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Frankenstein: From a Psycho-Political Perspective

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The immediate incitement to pursue the research embodied in this paper came from reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in a new light under the auspicious patronage of Professor Renate Miller, who taught us the newly inducted course of Victorian Science Fiction last Spring Semester. The moment I looked at it from a socio-political lens, I felt drawn into the implications underneath the simple-looking story of *Frankenstein* that I sat out to explore.

Many hearty thanks to Professor Miller who agreed to become my mentor and, despite her extremely busy schedule, took time off to contemplate my ideas, suggested additional readings and made herself available every time I needed her expert advice.

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Arif Kamal Babar

Abstract

Frankenstein is presented here as having the double frame-structure which functions on the conscious and unconscious levels of Mary Shelley. As the real story of Frankenstein has been told in frame narrative so are the implications of it. On the rational side, Shelley proved herself to be the dutiful daughter of her parents, William Godwin and Wollstonecraft, by imbibing their reactionary spirit but with some modifications. Considering it in the light of socio-political themes and ideas of her age, the political structure of the novel comes wide open.

In the next frame, the emotional desperation and frustration Shelley felt from the beginning of her life: when her mother died soon after giving birth to her; when the nurse she loved left to make her own life; the step-mother who kept a very indifferent attitude towards her, and finally the lack of warmth and oblivious attitude of her husband, Percy Shelly, whom she adored and expected to have a loving relation with. All these incidents had had a profound effect on her and they seeped through from the unconscious region of her mind into the conscious writing of her novel. From the ambitious nature of Victor Frankenstein to the pleas of the creature for a word of sympathy and empathic attitude, all events follow the trajectory of Mary Shelley's own life.

In a nutshell, Frankenstein starts on the rational level and ,implicitly, seeps through to emotional part of Mary Shelley, and successfully vents all the desperation, frustration and anger which had been pent up in Shelley's mind and heart from the very outset of her life.

It could be rightly called a cautionary tale but not in the commonly-held belief of encroaching the domain of God, but as a warning against the ever-increasing socio-political injustices of 18th and 19th centuries.

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my nephews and nieces: Abdul Hadi Khan, Abdul Kamil Khan, Abdul Mueeze Khan, Ayan Khan Babar, Amina Khan and, the most pretty, Fatima Amjad Khan.

Their ever present faces in my mind helped me speed up my research to be able to give them my full time again.

Arif Kamal Babar

Introduction

The story of Frankenstein enjoys a unique status that has been criticized and fascinated by the generations of readers and writers. William Beckford, a pioneer of the Gothic novel in England, recoiled in disgust from the latest of his offspring, writing in the flyleaf of his copy: “This is, perhaps, the foulest toadstool that has sprung up from the reeking dunghill of the present times”¹; The Quarterly Review of 1818, along with the Edinburgh Magazine, drew attention to the novel’s affinities with Godwin’s and denounced it as a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity.²

Aside from the criticism, the three traditional meanings associated with the Frankenstein are:

The first approach makes it a cautionary tale against the transgression into realm of Almighty God; The second interpretation presents Frankenstein as a model of the mind representing the intimate good and bad struggle in the human personality; The second interpretation takes a more popular approach of technological foreshadowing of Frankenstein’s plot. It received a huge boost from the reporting of The New York Time Magazine that proclaimed a breakthrough in genetic engineering on March 5, 1972: “The Frankenstein myth becomes a reality; we have the awful knowledge to make the exact copies of Human Beings³”. Keeping this self-regarding perspective, the true significance of Frankenstein was seen to be foreshadowing of Robots, test-tube babies, and the heart-transplant surgery of Dr. Christian Barnard.

¹ In Frankenstein’s Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing.

² Ibid

³ William Gaylan, New York Times Magazine, March 5, 1972.

This paper will adopt a divergent view from the above-mentioned criticism and the traditional meanings, and will attempt to show how the story of Frankenstein echoed the socio-political issues of the 18th and 19th centuries that lent it universality in the English Literature. It will further go deep into the underlying meaning of Frankenstein with its Psychological connotations that mirrored the personal ambitions, frustrations and desperations of Mary Shelley. It will not stick only around the character of the Creature to be the representative of Mary's desperation and frustration as mentioned in the article of Anthony Badalamenti⁴ that primarily emphasized on her married life and the resultant setbacks that emerged from the oblivious attitude of Percy Shelley. This paper will also be not content with the conclusion of Anca Vlasopolos⁵ that Frankenstein was used by Mary Shelley as a tool to criticize the ways and means of Aristocracy; nor it will stress upon its racial aspect that has been dwelled upon by H.L Malchow⁶.

This paper will reveal how the various facets of Frankenstein portray the common and continuous anxieties of its age? How it highlights the genuine causes for alarm in the increasingly uncontrollable tendencies of the modern world? How the characters of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature represent the class struggle; how these characters interchange and overlap to represent the helplessness of Proletariat in the rational frame of the story and how they represent different facets of Mary Shelley's own life in the unconscious frame of the story.

It will further elaborate how Mary Shelley's novel goes a step further and comes up with a pragmatic and peaceful solution to the political problems of her age and throws a spotlight on the social reforms essential for the uplifting of the marginalized class of the society that could result in the creation of a wholesome and balanced society.

⁴ Why did Mary Shelley write Frankenstein?

⁵ Frankenstein's Hidden Skeleton; The Psycho-Politics of Oppression

⁶ Frankenstein's Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain

Considering the present day society of England one can say with certainty that 20th century Socio-political Reforms had already been proposed in the encoded message of Frankenstein long before they were formally realized in the Britain Parliament. And it is the job of this paper to bring out those ideas, suggestions, practicality and the resultant hideous repercussions in case of a failure to bring them to fruition along with some personal tragic vibes of Mary Shelley that find a responsive chord even in the heart of a 21st century reader, and that aspect adds to its universality and adaptability.

“Labor does not only produce commodities; it produces itself and the laborer as a commodity and that to the extent to which it produces commodities in general.”

(Karl Marx)

(It is an encrypted message of Karl Marx about the class system, discrimination and alienation that has come about in the wake of industrialization. What it reveals is the undeniable truth of labor world: it produces a labor with its labor, and the moment that product is produced it grows independent of its maker and starts working against him by helping the capitalist grow his assets and enlist more labors)

Taken as a whole in the political light, Frankenstein can be stripped of all its Gothic fiction trappings and be understood to illustrate the relation between the worker and his product on one hand, and between the worker and Rentier capitalist (one who owns the means of production) on the other.

Placing Victor in the role of a worker and imbuing his creature with the spirit of an object made with the efforts of a worker and applying to it Karl Marx's *“Theory of Alienation”*, the political theme of the novel breaks open.

The Theory of Alienation, that describes the separation of things that naturally belong together, and the placement of antagonism between things that are properly in harmony.

The theoretical basis of alienation within the Capitalist mode of production is that the worker invariably loses the ability to determine his or her life and destiny when he is deprived of the right to conceive himself as the director of his actions; to determine the character of his actions;

to define his relations with other people; and to own things and use the value of goods and services produced with his labor. Although the worker is an autonomous, self-realized human being; as an economic entity, he or she is directed to goals and diverted to activities that are directed by Bourgeoisie, who owns the means of production in order to extract from the worker the massive amount of surplus value in the course of business competition among industrialists.

