

Rachel

6/4/11

English 314

Theory Based Paper

Releasing the Monster Inside

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* ~~by~~ at the age of twenty, making a name for herself as one of the greatest writers in British Romantic literary history. Her novel continues to influence science fiction novels and thrillers today. Through Dr. Frankenstein, Shelley undertook an examination of basic human reactions and their ability to cope with their own emotions. Frankenstein's preoccupation with death causes him to sublimate his fears, which ultimately leads to his downfall. Shelley's usage of characterization and incredible employment of imagery was the vehicle for this theory. This psychological, subconscious process ~~can~~ reveals much about the way that humans deal with confusing trials and conflicting emotions.

Death is a common theme throughout *Frankenstein*, continually reshaping both the plot and the characters. Interestingly enough, Victor Frankenstein was never exposed to death or depression during his childhood years. He states, "In my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors" (Shelley 37). As a boy, he developed a fascination with science and ancient stories of an elixir of life with the ability to prolong death. Since many psychologists believe that human reactions are based upon previous influences, this strange obsession became a motivation for his future choices. Reaching adulthood, he had his first personal encounter with death. His mother passed away after a battle with Scarlett Fever. He recalled, "My mother was dead, but we still had duties which we ought to perform" (Shelley 28). As a man, he was expected to control and ignore his emotions since they

Formatted: Space After: 0 pt, No widow/orphan control

Comment [J1]: You'll want to change your heading here so it follows MLA format. We don't really care, but you'll want to make sure you do that before you submit your final draft to Sister Grover.

Comment [J2]: I agree!

Comment [J3]: This word still doesn't sound quite right...And even if it is, our journal caters more to the everyday person, and most people wouldn't know what this word means. It would be helpful if you defined it, at least.

Comment [J4]: These two sentences comprise your thesis (which I still really like!). It would be better if you could combine them into one, but they do work as they are.

Comment [J5]: Fantastic! Great analysis!

Comment [J6]: Why is this capitalized? I don't think it needs to be.

were considered feminine. Due to these pressures from the time period, Frankenstein was given very little time to grieve and was quickly ushered off to school, making it impossible for him to fully comprehend death and its meaning. It is possible that this forced emotional control ~~may have~~ caused mental repression. Repression is a Freudian term to explain the “mental process by which distressing thoughts, memories, or impulses that may give rise to anxiety are excluded from consciousness and left to operate in the unconscious” (“Repression”). Frankenstein claimed to believe that grief itself was merely an “indulgence” (Shelley 28), more as a way of explaining to himself why he was given inadequate time than for anyone else.

Comment [J7]: Be specific. Were they considered feminine because of the time period?

From this point on, Victor Frankenstein became dominated by his subconscious. Because, since he was not able to process his interaction with death, his mind became preoccupied with his desire to understand it. His classes only fed into this as he “was led to examine the progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses.” (Shelley 37). Looking past the text itself to Shelley’s characterization of Frankenstein, there is a clear change in his attitude. His ignorance of everything in the world around him suggests complete absorption into an exploration of death. Shelley paints a picture of the disgusting and decomposing world in which he now lives, collecting bones and sleeping in morgues. His mind reveals the depth of his fascination completely when he falls asleep the night of his creation. Frankenstein remembers, “As I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death...I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of her flannel” (Shelley 44). This violent dream of Elizabeth, whom he loves, suggests a deeply seeded fear that death will destroy all that is important to him. Sigmund Freud, a distinguished psychologist, often stated his belief that our subconscious fears and desires are manifested in our dreams. In

Comment [J8]: Is this supposed to be “than anyone else” or “than for anything else”?

Comment [J9]: You do a very good job in this paragraph establishing Frankenstein’s character and doing so through a psychoanalytical lens. Good job!

Comment [J10]: Though you talk about the literary device you’re discussing later in this paragraph, it’s best if you can work it into your topic sentence.

Comment [J11]: A quotation of this imagery would be really nice somewhere in here.

Shelley's view, uncontrolled fears can dominate our actions and decisions.

~~The Frankenstein's~~ fixation with morbidity ~~developed by Frankenstein~~ was clearly unnatural. Nevertheless, he was able to recognize the inappropriateness of this behavior. As a psychological defense mechanism, he attempted to sublimate his fears. Sublimation is another psychoanalytical term, meaning, "The appreciation or creation of ideal beauty... ~~is~~ rooted in primitive... urges that are transfigured in culturally elevating ways" ("Sigmund Freud"). Essentially, Frankenstein sought to channel his seemingly inappropriate tendencies into socially acceptable practices. While attempting to reenergize a deceased human body might not seem like an appropriate relief of psychological stresses, Frankenstein recalled that, "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (Shelley 39-40). He was able to justify this action by claiming it as a scientific advancement – merely a fascinating extension of his studies. He hoped that this discovery would help to bring joy to the world by the illuminating death.

Comment [J12]: Again, mention the literary device you're talking about in the topic sentence.

Frankenstein believed ~~that~~ he could create life himself. An attempt to control life is a natural reaction to the helplessness of death. He reminisced, "I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse the spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet" (Shelley 43). However, because the body he pieced together was dead, there was no life – no soul – to restore to it. As Victor channeled his fears and strange desires into the creation of the monster, they were also channeled into the monster himself, thereby inserting a portion of his own soul into his creation. For the length of time leading up to the monster's awakening, they were one. He recalled, "I did not watch the blossom or expanding leaves – sights which before always yielded me supreme delight – so deeply was I engrossed in my occupation," (Shelley 42). He was mentally giving up so much of himself to his creation that he became sick every night,

Comment [J13]: Again, love this paragraph. You're a very good writer!

and later fell into a seizure.

