‘Both Victor and his creature are motivated by revenge.’ Do you agree?

As a chilling gothic novel set in the early nineteenth century, Mary Shelley through *Frankenstein* explores the newfound ideologies of Enlightenment through changes in the values and attitudes of Frankenstein and the Monster. Frankenstein’s actions and motivations in the morally ambiguous world constructed by Shelley portrays him as a Byronic hero whose tyrannical actions are seen as the result of an unrelenting passion for scientific exploration that has been bastardised by the influence of the social mechanisms of his day. This acts as a catalyst for a negative pathway of ambition and wreaks havoc on his life, thus motivating him to seek revenge. Yet, in the case of the Monster, he vows to seek vengeance on his creator and the rest of humanity as a result of the deep-rooted unhappiness and loneliness he experiences. Thus, Frankenstein and the Monster ultimately both wish to take revenge, however they are not initially motivated by it. Frankenstein is led rather by his ambition to presume that a mere has the jurisdiction to preside over life and death while the Monster is triggered by his rejection by both Frankenstein and society.

Despite Frankenstein having ‘begum life with benevolent intentions’, his desire to be a pioneer in the world of science becomes his sole motivation, and ultimately leads to his downfall. As a child, Frankenstein is depicted as an ‘innocent and helpless Monster bestowed on [his parents] by Heaven’. By presenting him as such, Shelley iterates an initial favourable view of the character due to the associations of purity through innocence and a reference of the Divine, and thus adheres to the Romantic idealism of children. Yet, the protagonist’s unrelenting ego is later exposed when he relishes the possibility of ‘a new species bless[ing him] as its creator and source’. The presence of this in the text proves to be a condemnation by Shelley of an individual with such ego, and serves as a device that foreshadows Frankenstein’s malevolent motivations. Frankenstein is only further influenced by the ‘wind of promise’ that was prevalent during the era from which Shelley writes, the Age of Enlightenment. Initially, he seeks to ‘overtake the winds’, but soon he needs to be ‘carried by the wind’, and after bringing his creation to life, he is ‘moved by every wind that blows’. This motif of wind is deliberately used by Shelley for different purposes; while she accentuates that Frankenstein’s ambition to defy the ‘immutable laws’ of nature to create the Monster triggers the adversities he faces, she advocates her view that one must temper their lust and ego to prevent the consummation of one whole. Thus, Frankenstein’s ego and ambitious pursuit for scientific discovery serve as his initial motivations.

Conversely, the rejection and abhorring of the Monster by Frankenstein engenders a sense of loneliness in him, and thereby fuels his spitefulness. Frankenstein assumes the role of a creator when he brings his creation to life. With this idea of creation, Shelley subtly alludes to the book of Genesis, in which God creates Adam. However, unlike in the Bible, Frankenstein’s abandonment of the Monster parallels a moral anarchy. Not only does he pursue nature to its extents, but he also displays prejudice towards his Monster, labelling him as a ‘demonical corpse’ and ‘wretch’ repeatedly. Having a ruthless creator who fails to ‘soothe [his] sorrows [and] share [his] thoughts’, the Monster suffers from immense grief and isolation. These sentiments are only heightened when the Monster is ‘shut out from intercourse’ from...
humanity. The Monster asks himself, ‘Was I...a monster...from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?’ By highlighting this question, Shelley reveals the inhumanity and prejudice of mankind, who abhor the Monster based on his ‘shrivelled complexion’, in order to elucidate that the Monster’s alienation from society is his key motivation to provoking him to have an ‘insatiable thirst for vengeance’. Therefore, Shelley prevents the Monster as a poor, helpless creature to establish support for her view that the Monster is not innately motivated by revenge.

Despite Frankenstein’s and the Monster’s initial motivations being dissimilar, duality in terms of revenge still exists. Upon being abhorred by the De Lacey’s, the Monster feels ‘the spirit of revenge enkindled in [his] heart’. Here, Shelley alludes to the belief in the supernatural that was prevalent during her era to highlight the malice the Monster feels towards both Frankenstein and society for imbuing a sense of dejection in him. His revenge is only heightened when he is shot by mankind after having saved a human being from destruction. Having a ‘rise for revenge’, ‘a deep and deadly revenge’, he vows to seek respite for the ‘injustice and ingratitude of their infliction’. The use of alliterative terms in these three clauses is a deliberate attempt by Shelley to underscore the unjust nature of humanity while conveying her view that if society had not exhibited such disgust towards the Monster, the Monster’s situation may have been averted altogether. This gothic imagery is also prevalent in the case of Frankenstein who calls on the ‘spirits of the dead’ and the ‘wandering ministers of vengeance.’ By employing this allusion to Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Shelley criticises Frankenstein for possessing such deep-rooted feelings of vengeance similar to those of Lady Macbeth, who committed unruly actions to seize the throne. Consequently, through the portrayal of the two souls at the denouement of the novel, it is evident that they both desire to seek revenge.

Mary Shelley uses her narrative Frankenstein to examine the complexity of revenge. She explores the characters of Frankenstein and the Monster in doing so. For Frankenstein, his ardour to be a pioneer in scientific discovery and exploration forms a larger part of his motivation compared with revenge. By contrast, the Monster is betrayed by Frankenstein and the rest of mankind and as a result, is only then inspired to cause harm to society. Thus, it is seen in Mary Shelley’s celebrated text Frankenstein, revenge is not an innate desire; it is a product of other motivators such as ambition and rejection.