The paradoxical element of the Frankenstein is the fact that the Creature produced by Victor is much larger and apparently far more powerful than him, yet it is incapable of producing anything without him. It clearly shows the inescapable and inextricable bonds between worker and the capitalist, and the worker and his product as all three elements are directly involved in the process of production.

The meaning becomes clearer when we, readers, approach the story from the perspective of activities involved in production rather the process of creation.

Victor, the protagonist of the story, is propelled by a burning desire to unearth the 'Principal of Life' that will rid the world from the fatal diseases that are afflicting the humanity and cutting short their life span.

He puts his heart and soul in his project. He stays away from his family and friends; locks himself in his room and laboratory, and spends endless hours in his activity without noticing the days in and out and changing of seasons. He is so much engrossed in his project that he even does not reply to the letters he receives from his family member (Elizabeth); nor does he plan to visit them in the near future while being busy with his project. It is clear from these facts from Victor's life that his project, with which he was bound heart and soul, has taken over his life so completely that he has put his survival on the line for it. He does not care about his emotional life

anymore and all his emotional relationships have been subsumed by his rational side that has, in itself, been taken over by irrationality of his project.

This situation comes very close to what Karl Marx directly pointed to in *Communist Manifesto* where he dwelt at length upon the conditions and working hours of labor community:

“Conditions were often poor and a very distinct line was drawn between rich and poor, factory owner and factory laborer. Industry workers, increasingly tied to the pace of machinery, found it more and more difficult to control their work processes; they had to work ten or twelve (or more) hours nearly every day on schedules fixed by factory owners.” (1)

On another occasion their (working class) condition has been aptly depicted by Fredrick Engles in his famous book *The Condition of the Working class in England*:

“The oppressed industrial working classes, or proletariat, existed merely as a piece of capital for the use of which the manufacturer pays interest under the name of wages. They worked grueling hours, endured beatings from factory managers, were often ill as a result of working conditions, and were paid enough for only the most meager existence.” (CH 2)

This fact has also been corroborated by the Saddler Committee Report of 1832 (which aimed to investigate factory labor practices in England). The interviewee is asked how they (the workers) managed to remain alert and attentive at their machine. The worker responded, “They strapped us many times, when we were not quite ready to be doffing the frame when it was full.” (CH 5)

In response to another question about the workers` destroyed appetite, he (representative of Labor Class) responded, “it destroyed the appetite, and I became so feeble, that I could not cross

the floor unless I had a stick to go with; I was in great pain, and could find no ease in posture.”

(CH 5)

This excerpt from the *Saddler Committee* is just one example of the labor class which sinks deeper and deeper into the quagmire of poverty rather than benefiting from it and helping themselves and their families. This is what Karl Marx suggested in his Theory of Alienated Labor:

“Labor produces palaces but only hovels for the worker; it produces beauty but cripples the worker; it produces culture but only imbecility and cretinism for the worker.” (79-80)

Keeping these facts in the background and reading through *Frankenstein*, we can clearly identify Victor with the representative of Proletariat class: his indulgence in the natural sciences as against his attitude in the beginning of his life when he was more tilted towards Literature and Philosophy:

“A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind and bounding with joy, I communicated my *discovery* to my father. My father looked carelessly at the title page of my book and said, ‘Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is a sad trash.’”

Professor M. Krempe at the University of Ingolstadt, too, downplayed the works of ancient philosophers when Victor confesses to reading the ancient philosophy. Professor Krempe replies, “Every minute, every instant that you have wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost. You have burdened your memory with exploded systems, and useless names.”

Here Victor’s father and Professor play the role of Capitalists who manipulate their workers and play down their innate interests and talents to serve their own ends and purposes. Once started on

the way to production we gradually see the alienating effects on Victor as he moves away not only from friends and family at first but also from himself in the end. This is what Karl Marx describes in the following words:

“The process of production alienates the worker from his own body, his intellectual being and his human essence.” (83)

The meticulous details Shelley uses to convey the state of mind of Victor when he is making the creature, his isolated apartment, his inability to contact his family or even notice the changing of season, can be interpreted to represent what Marx describes as the two most immediate consequences of his labor, alienation from one's nature and alienation from other men of one's own society.

The process of making the creation, then, can be read as the experience in which the worker does not confirm but denies himself; feels miserable instead of happy; displays no free physical and intellectual energy and, in the end, mortifies his body and ruins his mind.

From this perspective, the raw materials Victor uses for his creature, parts of the dismembered corpses, are symptomatic of the way the process of production breaks down what Karl Marx calls ‘the body of the natural world into a series of dead component parts to be used in manufacturing’. Besides the breakdown of natural order, the use of such parts by Victor makes the process of production very disgusting and that to keep working towards his goal he must stop triggering such a sense of disgust by denying or repressing natural responses like sense of taste and smell. That repression separates Victor from his own essence, so that part of him is involved in the material process of production but the other part denies that involvement. In addition, Victor had to kill his emotional side of his character to be able to fully concentrate on the project

of his life. This is what happens with labor class of 18th century where they lived separate in a far off places to work long hours of shift to win bread and butter for their families.

The series of stages in the creation process—the alienating effects of the process that leads up to that movement-- thereby illustrate Marx`s assertion that “alienation shows itself not only in the result but also in the act of production, inside productive activity itself.” (80)

The final stage of production where creature becomes alive and his activities against Victor also makes much more sense when we approach it from the perspective of alienated labor as Marx. Although Victor had tried hard to make his creature as beautiful and perfect as possible by collecting the top grade elements but even then when the creature comes alive and looks Victor in the eye with his yellowish eyes and skinny frame, he (Victor) is filled with disgust and repulsion and runs out of the laboratory and tries to find sleep and peace in his room but he is unable to do so. So in a sense, the activities and hard work of Victor was working against him. He succeeded in animation part of his project but failed in imbuing him (creature) with the spirit he wished him to have. It clearly suggests that a worker may seem to be successful in earning a living for himself on the surface but internally he is failing himself and helps further the opposite of what he intends to achieve. This is what Karl Marx says:

“The worker puts his life into the object and this means that it no longer belongs to him but to the object.... So that the greater his product be, the less he is himself. The externalization of the worker in his product implies not only that his labor becomes an object, an exterior existence but also that it exists opposite him, that his life he has lent the object affronts him, hostile and alien.”
(79)

In Marx's terms, the creature represents the externalization of Victor's (any laborer) alienation and helps continue the plight of the individual worker by instead of raising him with the progress of industry, it sinks him (the Proletariat) deep and deep below the condition of his own class. The laborer lives only to increase the capital of the ruling class and in return the vicious cycle of capitalism continues and swallows up more and more individuals.

That is why the creature, once produced, works to break any attachment Victor might form to the outside world. We can clearly get to the rationale of the killings which the creature committed. All of the innocent victims, William, Ernest, Justine, Henry, Elizabeth and even the father of Victor, who died a natural death but indirectly his death owes itself to the creature, had one thing in common—they were intimately related to Victor and they did have the potential to break the bond that had become inextricable and irrevocable to the creature, as the creature himself said on a couple of occasions:

“It is true, we shall be cut off from the world, but on that account we shall be more attached to one another.”

“Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us.”

Hence, we can see how Victor has become a mouthpiece; clearly expressing the isolation from the rest of his species that, Marx asserts, is the consequence of production under Capitalism.

