By now this is a painfully familiar scene: Victor depends on the temporary relief of Nature and the support of his companion, now Elizabeth instead of Clerval or Alphonse, in order to ease his anxiety.

CHAPTER 23

A storm rolls in after they arrive at the cottage. Victor, armed with a pistol and terrified that the monster will attack at any moment, sends Elizabeth to bed for her own safety. But as he searches the house, he hears a scream. Elizabeth has been murdered. While huddled over her lifeless body, Victor sees the monster at the window. He fires at it, but misses.

Victor assumed the monster would attack him, not realizing that the monster wanted revenge by subjecting him to the same horror to which he subjected it: isolation. This mistake results in Elizabeth's death.

Victor rushes back to Geneva. The news of Elizabeth's death overwhelms his father Alphonse, who dies a few days later.

Now the monster's revenge is complete: Victor is alone (besides Ernest).

Victor goes mad for several months and is kept in a cell. When he regains his senses he tells his entire story to a local magistrate, hoping to enact justice on the monster. The magistrate listens but doesn't entirely believe Victor and, anyway, considers tracking down the monster impossible. Victor resolves to seek his revenge on his own.

Finally, Victor tells his secret. But it's too late. Now he faces the same predicament as the monster: rejected by humankind, he must seek revenge on his own.

Victor curses the magistrate and all of humanity. "Man," he cries, "how ignorant art thou in thy pride of wisdom!"

Victor's curse is similar to the monster's curse of him. They are now essentially the same.

CHAPTER 24

Victor decides to leave Geneva forever. While visiting the graves of his family he swears revenge, and then he hears the monster's laughter, and its voice calling Victor a "miserable wretch." Victor pursues the monster, but it escapes into the darkness.

The monster's revenge is successful; now Victor suffers isolation as it does.

For months, Victor tracks the monster northward into the frigid Arctic regions, led by clues and taunting notes the monster leaves behind. Victor chases the monster onto the frozen ocean with sleds and dogs, and comes within a mile of the monster's own sled, but then the ice breaks up beneath Victor's sled.

The barren arctic is a perfect symbol of isolation and the power of nature. A man in this tundra is utterly alone and entirely at the mercy of nature.

This is the point at which Walton's ship rescued Victor. The narrative returns to the present. Victor, knowing he's dying, begs Walton to take vengeance on the monster if he should happen to see it.

Victor has finally told his story and secret to a sympathetic audience. But is there any difference anymore between Victor and the monster except appearance?

WALTON, IN CONTINUATION

The novel returns to the frame of Walton's letters to his sister, Margaret Saville. In a letter on August 26, Walton says that he believes Victor's story and recalls how Victor described himself as the victim of "lofty ambition," which brought him to despair. Walton laments that he did not know Victor when they could have been friends. As Walton writes, "I have sought one who would sympathize with and love me." Yet while Victor responded kindly to his offers of friendship, he remained fixated on his only remaining destiny: to destroy the monster.

Walton and Victor are after the same thing: love, acceptance, and glory. And in both cases, their ambition worked against their hope for love and acceptance. Both men end up trapped and isolated, Walton by nature and Victor by the need for vengeance.

In a letter on September 2, Walton tells Margaret that his ship and crew are in grave danger: the ship is now surrounded entirely by ice. He blames himself for their fate and says they may all die as a result of his "mad schemes." He fears a mutiny.

Just as Victor lost his innocence and realized the dangers of his ambition, so too does Walton. Walton also fears vengeance from the "monster" of his crew.

In a letter on September 5, Walton says that his crew have demanded that he turn the ship around and head for home as soon as the ice frees them. Victor speaks up in his defense, telling the rebellious crew members they should "be men," for they had set out to be the "benefactors of [their] species." The speech changes the crew's mind, but Walton fears only temporarily. He says he'd rather die than return in shame with his "purpose unfulfilled."

Walton maintains the innocent ideal notion that he can somehow enlighten all of humankind by seeing the North Pole. The same mix of arrogance, benevolence, and lust for fame fuels both his and Victor's ambitions. Victor's speech implies that he has not, in fact, changed much at all.

In a letter on September 7, Walton says he has agreed to the crew's demand to turn back. He considers what has happened an injustice.

Like Victor, Walton blames his failure not on his ambition or his fallibility, but on others.

In his final letter on September 12th, Walton says that he has turned back, his hopes of "glory" and "utility" crushed. In addition, Victor has died. Victor had objected to Walton's decision to turn back his ship and said that his own "purpose" remained firm. Victor then tried to rise and return to the ice, but could not. He reaffirmed his certainty that he acted well in trying to defend his fellow man against the monster, his creation. He then died quietly, eager to rejoin the relatives he had lost in life.

Like Victor, Walton's ambition destroys everything around him until he's left alone. Victor, quick to judge everything but himself, expects Walton to stick to his convictions, but his own conviction is a need for revenge. If he had truly acted in "good faith," he would have confronted his prejudice, or, failing that, told his secret earlier.

Walton interrupts his letter upon hearing a disturbance in the cabin where Victor's body lies. He returns to tell Margaret that he has just seen the monster crying over Victor's corpse. To Walton's shock, the monster says he suffered remorse and pity for Victor all along. Walton calls the monster a "wretch." The monster is unsurprised, having been rejected by people from the start. It says that it abhorred itself even as it was doing evil, and describes itself as a "fallen angel," yet it also wonders why only it, and not Felix, or the man who shot it, or Frankenstein, is considered a "criminal." The monster then promises to end its own life, springs from the cabin back onto the ice, and disappears.

The last person the monster encounters before killing itself treats it unfairly, with the same prejudice and bitterness the monster faced throughout its life. The monster's use of religious language to describe its plight again suggests the connection between Frankenstein and Paradise Lost, and between the monster, Adam, and Satan. With a final condemnation of the prejudice it has always faced and the weakness of men, the monster reveals its final loss of innocence: its own self-hatred, and wish to die.

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