Comment [J14]: Explain how this adds to your thesis. Also, you need some kind of concluding sentence that ties together everything you said in this paragraph.

When the monster awoke, it became its own separate entity, a moving and breathing

Comment [J15]: Literary device?

piece of the Doctor himself. He was an active corpse and a living personification of

Frankenstein's greatest fear – death. The fact that the monster was purposefully oversized,

“about eight feet in height,” (Shelley 39), suggests the immensity of Frankenstein's fear. It was

Comment [J16]: Love this insight! I would have never thought of this myself.

clearly too large for him to handle and had to be removed from him. ~~He~~The monster became an

extension of the Doctor, a tool for him to deal with his mental inadequacies. He confessed ~~that~~,

“Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of my room, and continued

a long time transversing in my bedchamber,” (Shelley 44). The fact that the monster symbolized

the transference of his fears was solidified as Victor ran at the sight of him. Later, while visiting

Justine, a friend who had been convicted of the monster's crimes, he described, “I had retired to

a corner of the prison room, where I could conceal the horrid anguish that possessed me,”

(Shelley 81). In his cowardice, he could not even stand to see the effects that his mind would

have on his loved ones.

Comment [J17]: Again, you need a concluding sentence that wraps things up and ties back to both your topic sentence and your thesis.

Though the man and monster separated, they remained connected. The corpse became a

Comment [J18]: Literary device?

vehicle through which the doctor ~~would~~ reveals his greatest thoughts and deepest desires – an

exploration of death. While the monster committed the physical crimes, Victor paid for them

mentally with inconsolable grief and constant pangs of guilt. He realized, “I had turned loose

into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery; had he not murdered

my brother?” (Shelley 68). However, it is odd that his brother's death came just as he was

growing out of his awkward, sickly years. William was becoming handsome and received much

attention from Elizabeth. Subconsciously, it is possible that Victor might have felt jealousy

towards his progressing brother, and might have wished his threatening presence removed. In

this way, the monster becomes Frankenstein's "id." In Freud's psychoanalytical approach to the human mind, he felt that the id was the part of the brain that held all unconscious desires and urges. This was controlled by the ego, or the part of the brain that adapts to what is socially acceptable. While Victor's ego would never allow him to murder his own brother, his unfettered id, personified by an eight foot tall, reanimated corpse could easily accomplish the evil task.

Frankenstein becomes so subjugated by his guilt as it carries out his darkest desires. He undoubtedly becomes the monster that he so feared, embracing death and its mysteries throughout the rest of the novel. He first succumbs to mental death and decay. He said, "When I thought of him, I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became enflamed, and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed" (Shelley 85). He is digressing to a primitive and animalistic form to express his emotions, not unlike the monster himself. Finally, after retelling the entire story, Frankenstein is able to embrace death in a fully physical form. Believing himself to be a pathetic addition to mankind, he ~~woefully~~ jumps from the narrator's ship and is "borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance," (Shelley 240). By suppressing, or holding back his natural curiosity towards death, Frankenstein was forced to surrender to his greatest fears.

Comment [J19]: Literary device?

Comment [J20]: Nice sum-up!

Though frightening, the struggles of Frankenstein's character are not uncommon. Even today social restrictions often require the sublimation of unacceptable fascinations or beliefs in order to be accepted by the world. This can easily mean the repression of desires and emotions as well. While this presents a temporary solution, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley suggests that this is not the appropriate way to handle these psychological issues. Her fantastic rendering of this struggle within the human mind insinuates that repression and sublimation will eventually cause damaging, mental side effects. Those secret desires caged in the mind will become the monster

that will surely bring about our eventual destruction.

Rachel,

I was so impressed with your paper! It's so fascinating and interesting and you do such a good job explaining and supporting your ideas. And I appreciate you listening to and taking the suggestions I gave you on your last draft. I would accept this into our journal mostly as is, aside from the few minor things Karen and I pointed out. Most of the comments I made were more because of the instructions for the essay we were given for class, but I personally think your paper is better not oriented around literary devices. So, that's your choice to make. As you spruce this up for your final draft, I would suggest that you make sure that everything you say ties back into your thesis. There are a few paragraphs that only loosely tie back in that you could strengthen by making specific mention back to what you are trying to prove with this paper. Other than that, I loved your paper, I really enjoyed reading it, and I hope everything goes well as you get this ready for final submission!

~Jessica DeLand

Works Cited

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. USA: Dalmation Press, 2010. [Print](#).

"Sigmund Freud." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia

Britannica, 2011. Web. 01 Jun. 2011.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/219848/Sigmund-Freud>.

"Repression." *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2011. ~~Web. 9 June 2011.~~ <http://www.merriam-webster.com> ~~(9 June 2011)~~.

Formatted: Space After: 0 pt, Line spacing: Double, No widow/orphan control

Comment [J21]: I'm not an expert on MLA citation, but I think I've helped you get it right. You'll want to double-check it in an MLA citation engine online, though, like easybib.com

Formatted: Space After: 0 pt, No widow/orphan control