Even the dialogues of Victor with Robert Walton reveals his innate desires to revert back to his previous life of simple pleasures and beautifies; when his ambitious instincts had not taken over him completely; when his life was mainly confined to his family and friends; when he had not found that spark in himself which propelled him to sail in the uncharted water and,

inadvertently, unleashed a curse upon himself. Remembering his past life Victor addressed Robert Walton in the following terms:

“I feel exquisite pleasures in dwelling on the recollection of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind, and changed its bright vision of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self”.

“How dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge (of capital) and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than the one who aspires to be greater than his nature will allow”.

“If our impulse was confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free, but now we are moved by every word that blows and a chance word or scene that that word may convey to us”.

All these preceding quotes afford us a glimpse of the era in which Mary Shelley was writing the novel. The era was Industrial Revolution which registered its effects on every social institution man had been tied to; family and community ties broke up as people starting migrating to urban centers in search of better remuneration and standard of life; cottage and farming industry gave way to manufacturing industry and thousand years old traditional values were replaced by artificiality and ostentatiousness. Though, people were hopeful of getting a better life and future for themselves and their families but the end result of those migrations and endless working hours was increased mortality rate and higher inflation. For example, “In all over Europe wages rose up on an average of 5.5 percent in the second quarter of nineteenth century but the cost of living rose about 16 percent each decade, canceling out the wage increase.”⁷As another example,

⁷ Hunt, Lyn *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures*, Volume II, Bedford/St.

in large cities mortality from disease, as well as death rates for workers was higher than in the countryside. In cities like Manchester and Liverpool, mortality from smallpox, measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough was four times as high as in the surrounding countryside, and mortality from convulsions was ten times as high as in the countryside.⁸

To bring home some more socio-political conditions of the 18th and 19th century we can switch the roles of Victor and his creature and could cast them as entrepreneur and worker respectively. By switching the roles we can see the plight of the worker in a different color but this time it carries a tinge of warning. At this juncture it would also be helpful to term the character of Creature as monster and observe it in the contemporary literature of the era and before to illuminate the warning aspect of the story.

In modern usages, the term monster brings to our mind something frighteningly unnatural and of huge dimension but it had not been the case in earlier usages of the term. It was used and understood in a completely different context, i.e., the essence of which was not physiological but moral in its reference. Such a connotation persisted well into second half of nineteenth century, and it did not keep to the English Literature alone.

A few examples will suffice to make this point clear:

Michel Foucault has dwelled deep upon public performances put on by the inmates of lunatic asylums until the nineteenth century; a monster is something or someone to be shown. In a world created by reasonable God, the freak or lunatic must have a purpose: to reveal visibly the results of vice, folly, and unreason, as a warning to erring humanity.

⁸ Engels, Friedrich: The Condition of the Working Class in England.

In the era of Reformation we can find Martin Luther himself portraying and explaining the birth of freakish ‘monk-calf’ in the light of monster-interpretation by showing it as a warning from God about the corruption of Rome. Popular broadsheets of this period would carry woodcuts of deformed children or animals, together with extended analyses of the divine message contained in these prodigious births.

In the same vein we can see the character of Creature as a representative of the oppressed class and his dialogues and monologues as a warning against the contemporary status quo where the society was being divided into two hostile camps and the spirit of Karl Marx’s statement was ringing true—The specter of communism was glaring at European society; that would put an end to mutual hostilities and jealousies and a semblance of equality would come to fruition—could be observed here:

Various dialogues of the creature help peep into the miserable conditions of working class in the thick of the Industrial revolution and their meager demands for acceptance into the mainstream society:

“I (creature), the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked and trampled on.”

“Satan has his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and detested.”

“Once I false hoped to meet the being who, pardoning my outward form, could love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding.”

“The whole scene of my life appeared to me as a dream; I sometimes doubted if indeed it were all true, for it never presented itself to my mind with the force of reality.”

“I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true, but that is a poor medium for the communication of feelings, I desire the company of man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to me”.

“I was benevolent and good, misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous”.

All of these preceding dialogues and monologues display very clearly the torments and afflictions of the monster, and in turn what the helpless working class of the nineteenth century was undergoing. They not only were working in inhuman conditions but also they were being treated as an outcaste in their own societies and countries; they were only treated as a tool in the increasingly becoming mechanistic society; they lived and worked and finally died but did not receive any word of sympathy and affection from their capitalist owners.

This is the exact Rousseau’s stated position on the rampant inequality among men in the industrialized era in his *Social Contract theory* and argued that contrary to intuition and popular belief, savage men behaved with more empathy and kindness towards their fellow beings than even the reasoned philosophers of the modern era⁹. And since they did not hold any property whatsoever, they did not feel any grudge or prejudice against their fellow beings nor did they commit any act of violence or cruelty against others. In the words of Rousseau, “those people were subject to few passions and self-sufficient”. He (Rousseau) further argues that “Although natural or physical inequalities did exist—e.g. difference in health, age and physicality—moral

⁹ Rousseau considers feelings of empathy and pity as being natural to man. It does not need the construction of modern society to be instilled in a human being. It is a natural impulse found even in the animal world.

or 'political' inequality did not, defined by Rousseau as 'different privileges enjoyed by some at the expense of others, such as being richer, more honored, more powerful, or holding others in bondage'.

Same lack of empathy and callousness propounded by Rousseau is being witnessed here in the attitude of Victor and other members of his society towards monster. As evident from the statements of monster, all he wants is just his rightful place in the society but Victor is firmly determined not to afford him any comfort let alone his rightful in the world. He (creature) craves for love, sympathy, ownership, identity and companionship but all he gets in return are hatred, apathy, dejection and loneliness.

The commentary of monster on the human society is right on the mark and underscores the prevalent cruelty and injustices when he says, "I (creature) could not understand why men who knew all about good and evil could hate and kill each other"; on another occasion he (monster) says: "The most respected men have wealth and influence; he laments, I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property". This statement of monster carries more political implications than emotional ones. Karl Marx really endorsed it in his *Communist Manifesto* when he articulated the effects of Industrial Revolution: "A very distinct line has been drawn between rich and poor, factory owner and factory worker". What Marx hinted at in this statement is the same what monster complained about: the overwhelming influence of well-entrenched traditional caste system and the creeping in of a new class system in the society, which was emerging as a result of industrialization era, and the resultant and inevitable class struggle in its wake. Besides the complaints of monster, the caste and class vibes are very strong in the plot:

Walton who befriends Victor for qualities like 'being attractive and amiable', well-educated, and 'possessed of elegant language'(27); and his (Walton) rejection of a tender-hearted and virtuous but lower-class man as his companion are clearly indicators of aristocratic world, where there is much more emphasize on the outside appearance rather than on the inside beauty of a person.

Victor, on the other hand, exhibits the same kind of arrogance and priorities while making his friends: his friendship with Clerval, a merchant's son, is feasible only when Clerval and his father are poles apart in their views of learning and money, his interest in esoteric knowledge and his refusal to sully himself with his father's occupation. (3:44)

Even the Professors at University of Ingolstadt are measured by the yardsticks of aristocracy: Victor's admiration of Professor Waldman to his friend in the aristocratic language like: The Professor has 'dignity in his mien', 'affability and kindness', 'an aspect expressive of the greatest benevolence', and a 'voice the sweetest I had ever heard'. (3:47-48) and his repulsive behavior about Professor Krempe in the words like 'uncouth', 'squat man, with a gruff voice and a repulsive countenance' (3:45-46), and the resultant dampening of Victor's spirit are clearly characteristics of aristocratic behavior on Victor's part. Moreover, Waldman, who behaves and conducts himself like a gentleman, succeeds in putting Victor on the track of scientific pursuit solely by appealing to his aristocratic instincts when he claims, men of their class belong to science and soon science will be the ruling power of the world.

