

‘The novel Frankenstein explores the consequences of being at odds with the natural world’. Discuss.

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 to manipulate the ‘immutable laws of nature’. This acts as a catalyst for a negative pathway of ambition and wreaks havoc on his life. Additionally, his obsession leads him to his failure to express parental love for his own creation, thus imbuing the Monster with deep-rooted unhappiness and loneliness. Yet ultimately, both Frankenstein and the Monster seek revenge on each other and mankind. Thus, through the characterisation of Frankenstein and the Monster, Shelley advocates her view that if one attempts to push the natural world beyond its boundaries, one will suffer a host of negative consequences.

Despite Frankenstein having ‘begun life with benevolent intentions’, his desire to create a fully functional human from cadavers becomes his sole motivation, and thus 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 the adversities that Frankenstein faces in the aftermath of creating the Monster. 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 lust to challenge the power of the natural world intensifies his suffering, she promotes her view that one should not presume that a mere has the jurisdiction to preside over life and death. Thus, Frankenstein’s passion for the exploration of the natural world subsequently leads to him suffering considerably.

Furthermore, Frankenstein’s decision to put his dreams above all else causes him to neglect his own creature, and instead abhor him, fuelling the spitefulness of the Monster. 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 places his desire of utmost importance, and subsequently fails to take appropriate care for his creation. This thus renders the Monster with ‘no Eve [to] soothe [his] sorrows [and] share [his] thoughts’. Shelley aims to convey her message that it is a ‘duty’ for creators to take responsibility for that which they create, while positing that one should maintain an appropriate moral pathway when following

their dreams. That the Monster is later prompted to have an 'insatiable thirst of vengeance on mankind' further indicates the negative ramifications of a lack of parental love. Therefore, Shelley elucidates that being at odds with nature not only causes the creator to suffer, but also creates a miserable life for the creation.

Despite Frankenstein's and the Monster experiencing different consequences for the most part, 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 implies that it is Frankenstein's decision to give his creation such 'wretched' features that renders the Monster susceptible to rejection and disowning by humanity. His revenge is only heightened when he is shot by mankind after having saved a human being from destruction. Having a 'r[ise] 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 accentuate the negativity the Monster feels, however presenting her opinion that if Frankenstein had not created him, this whole 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, it is evident that their spitefulness is a product of Frankenstein's initial desire to defy the laws of nature.

Mary Shelley uses her narrative Frankenstein to examine the complexities of being at odds with nature. She explores the characters of Frankenstein and the Monster in doing so. For Frankenstein, his relentless passion and ego attributes to his inability to love his creature and moreover, self-initiates his downfall. By contrast, the Monster's unhappiness and inspiration to cause harm in society is seen as a consequence of Frankenstein's scientific pursuits. Thus, it is seen in Mary Shelley's celebrated text Frankenstein, one will experience a great deal of adversity if they wish to tamper with nature.