FRANKENSTEIN – MARY SHELLEY

Revision
SOME IDEAS

❖ A novel of doubling and reversal – Walton/Victor, Victor/Monster, Victor/Clerval, beauty/ugliness. Home or the domestic/wild nature and the laboratory
❖ masculine science wrests secrets from feminised nature
❖ Monstrous moral and legal systems – Justine
❖ The monster’s treatment creates his desire for revenge and murder
KEY IDEAS

❖ Knowledge
❖ Women
❖ Sublime
❖ Family/Parenthood
❖ Education
❖ Science/Technology
Victor seeks knowledge for his own reasons

Does not consider the ramifications

Walton also does this

Victor focused on Alchemy before going to university and learning about new science

Rime of the Ancient Mariner about the death of imagination in man and embarkation on quest for spiritual and intellectual knowledge.
KNOWLEDGE

❖ “unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me; let me reveal my tale and you will dash the cup from your lips.”
❖ Victor cautions Walton against seeking knowledge – can be linked to concerns in the industrial age that unbridled use of knowledge can lead to disaster – “I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to you as mine has been” 4th letter to MS
❖ We see Victor’s obsession with learning in ch.2
EDUCATION

- Romantic education – self taught
- Adventures provide a source of growth
- Walton self educated “my education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading.”
- Walton, however, also had a practical education aboard a whaling ship.
EDUCATION

- The creature learns from the DeLacey’s
- Typical Romantic reading list
- No one to guide him in his learning
- ‘There was none among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No: from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me and sent me forth to this insupportable misery’
- Safie is educated also by the De Lacey’s
PARENTHOOD/FAMILY

❖ Elizabeth’s mother died early during childbirth
❖ Her family taught her to care for the poor (another key concern of the novel)
❖ Victor does not care for the creature he ‘parented’
❖ Rousseau’s ideas on education – children should learn naturally – Shelley critiques this
❖ Victor is the real monster – he neglects his own ‘child’
❖ Critiques the cult of the individual, of solitariness and introversion of the time.
Walton asserts that he will keep going over the ‘untamed yet obedient’ regions. Nature, or the stars will witness his success.

Eerie arctic setting

Elizabeth – “none could behold her without looking at her as a distinct species, as being heaven sent, and bearing a celestial stamp on all her features”
Creature feels uplifted by the natural world
Victor rows on Lake Geneva
Victor wants to ‘pursue nature to her hiding places’ – this leads him to neglect his friends and family
Once he achieves his dream ‘now that I have finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust fill my heart’
Landscapes in ch. 10 are icy, barren and inhospitable, as alien to warm humanity as Frankenstein’s manic desire. Sublime becomes dangerously inhuman.
SCIENCE

- Humphrey Davy, Luigi Galvani, Giovanni Aldini and Erasmus Darwin
- Science to *describe* or science to *intervene*
- Monster made from parts of animal as well as human – monstrous
Background figures here – not considered as confidants

Elizabeth is Victor’s “sister” he takes it for granted she is his

Justine takes the blame for the death

We never meet Margaret Saville

Elizabeth’s wedding night – Victor things primarily of revenge – she dies

Women as mothers – Victor is clearly not this
FREUDIAN INTERPRETATION

❖ Victor as the *id*, who acts out his sexual and aggressive natures by seeking to become God.

❖ The creature then, represents the *ego* which must work with the demands of the real world and come to terms with societal rejection.

❖ Walton becomes the *superego* or the conscience that relates the acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

❖ These three characters represent the struggle of man and his conscience with the good and the bad, the learned and the ignorant.