This attitude of class assortment on the basis of financial status, physical beauty and standard of manners dawns even on the Creature when he tries to learn sophisticated knowledge and language by studying the classical literature. But here he fails to get the order of preference right: in the aristocratic world physical beauty comes first and this is what the creature lacks. His

discussion with the elder and blind De Lacey, and his acceptance by him who offers him intercession and shelter, shows the extent to which he has acquired the upper-class modes of expression and thinking. There is also a strong irony about the intellectual level and deeply-entrenched prejudices of the society: all the characters in the novel are blinded and repulsed by the physical stature of the creature, but the real blind man, elder De Lacey, sees the true character of the creature and treats him with kindness.

Despite the learning of manners and milieu of aristocracy, the creature is not accepted by any one, not even by household of De Lacey. Even the attempts on Creature's life and the wishes to expel and outcaste him stem not from any of his actions, but from his physical deformity. He is hunted and stoned by villagers, snatched away from the old man in the middle of his earnest request and being stuck with a stick in a full-fledged effort to kill him; he is shot at and reviled by William in his own childlike terms and finally the most brutal is to be abandoned at birth and to be considered expendable by Victor in particular and the society in general.

To carry the prejudiced attitude further, the three characters, Victor, Walton and William, who see the creature in person, use the opprobrium 'wretch' for him which clearly indicate the inferior level in society for anyone who does not meet the established standards of society for acceptance. To make the situation worse, the creature himself takes on the opprobrium for himself while conversing with Victor:

"All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who is miserable beyond all living things." (17:145). Later he (creature) confesses to Walton: "It is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely and the helpless"; "I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to

be spurned at, and kicked and trampled on, even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice.” (24.223)

Even William, whom the Creature chanced upon and who, he thought, to be free of any prejudices and bias of upper-class gentry, turns out to be a perfect scion of his class:

“This little creature (William) was, seemingly, unprejudiced and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity.” (16.142)

But the reply of William shatters his (Creature) belief in the innocence of souls when he says:

“My papa is a syndic—he is M.Frankenstein. He will punish you. You dare not keep me.” (16:142)

Besides the aristocratic attitudes of Victor’s family, the judicial system also seems to be tinged with its colors. The weight of William’s murder falls on Justine, who belongs to a lower segment of society, on the basis of some flimsy circumstantial evidence. On the other hand Victor, himself, confesses to the murder of Clerval but he is exonerated from it on the basis of temporary insanity.

Moreover, Creature who just wants the gratifications of his most basic needs and a female partner, and pledges to depart for “The vast wilds of South America” where he wishes to live a simple life: “My companion will be the same nature as myself; and will be content with the same (vegetarian) fare—we shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on men, and will ripen our food.” (17:146). Even this simple of his is not fulfilled, though apparently for altruistic purposes, but inwardly, class sentiments are quite obvious which discourages any soft

corner for the downtrodden and oppressed for the simple reason that if encourage and helped, the they would overrun the world and destroy the established order.

What makes Mary Shelley different from Karl Marx is the solution she provides for these social ills which had found their way in her contemporary society, and secondly, the canvas of her audience which brought in its fold the whole society. What Karl Marx does is just addressing the members of Proletariat class and inciting them to get their rights by force. The last line of Karl Marx sounds more like a war cry than political statement: "Working Men of all Countries Unite". On the contrary, Mary Shelley threads the non-violent way and uses the psychological effects of the element of fear to have its bearing on the Bourgeoisie class and have them make adjustments in their behavior. Some of the following dialogues by monster clearly show off the other hideous side of the picture if no improvements are made in his condition:

"I (creature) will be with you (Victor) on your wedding night".

It shows the determination of the monster to follow his creator and deserter everywhere he goes and to pay him back in the same coin. Another example of his warning is:

"I (creature) have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the like of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge in other".

As horrible and frightening the threats of Monster sounded, so were the effects of them in the reality of the novel. Monster followed through his words and deprived Victor of everything he cherished and held dear. He lost not only his entire family and friends but even his own self to monster.

Though in novel Victor, as a representative of Bourgeoisie class, lost everything owing to the revenge of monster, as representative of Proletariat class, but in reality there was still time left to make amends and stem the tide of revolution that was knocking at the door. That was what Mary Shelley seemed to bring to bear on the Royalty and Aristocracy.

To look more closely at the novel under the political microscope, one can say with certainty that Mary Shelley was not in favor of complete overhaul of political system. What she wanted was only a few changes in the already established mechanism to give voice to the proletariat class and have their conditions improved.

Identifying monster with a new body politic and Victor as common folks, the political and social implications of experimenting with a completely new system of governance becomes very clear.

When we examine the development of Frankenstein myth in the reactionary climate of nineteenth century against the backdrop of French and American Revolutions, it reflects the dismemberment of the old body politic as incarnated in the personal authority of late feudal and absolutist rule. They signal the growing awareness, hastened in the heat of regicide and revolution, of destinies no longer continuous with nature but shaped by art, by policy—the prospect in politics and in broader cultural life of the artificial man.

In Britain the first decade of French Revolution witnessed the prodigious proliferation of writing: a boom in ‘Gothic novels led by Ann Radcliffe and a flurry of books and pamphlets provoked by Edmund Burke’s *Reflection on the Revolution in France (1790)*. The former is concerned with the norms of unlimited personal power and its tyrannical abuse: imprisonment, rape, persecution and the victim’s claustrophobia. The latter is concerned with the very new monster of that time, the French Revolution as Edmund Burke saw it with its novelty, rationality and irrationality in

the artificial order of revolutionary France, and with the terror of both the new and the old regimes. There was an intermediary category of writings spearheaded by both parents of Marry Shelly, Marry Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, which registered the social criticism of status quo but this body of writings was more tilted towards direct portrayal of political and social issues of the time as in the case of Edmund Burke. All these bodies of writing were more or less replies to each other criticism and allegations.

If Burke's extravagantly rhetorical attack on the French Revolutionaries is tied to his powerful emotional investment in a natural policy which antedates Hobbes's artificial man and leads him to identify the political status quo so insistently with the sanctities of familial feelings that his account becomes a sentimental film of the twentieth century. 'Ingratitude to benefactors is the first of revolutionary virtues', Burke later wrote, and went on to describe the revolutionaries as 'miscreant parricides'. Burke mobilizes, and intensifies, a Shakespearian sense of monstrosity as rebellion against the father:

"We should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces, and him in the kettle of magicians, in hopes that their poisonous weeds, and with incantations, they may regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father's life".

Godwin's group of writing, on the other hand, identified the source of monstrosity in the court luxuries and the dehumanizing callousness of a life of lascivious pleasures. Godwin's group went close to political theory of Rousseau who considered the modern State and Society to be at the root of all evils and vices. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau maintains:

“Frequent contact among multiple people and the emergence of new interpersonal relationships led to the ideas of ‘merit and beauty which produced feelings of preference’ and the notion of love led to jealousy and the love of well-being is the sole motive of all human actions”.

