**4th Semester CC 9**

**Frankenstein; Mary Shelley**

**Victor and His Creature:**

Generally, it is through Victor’s relationship with, and treatment of, the creature that his egotistical and callous sides are evident. He is very insensitive towards the creature’s situation, and at first, he is not even interested in hearing the creature’s story; until, of course, he can see a personal interest (Victor does not know for sure at this point whether it was the creature who murdered William, and he wants to get his suspicions affirmed or refuted – he wants to know if he is right). Until this situation, Victor has spent every minute of his account to describe how wretched the creature was and how much he loathed even the sight of him from the very beginning: “How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form?”, “[…] breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley, 1993: 45). Unable to comprehend his actions and his own creation, Victor flees like a coward; a recurrent reaction pattern. That Victor flees when he observes the creature is also an expression of his narcissistic personality; several critics (Jansson, Mellor) have analysed the creature to be Victor’s ‘double’, so when Victor sees the monstrosity of his ‘double’, it does not correspond with his expectations and self-perception, and he must escape. Joseph Kestner in Frankenstein, edited by Fred Botting, suggests that it is, in fact, Victor’s self-absorption that has led him to create the creature: “Victor Frankenstein’s evident longing for another, despite his close friendship with Henry Clerval and his betrothal to Elizabeth, leads to a creation of a being who becomes the Inadequate Other which is in reality Victor himself” (Kestner quoted in Botting, 1995: 69). The ‘Inadequate Other’ reflects the narcissist’s flaws, but at the same time, it also reinforces self-esteem by denying the flaws and instead projecting them onto the Other. Kestner also brings into question 39 Victor’s self-renounced affection towards Clerval and Elizabeth, which supports the idea of Victor saying one thing and doing a complete different thing. But to return to his reaction when the creature is brought to life, it is apparent that the ‘beautiful features’ that Victor had selected have been lost in the process, and the creature, therefore, does not live up to Victor’s ambitions and expectations. The creature is a ‘catastrophe’ in Victor’s own words, and even though it is Victor who is the creator, he seems to blame the creature for this dreadful outcome. Furthermore, Victor only focuses on his own emotions without taking the creature into consideration, and he thus excludes the creature from his own “birth” and refuses him an opinion. Victor’s description of his painful labours of creation is a reference to the female act of giving birth and reinstates Victor as the creator and father of the creature. But that he should have used ‘care’ in the creating process is not entirely true, since he made decisions that were irresponsible, and which can be seen as partially accountable for the outcome. After a while, Victor returns, and after a morbid dream about Elizabeth and his dead mother, he finds the creature in his room: “[…] as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created” (Shelley, 1993: 46). The creature’s behaviour is described as those of a child’s: “He held up the curtain of the bed. […] His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks” (Shelley, 1993: 46). The creature is clearly looking for affection and affirmation from Victor, as any child would on seeing its parent for the first time. Mary Shelley’s description of the creature as innocent and infantile creates a feeling of sympathy for the creature, and Victor’s rejection and uncaring treatment becomes evident. Furthermore, when the creature is seemingly trying to attain physical contact with Victor, most likely a hug, Victor perceives it as an act of violence towards him: “[…] one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed downstairs” (Shelley, 1993: 46). Again, Victor displays his self-absorption and lack of empathy by misreading the creature’s intentions and subsequently flees; abandoning the creature a second time.

**The Science in Frankenstein:**

The ambition shared by both Victor and Walton is scientific and it re-echoes the ambitions that followed the progress of science and the Industrial Revolution from Mary Shelley’s contemporary society. Mary Shelley’s treatment and critique of science is unique and important in the understanding of the novel: “Frankenstein is notable both for its grasp of the nature of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution and for its perspicacious analysis of the dangers inherent in that enterprise” (Mellor, 1989: 107). This section will therefore take a look at the science in Frankenstein and examine its relevance in a feministic reading of the text but also as Mary Shelley’s personal critique of science if her opinion can be determined. But first, I will take a closer look at the ambition which is a recurring theme of the story and crucial in the understanding of Victor and Walton. - Warning against Ambition Victor warns Walton not to excite the same ambition that has led to his ruin on three occasions; the first is when Walton has told Victor about his ambitious voyage, and how death is not a factor to be considered, Victor bursts: “Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me – let me reveal the tale, and you will dash the cup from you lips” [Sic] (Shelley, 1993: 23). The next warning falls when Walton inquires information on the particulars of the creature’s formation: “‘Are you mad, my friend?’ said he; ‘or whither does your senseless curiosity lead you? Would you also create for yourself and the world a demonical enemy? Peace, peace! learn my miseries, and do not seek to increase your own’” (Shelley, 1993: 160). Whereas the first warning seems to be about ambition the next one appears to focus on uncontrolled scientific curiosity. At the same time, it serves as Mary Shelley’s warning against creation without any female intervention which is an act that should not be repeated. Finally, on his deathbed, Victor advises Walton to avoid ambition and instead to live a serene life: “Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries” (Shelley, 1993: 166). Here, Victor warns Walton against ambition, but earlier he advocated for pursuing one’s dreams and aspirations of glory which can be interpreted as Mary Shelley’s disguise of her own opinion of the matter. Even though I agree with her critics (Mellor, Jansson) that her representation of science stays ambiguous there is reason to argue that it is her voice we hear when Victor warns against ambition. The reason for this is that his state of mind seems more at ease and sane than when he rambles about glory and ambition (Shelley, 1993: 163-4). In this context Frankenstein appears to take a critical stand towards science. - Rhetoric Anne Mellor argues that Mary Shelley also used science rhetoric to promote a feministic perspective: “Mary Shelley was one of the first to comprehend and illustrate the dangers inherent in the use of such gendered metaphors in the seventeenth-century scientific revolution” (Mellor, 1989: 89). Mellor refers to the way in which nature was described as a passive female which the ‘aggressive, virile male scientist’ could capture and enslave (Mellor, 1989: 89). Perhaps, in opposition to this, Mary Shelley chose male narratives solely; in that way they were accountable for both good and bad. The rhetoric also applies to Victor’s creation. One of the main arguments that Frankenstein is a feministic critique of patriarchal society is Victor’s creation of a ‘human being’ with no female intervention. Not only does this show that men looked down upon women and therefore strove to create a society where women were not needed, it also shows that breaking the laws of nature and the natural process of creation will end in disaster. At the same time it serves as a response to some of the theories that were prevalent at the time concerning the reason for “monstrous birth”.