Rousseau further argues that public esteem with public gatherings and regard went to the most talented, thus impelling inequalities and feeling of vanity and contempt, shame and envy. Natural liberty was ‘irretrievably destroyed’, property and inequality became law, usurpation becomes right and humanity was subjected to ‘labor, servitude and misery’.

In Godwin’s group, Wollstonecraft’s own writings display a very harsh criticism of the court life and Papal authority and considers them the mother of all evils that inevitably leads to mass protest in the shape of revolution. In her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution (1794)*, she writes:

“Sanguinary tortures, insidious poisonings, and dark assassinations, have alternately exhibited a race of monsters in human shape, the contemplation of whose ferocity chills the blood, and darkens every enlivening expectations of humanity: but we ought to observe, to reanimate the hopes of benevolence, that the perpetrations those horrid deeds has arisen from a despotism in the government, which reason is teaching us to remedy.” (HMT, 515)

On another occasion, she writes:

“But, by the habitual slothfulness of rusty intellects, or the depravity of the heart, lulled into hardness on the lascivious couch of pleasures, those heavenly beams are obscured, and man appears either as hideous monster, a devouring beast; or a spiritless reptile, without dignity or humanity.” (HMT, 513)

She, Wollstonecraft, does not even spare the priests of her time and makes them responsible for instilling a completely wrong philosophy of life. She adds:

“We must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from the wild traditions of original sin: the eating of the apple, the theft of Prometheus, the opening of Pandora’s box, and the other fables, too tedious to enumerate, on which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition, to persuade us, that we are naturally inclined to evil.” (HMC, 17)

It was from the area marked out by this overlapping of literary and political discourses that Frankenstein myth was born, as the product of the controversy generated in Britain by the French Revolution though it clearly refrains from adopting revolutionary ways and means to effect change in the status quo as against the popular political theories of the time.

When we examine the development of the Frankenstein myth, it reflects the dismemberment of the old body politic as incarnated in the personal authority of late feudal and absolutist rule. They signal the growing awareness hastened in the heat of regicide and revolution, of destinies no longer continuous with nature but shaped by art, by policy—the prospect in politics and in broader cultural life of the modern man, also called ‘artificial man’. The very setting, University of Ingolstadt, where Victor Frankenstein works on his project was known for political activism and reactionary politics in the 19th century. The deliberate choice of Ingolstadt by Shelley clearly signifies her association and interest with the political events of her time.

Even the name of Victor’s spouse, Elizabeth Lavenza, suggests the anger she felt at personal and political level. Elizabeth’s last name is a cognate of anger and revenge both in England and Italy. It clearly dawns upon the reader that Mary Shelley wished for a stable and secure life not only for her personal being but also for the common folks of her country. To carry the message more

strongly and criticize the incumbent aristocracy of her time, she has Victor marry a girl who is a spiritual sister and lives from him from the very beginning of his life. This is a direct critique of the tradition of inbreeding prevalent in the aristocracy of her time. His (Victor) hesitant behavior and speeches on his wedding night bear a loaded sensation of fear for having a sexual relation with his bride that clearly signify the helplessness of partners in aristocracy and the immorality of their acts. It also demonstrates Shelley's tremendous amount of talent and expertise in making an unspeakable and unmentionable subject of her time virtually transparent.

Besides, Mary Shelley has successfully incorporated the medieval theory¹⁰ by identifying the monster with the new body politic and making its appearance so hideous that even the creator, Victor, himself recoiled in horror:

“As soon as the monster comes to life, He (Victor) is filled with intense revulsion. He explains, “The beauty of the dream¹¹ vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.”

Furthermore, Victor Frankenstein himself repents and feels guilty for his actions when he sees the destructive work of the Creature he created with so much passion and hard work:

“I was seized by remorse and sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe.”

Later in the novel Victor Frankenstein's sadness is mingled with a perpetual fear that a new tragedy will befall his family¹². Victor, himself, feels miserable when he says:

¹⁰ According to Medieval theory, “when political discord and rebellion appear, the ‘body politic is said to be not just diseased, but misshapen, abortive and monstrous. Once the State is threatened to the point when it can no longer be identified with ‘the King’s body’—that is, with an integral and sacred whole—then the humanly recognizable form of body politic is lost, dispersed into a chaos of dismembered and contending organs”.

¹¹ Dream here clearly implies a new political system with no traces of the status quo.

¹² The canvass of family, here, can be elaborated to imply the whole humanity.

“I had been the author of unalterable evils, and I live in daily fear, lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new wickedness.”

By making monster as hideous as words can allow and showing Victor as remorseful over his creation as humanly possible, Mary Shelley clearly conveys the idea of a ‘new body politic’ as impracticable and undesirable as possible. Furthermore, the creation of monster from ill-assorted parts already in existence clearly shows that the so-called new body politic is a myth. In addition, the complete opposite result of Victor’s experimentation points at the evolutionary nature of politics, not revolutionary.

Besides, by painting the monster in less lurid colors in the context of his committed crimes and pinning the onus of culpability on Victor Frankenstein and his irresponsible behavior Mary Shelley is clearly endorsing the political philosophy of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, with regard to French Revolution. As Wollstonecraft maintains in her HMV (An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution):

“The elements of the Parisian crowd deserve to be regarded as monstrous, but these are, in the first place, a ‘set of monsters, distinct from the people, and moreover their bloody actions are engendered by despotism, as retaliation. The actions of the people are compared with those of a blind elephant lashing out indiscriminately under provocation.” (HMV447). In these circumstances ‘the retaliation of slaves¹³ is always terrible’. (HMV 520)

Mary Shelley described the same political philosophy in a more literary fashion, but putting the Frankenstein in the genre of Gothic science fiction she diluted the political message to be more interesting and stimulating to the common man. On the other hand, keeping Frankenstein out of

¹³ Common Folks

the political genre allowed Mary Shelley to convey the political message in a more vivid and visual way. The sensationalism and feelings of awe and fear which the Frankenstein creates in its reader could never have found a place in a true political pamphlet or treatise. In addition, the gravitational force which Mary Shelly has created around her story that keeps the reader focused is far more than any piece of political writing can enjoy.

Aside from it, Mary Shelley has taken a leap in the political context of her writing that placed her far ahead of all the preceding and contemporary political writers and social scientist, including her parents, who either supported the aristocracy and monarchy or criticized the same for their wayward and luxurious life style. None of these writers provided a plausible political solution: as matter of fact, no aristocrat would be ever ready to forgo his all perks and privileges and adopt a life of a mystic overnight. Equally, it was totally immature on the part of writers to demand total overhauling of the political system and bringing in a completely new system in the wake of French Revolutions and its resultant violence and vices.

By making the monster's position identifiable with the conditions of the common man and making him speak in the first person, Mary Shelley has forcefully and emotionally narrated the conditions which could lead to an impending political and social disaster; and making the monster demand a few basic human needs in order for him to stop threading the violent way clearly carries the political message to avert the disaster by provision of just a few fundamental facilities and by bringing the neglected common people into the mainstream society.

She, Mary Shelley, seems to be suggesting a modern parliamentary system within the already established political system. As it can be firmly argued that she never articulated any demand for the destruction of the age old British Monarchy institution—the demand which was gaining great

currency at her time. It displays her political acumen, though never really explored in her lifetime, and maturity that she only advocated for some basic human needs to be incorporated and inculcated in the incumbent political system of her time so that the tide of continental revolutions could be averted and British, as a society and nation, continues to march up the technological and economic advancement to stay on as powerful political entity for the whole world to follow.

Going by the current political scenario in the British and the major changes that were brought up in the twentieth century in the, then, prevalent status quo, it seems the British as a society listened to the demands and solutions propagated by Mary Shelley. The Reformation Bills that were passed by the British parliament in the nineteenth century and numerous other laws that were adopted by the succeeding governments to bring about healthy and wholesome changes in the lives of common folks speak volumes of the genius of Mary Shelley, and she truly deserves to be given the credit for all these sociopolitical reforms, whether they are Reform Bills of 19th century or the right of vote for women, which have been in practice at present in British and in all other civilized nations.

Moving away from the rational frame of the story that is associated with turbulent politics of 18th and 19th century and tracing the trajectory of the novel to unconscious icy region of Shelley's mind by getting to the second-framed structure of the novel, and analyzing it from a psychological and personal perspective of Mary Shelley, the reader can get to know why there has been a feeling of unconventionality, desperation, anger and solitude in the novel. Starting with Walton's disobedience of his father's injunction against going to sea; Victor Frankenstein's disregard of filial obligation (including his six-year self-exile) and Frankenstein's larger hubris in usurping godly power to create life; the Creature himself disregards the omnipotence of his

maker in his insistence on a companion of his own kind; in the murders of Frankenstein's brother, friend and fiancée; and finally in his assumption of power over his creator in the hunt and chase that forms one of the several book narratives, find their responsive chords in the own personal life of Mary Shelley .

Mary Shelley inherited the genes of unconventionality from both of her parents, William Godwin and Wollstonecraft, who exemplified the era of radical thought in Britain. Both Godwin and Wollstonecraft actively advocated fundamental change in socio-political authority, and Mary Shelley often reread their works. She went a step further than her parents and personified some of her own ideas and thoughts in her own personal acts:

She (Mary Shelley) intended to pursue a writing career, which was a completely male domain and profession in her time, from a very early age. She published her first work¹⁴ at eleven and her second body of work¹⁵ at twenty clearly signifies her tendencies towards the incumbent status quo. In addition, her elopement with the married Shelley in defiance of society and –more importantly—her father; Godwin refused to see the couple until their marriage two years later and, lastly, her arrangement of a passport in 1827 for a female friend so that she could pass as a man, all showcase her thinking and irksome attitude with her societal values and egocentrism.

Besides her (Shelley) obvious behavioral non-conformity with the established rules of the society, the novel also takes the reader on the psychological and emotional journey of Mary Shelley's own life which entailed much pain and afflictions. Frankenstein has engulfed the themes of sympathy and rejection as much as it has revolved around the themes of creation, destruction and status quo. Mary Shelley's journal and letters suggest that although she was

¹⁴ Monsieur Nongtongpaw

¹⁵ History of a Six Weeks` Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland and Frankenstein.

feeling very guilty and sad about the fact that she hurt and wounded the feelings of her father and other members of her immediate family. To carry this point further, we can quote a section of the letter she wrote to Maria Gisborne on Nov 22, 1822:

“Perhaps it would be better not to write at all; but the weakness of human nature is to seek for sympathy.” (Letter 1: 291).

Thus, Frankenstein carries, as underhand theme, Mary Shelley’s own plea for sympathy and acceptance as much as it is about the other needs of any human being and the human society.

Tracing Mary Shelley’s life one can hardly miss out the dejection, indifference and frustration that held sway on her life from the very beginning. Her mother died soon after giving birth to her which is usually interpreted as being neglected by children finding themselves in the same situation. It is not far-fetched to believe that in the Victor’s desertion of his creation bears resemblance to her own life which started in the same fashion. Her father, Godwin, was an influential writer and political activist but he never tried to be a father who exudes love, protection, security and sympathy. He never tried to fill the gap left wide open by the death of her mother, and finally his estrangement at the union of Mary Shelley with Percy Shelley was something that she could hardly cope with. In addition, Shelley’s relation with her step-mother, Mary Clairmont, was far from any sign of harmony. She faced indifference, inconsideration and carelessness in the treatment meted out to her by her step-mother. As a final nail in her coffin, the relationship with Percy, whom she loved and adored, was the most tragic of all. She eloped with him to be in a secure and loving relationship which she wished for from the beginning of her life but it turned out be far less from that. At times, her husband behaved very lovingly but his attitude and behavior took eccentric jolts like a pendulum in a clock. His interest

in her step-sister, his close-relation with his first wife while being with her and his obviousness to her feelings, when she needed his company and support, struck very deep in her. To carry this point more comprehensively, we can quote an event from her life:

Mary gave birth to a daughter on Feb 22, 1815 but the delivery was about two months premature and the child soon died on March 6. Percy was initially very disappointed and dejected at the birth of a female child and, later on, he did not even care for the condition of Mary when her infant child died nor did he extend any support to her during her acute mourning and bereavement.

Percy did love Mary but his above-mentioned attitude shows his oblivious and self-absorbed nature. There seems to be much emotional abuse, neglect and carelessness in the way he loved her. His wayward life style and way of loving exerted its ill-influence over the very core of their relations and made a miscreant of it.

On March 19, 1815 shortly after the death of her first child Shelly records in her journal,

“Dreams that my little baby came to life again--that it had only been cold and that we rubbed it before the fire and it lived”. (Journal 1:70)

In one of the letters Mary Shelley addresses to Leigh Hunt on March 5, 1817:

“I had a dream tonight of the dead being alive which has affected my spirits.”

Mary Shelley's inescapable pain found an opportunity to express themselves in a creative and artistic fashion when she went on a visit to Geneva with Percy and Byron where their presence turned out to be a blessing in disguise and provided the much-needed stimuli and provocation for a kind of story that proved to be a classic in the English Literature and an enduring success.

The dream she writes about in her journal just before she sat out to pen down her novel, and its resultant connectivity with the plot of the novel is too strong to be ignored:

“The pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw this hideous phantom of a man stretched out, and then on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion.” (10-11)

This resemblance between the two is not accidental or coincidental; instead it shows her preoccupation with a state of mind that found expression in the novel she sat down to write in the most depressed period of her life.

The same train of thought finds further expression in the novel when Walton initially discovers Victor Frankenstein exhausted and nearly frozen. Frankenstein faints but Walton explains:

“We restored him to animation by rubbing him with brandy and forcing him to swallow small quantity. As soon as she showed signs of life we wrapped him up in blankets and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen stove. By slow degrees he recovered!”

In view of the above, it is quite clear that life and death theme prevalent in the novel did not come from any outside source but in fact it strikes a very deep chord in Mary Shelley’s life.

Aside from the resurrection theme, the ambitious nature of Victor Frankenstein in the novel also bears a great deal of resemblance to the expectations associated with Mary Shelley from the very beginning. Owing to being the daughter of Wollstonecraft and William Godwin she was considered to be nothing less than exceptionally talented.

In 1798, Sir Henry Taylor’s mother wrote to her husband, who had travelled to London solely for the purpose of meeting up with the author of *Political Justice*, in this fashion:

“So you really have seen Godwin and had little Mary in your arms; the only offspring of a union that will certainly be matchless in the present generation.”

Even her husband Percy Shelley was very concerned about her literary status and always egged her on to prove her worth. She relates in her introduction of 1816:

“My husband was from the first very anxious that I prove myself worthy of my parentage..... he was forever inciting me to obtain literary reputation, which even on my own part I cared for....”

(VIII)

Later in her life she remembered the words of her father in her Second Journal:

“I was nursed and fed with a love of glory. To be something great and good was the precept given me by my father.” (Oct 21, 1838)

Besides the burning passionate nature of Victor, his second period of life comprising remorse and sense of guilt in the wake of his actions also mirrors the depression Mary Shelley felt for causing harm to others inadvertently:

Shelley’s half-sister, Fanny Imlay, who committed suicide while Shelley was busy writing the novel; and Harriet, Percy Shelley’s first wife, who committed suicide after she married him. she had had warning of her lonely half-sister’s depression, and after her death she was, Percy Shelley recorded, filled with remorse and self-accusation for not having been more attentive. In the same vein, although Shelley might have wished Harriet’s death to have a more comfortable and undisturbed married life but, clearly, she harbored intense feelings of guilt as evident from her feelings articulated in her Journal of Feb 12, 1839:

“Poor Harriet to whose sad fate I attribute so many of my heavy sorrows as the atonement claimed by fate for her death.” (Journal 2:560)

It further bears evidence that Mary Shelley grew up quite conscious of her actions and their resultant repercussions for the people who were affected by them. It further shows the mental maturity of her mind.

In addition, Victor Frankenstein’s frequent statements in the novel run concurrent to the situation Shelly felt herself to be in. A couple of examples will further suffice here to establish the parallel between Victor and Shelly:

Shelley writes in her novel’s introduction: “My dreams were all my own; I accounted for to nobody; they were my refuge when annoyed—my dearest pleasure when free”. These dreams often took on the form of deep depression and plunged her into an isolated corner of introspective brooding. The same line of thought we can see in Victor Frankenstein’s declaration in the novel:

“I shunned the face of man; all sound of joy or complacency was torture to me; solitude was my only consolation—deep, dark, deathlike solitude.”

On another occasion Frankenstein’s musings and brooding reflects Shelley’s personal feelings of despondency. As he narrates his feelings: “Often.... I was tempted to plunge into the silent lake that the waters might close over me and my calamities forever.”

The same pessimistic mood was expressed by Shelley in her letter to Maria Gisborne:

“I am not given to tears: & though my most miserable fate has often turned my eyes to fountain—yet oftener I suffer agonies un-assuaged by tears..... When to destroy everything around me & to run in to that vast grave (the sea) until fatigued I sunk to rest would be a pleasure to me. (Letter 1:260-61)

Even her quotations of Milton’s Paradise Lost just under the title on the opening page of her novel suggests the state of mind she was in during the composition of the novel. Here she quotes:

“Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay?

To mould me man? Did I solicit thee?

From darkness to promote me”

(Paradise Lost)

Throughout the composition of the novel she was living with Percy, carrying a son named after her father and, at the same time, she was either pregnant or soon to be. Besides, the high regard Percy held her father in must have made her miss the company of her father terribly.

In view of the above facts and despite carrying common streaks with Victor, Shelley is no stranger to the character of monster as well. The dejection, rejection and loneliness that the monster experienced at the hands of those around him relate very well the story of Mary Shelly herself.

The near coincidence of Wollstonecraft’s death with the birth of Mary Shelley must have had tremendous psychological effects on her from the very beginning of her life. As often the case, children in such circumstance interpret the death of their mother as ‘desertion’. This explains why we see monster experiencing the same feelings of alienations and desertion. What monster wanted was only an identity and ownership from Victor but he never received it from the one

who brought him into being: same situation engulfed Mary Shelley, who must have wanted to be flanked and owned by her biological mother, but like monster she never received it.

Secondly, the treatment of her step-mother, Mary Jane Clairmont, with her who preferred her own children and sent her own daughter to school and kept Shelley at home must have had very ill-effects on the psyche of growing Shelley. As she writes in her memoir:

“As a child, I scribbled; and my favorite pastime, during the hours given me for recreation, was to ‘write stories’”.

Besides, the character of William Godwin also did not fit into the role of a proper and caring father. He may be, justly, called a ‘remote parent’. He never tried to fill in the void created by her biological mother’s death, and never stepped in to mend the discrimination she felt at the hands of her step-mother. Furthermore, Godwin’s outrage at her elopement Shelly disillusioned her when she observed a discrepancy between his actions and ideals. She felt profoundly injured by a rejection coming from the one person whose approval she most desired. She remarks in one of her letters:

“Until I knew Shelley I may justly say that he (Godwin) was my God—and I remember many childish instances of the excess of attachment I bore for him.” (Letter I: 296)

Later once she wrote to Shelley, “I know not whether it is early habit or affection but the idea of his (Godwin’s) silent quiet disapprobation makes me weep as it did in the days of my childhood.” (Letters 1:57)

She further claimed, in her Journals, having read or reread all the major works of both parents during 1814 and 1815 seems to indicate a desire to be 'with' her parents during some meaningful way during those initial years with Shelley. (Journals 1:85-97)

Though she didn't receive what she wished for emotionally from her father but, nonetheless, she incorporated some of his philosophical tenets like the 'doctrine of Perfectibility' where he says that, "Man is perfectible. By perfectible, it is not meant that he is capable of being brought to perfection. But the word seems sufficiently adapted to express the faculty of being continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement; and in this sense it is here to be understood. The term perfectible, thus explained, not only does not imply the capacity of being brought to perfection, but stands in excess opposition to it. If we could arrive at perfection, there would be an end to our improvement." (EPJ, 144-5)

The idea of absolute human perfection is, Godwin insists, 'pregnant with absurdity and contradiction'. (EPJ, 145)

We can see the personification of Godwin's same philosophy in the character of Victor Frankenstein who aspired for perfection and ended with a sea of troubles engulfing him from all quarters.

Godwin's another warnings against the detachment of science from social ties also finds its due place in the novel. He asserts: "Science and abstraction will soon become cold unless they derive new attractions from the ideas of society." (EPJ, 300); later he argues that little good can be done by solitaries.

Again we see the same features in the character of Victor, who shut himself out of all the elements of society for the purpose of his scientific pursuit, but he could not achieve anything worthwhile and no good was derived out of his keeping solitary and detached from society.

To carry further the philosophies of her parents, Mary also mingled the societal philosophy of her mother, Wollstonecraft, in her novel by using the technique of *Reverse Psychology*.

Employing only three female characters in the novel and giving them no major role in the main plot stresses upon the passive and ineffectual role of women in her era.

The celebrated work of Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792)*, is a severe critical commentary on the role of women in that era. Mary Shelley is believed to have been reading this book before setting out to write the most accomplished novel of her life.

The characters of Caroline, Elizabeth and Justine reveal nothing substantial but only superficial qualities that have been associated with women by the society, not by the nature.

Caroline, Victor's mother, is paragon of virtue and generosity. She ensures to be at the service of Alphonse, Victor's father, and raises Victor and Justine with all the motherly love and concern. Elizabeth is Victor's childhood companion and his bride. She is presented as angelically beautiful both on the inside and outside. She tries to comfort Victor at every juncture and ensures her support for him whenever he needs it. Justine is another female character in the novel only to be introduced to offer her sacrifice for the murder of William, Victor's brother.

All these qualities seem very worthy humanistic qualities but lack every trace of intellectual and educational capacity. They clearly encapsulate the arguments of Wollstonecraft when she says:

“Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection and man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives.” (CH 19)

“The great misfortune is this, that they both acquire manners before morals and knowledge of life before they have from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural; satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority.” (CH 24)

All of the female characters in the novel rely on their emotions and submit blindly to whatever is assigned to them. For instance, Justice does not even possess the capacity to assert herself in the court of law and be able to absolve herself of the murder charge that she has been charged with. Instead, she takes it for granted and let others control of her life:

“Justine shook her head mournfully. ‘I do not fear to die; she says: ‘that pang is past. God raises my weakness and gives me courage to endure the worst. I leave a sad and bitter world; and if you remember me and think of me as of one unjustly condemned, I am resigned to the fact awaiting me. Learn from me, dear lady, to submit in patience to the will of heaven!’”

Later, on another occasion, she says:

“Alas! I regret that I am taken from you; and happy and beloved as I have been. Is it not hard to quit it all? But these are not thoughts befitting me; I will endeavor to resign myself cheerfully to death and will indulge a hope of meeting you in another world.”

“But soon I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt soon. These burning miseries will be extinct.”

Evidently, Justine’s all thoughts hinges on emotions and that could have been her reason not to defend herself properly in the court of law. All it is mentioned in the novel is that the poor girl confirmed the suspicion in great measure by ‘her extreme confusion of manners’.

Justice’s tacit approval of the sentence against her also illustrates Godwinian’s standpoint about the justice system:

“If there be any sight more humiliating than all others, it is that of a miserable victim acknowledging the justice of a sentence against which every enlightened spectator exclaims with horror.” (EPJ, 654)

This is also exactly what Wollstonecraft guards women of her era against when she says:

“All their (Women) thoughts on things calculated to excite emotion; and, feeling, when they should exercise reason, their conduct is unstable, and their opinions are wavering, not the wavering produced by deliberation or progressive views, but by contradictory emotions.”

Same is the case with Elizabeth who excels in domestic duties and carries filial emotions to the extreme but, unfortunately, she does not reveal any real intellectual capabilities to be able to steer Victor and her family, as a whole, out of the troubles.

What Shelley implies here is:

“Were women more rationally educated, could they take a more comprehensive view of things, they would be contented to love but once in their lives; and after marriage calmly let passion subside into friendship—into that tender intimacy, which is the best refuge from care; yet is built

on such pure, still affections, that idle jealousies would not be allowed to disturb the discharge of the sober duties of life, nor to engross the thoughts that ought to be otherwise employed.”

Though, Mary Shelley’s novel seems to be supporting ‘Rousseau’s doctrine of Education for Women’ which recommends education be relative to men, and that “ to please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable; these are the duties of women at all times and what they should be taught in their infancy.”

But, in fact, Shelley implies the opposite of it: it is hinting at the ‘Male Aristocracy’ that produces a false education that indoctrinates male superiority and stunts the physical, moral and intellectual abilities of women. Here she seems to be endorsing the standpoint of her mother, Wollstonecraft, who said: “The grand source of folly and vice has ever appeared to me to arise from narrowness of mind.”

It is quite clear from the plot of the novel that if female characters had been stronger intellectually, they could have fared well not only for themselves but also for their families. The emphasis on the passive qualities and role of female characters, and their futile final outcomes implies that it is necessary for women to avoid employment that only exercise sensibility, and that women who pursue intellectual activities have a greater purity of mind than those who are occupied with simple pleasures. Indirectly, it is an appeal to the society as a whole to let women prove their worth in different spheres of life; they should be allowed to achieve the same ‘strength of mind, perseverance and fortitude’ even they do not attain the same virtues in equal degree at least they will be the same in kind.

Besides, the issue of 'gendered education system' of eighteenth century does not escape the attention of Shelley. The lack of education of female characters and their resultant lack of any substantial role in the plot of the novel on one hand and the one-sided Victor's scientific education on the other receive particular attention. Victor's obsession with science and his resultant disregard of all familial relation; and the Monster's (Creature) interest in humanities and his resultant sensitivity and sensibility clearly show Shelley's approval of a well-rounded education system. The specific mention of 'Plutarch' and 'Paradise Lost' by the Creature and their wholesome influence on him speaks volumes of the importance of classic literature. In his own words the Creature says:

"Plutarch taught me high thoughts, he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages. Many things I read surpassed my understanding and experience. I had a very confused knowledge of kingdoms, wide extents of country, mighty rivers, and boundless seas. This book developed new and mightier scenes of action. I read of men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species. I felt the greatest ardor for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice."

The Creature's statement brings out the significance of Arts and Humanities in no uncertain terms. Science is, no doubt, the greatest tool to make headway in the technology and surpass the known boundaries of human existence, but to be a successful human being one needs to have in-depth knowledge of the world all around him, and to have the sensibility and sensitivity towards the needs of other fellow beings. The characters of Victor Frankenstein and the creature, their mutual inextricable connections bear testimony to this conclusion and through them the message spreads out to the whole humanity.

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, *Frankenstein* portrayed not only the personal emotional landscape and socio-political ideology of Mary Shelley but also it takes into account the prevalent social and political conditions of that era. Most students of Literature will agree that that it both comprises and imaginatively transcends autobiography, directly addressing the human conditions or, as Mary Shelley herself puts it, ‘to the mysterious fears of our nature’. By reading this single fictional story of a scientist and his creature in the socio-political light, a reader can easily construct the whole profile of the life of a common man and his surrounding conditions. Besides, the solution that it comes up with for the political turbulence of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is something which makes it a truly universal and timeless novel. Two historical instances will suffice to make the enduring political appeal of the novel very clear:

The first incident happened in 1824 during a debate session in the House of Lords where a Member of the Parliament spoke on the ‘Amelioration of the Condition of the Slave Population’. The MP clearly brought out the cautionary political status of the novel in the following words: “To turn the Negro loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passions, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance; the hero of which constructs a human form, with all the corporeal capabilities of man, and with the thews and sinews of a giant; but being unable to impart to the work of his hands a perception of right and wrong, he finds too late that he has created a more than mortal power of doing mischief and himself recoils from the monster which he has made.” Though the monster did have the perception of right and wrong but the MP downplayed it to have it suit his entrenched notions about slavery, but one thing emerges very clear that is the revolutionary turbulence bubbling up at the centre of *Frankenstein*.

The second instance relates to Racist regime in South Africa which banned the book in 1955 on the grounds of ‘indecent and obscenity’. A South African desiring to own it faced a fine of 1,000 pounds or up to five years in prison. What made Frankenstein so anathema to the Racist regime of South Africa is the subtext which underlies the main plot—the indictment of a class system that erects an aesthetics of exclusion to perpetuate its ascendancy.

Though keeping double-structure of a novel at the psychological and political level respectively is a very hard task for any writer but that could be reason why Frankenstein has been criticized for its loose plot-structure but, amazingly, it has afforded the coherence and has gelled together the different elements of the story. In addition, the same double-structure gave the same depth to the novel which we see in the submerged movement of Alpine glaciers whose presence dominates the novel’s imagery.

In the end one can further claim that if it had been released in the political genre, it would have been the precursor of *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Mar and, undoubtedly, it would have overshadowed many socio-political writings of her time.

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