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Lesson 4

Creating a Monster

Objectives

- To recognize the short- and long-term effects of Victor Frankenstein's response to his own creation
- To analyze the depression and anger felt by both Frankenstein and his monster
- To emphasize Mary Shelley's portrayal of nature as healer

Notes to the Teacher

The events in chapter 5 are the most pivotal in the novel. After the crescendo of highly-motivated study, Victor Frankenstein is ready for some decisive action. All the factors of the experiment come together in the "birth," the awakening of the creature. A problem arises which Frankenstein has never thought through: What if the awakened creature should be different from what the creator imagined? The scientist, unable to manage his horror at the appearance of the live creature, takes flight, thereby rejecting the new being. A pattern is established which will reappear in the novel. Victor suffers mental and physical illness; Henry Clerval supports him with care and friendship; Victor recovers.

Victor has failed to plan for his creature's integration into the world. Victor does not, in fact, aid this integration, but instead rejects his creation totally. Chapter 7 begins with a letter Victor receives from his father, a letter which announces the brutal murder of William. In chapter 8, Justine Moritz is falsely accused of the crime, forced into a confession, and executed. Victor suffers desperately as he knows that the true criminal, his brother's murderer, is his own creation. In these chapters, and in the two following chapters, Shelley emphasizes the mental states of both Frankenstein and the monster.

This lesson focuses on chapters 4–10, from Victor Frankenstein's immersion in college through his creation of the monster up to his reencounter with his own creation and agreement to listen to the monster's story. Students begin with a general overview, using discussion questions. They then focus on the nature of creator and creation and the relationship

between the two. Finally, they note the mental states of both Frankenstein and the monster and the way both relate to nature.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 9**, and have small groups answer the questions.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Victor is persuaded to study modern science. He wants to eliminate the curse of death.*
2. *Victor seems to become a total loner, obsessed and compelled by the single desire to create life. He neglects correspondence with his family at home. He is disconnected from other people.*
3. *Victor uses material from cemeteries, slaughterhouses, and dissecting rooms—pieces of bodies. The references are vague, allowing the reader's vivid imagination to take over. Victor preoccupied himself with the moment of change from life to death and resolves to create a being who will be a "new species," and thus to "renew life" and conquer death. Working on cadavers, he proceeds with his experiment and loses all sense of time and place.*
4. *Victor feels a total revulsion and runs away. He is especially horrified by his creation's eyes.*
5. *Victor's young brother, William, is murdered, and Victor feels sure his own creation is responsible. Victor feels responsible for loosing evil and danger on the world.*
6. *Justine Moritz was abused in her own home and was adopted into the Frankenstein family. She is executed as a murderess after being convicted on circumstantial evidence. Little William's locket was found in her pocket, and, although innocent, she is pressured by a priest into confessing guilt.*
7. *Henry joins Victor, providing companionship, helping restore him to health, and bringing some sense of normalcy.*

8. *Nature soothes and calms Victor, much in the Romantic tradition.*
 9. *Victor feels a parallel between his own plight and that of Coleridge's mariner. He, too, is plagued by a guilty action, and he does indeed feel the threat of the fiend he has created.*
 10. *Out on an expedition in the Alps, Victor meets the monster he created and is persuaded to listen to the creature's story.*
2. Write on the board or overhead projector the words *creator* and *creation*. Point out to students that nearly all cultures have myths that explain the creation of the world and humanity. Remind them of the story of Prometheus. Point out that the Judeo-Christian Bible also tells a story of creation. If possible, read aloud the first two books of Genesis. Then ask students how God responded to his creation. Lead them to see that the Bible repeatedly says that he saw the things he created as good.
 3. Point out the contrast in Victor Frankenstein's response to a creature that is totally dependent on him: he immediately recognizes his creation as ugly and repulsive. His response is total rejection. Ask students to brainstorm the effects of rejection (*anger, violence, depression, resentment, etc.*).
 4. Distribute **Handout 10**, and have small groups complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Numerous statements demonstrate Victor Frankenstein's painful state of mind. The following will serve as examples.*
 - *"Fear overcame me; I dared not advance, dreading a thousand nameless evils that made me tremble, although I was unable to define them." (chapter 7)*
 - *". . . [I]n all the misery I imagined and dreaded, I did not conceive the hundredth part of the anguish I was destined to endure." (chapter 7)*
 - *"The tortures of the accused did not equal mine; she was sustained by*

innocence, but the fangs of remorse tore my bosom and would not forgo their hold." (chapter 8)

- *"Anguish and despair had penetrated into the core of my heart; I bore a hell within me which nothing could extinguish." (chapter 8)*
2. *In the Romantic tradition, nature has the power to heal Frankenstein in a limited and temporary manner. Sample quotations include the following:*
 - *"My country, my beloved country! Who but a native can tell the delight I took in again beholding thy streams, thy mountains, and more than all, thy lovely lake!" (chapter 7)*
 - *"These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling, and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquillized it." (chapter 10)*
 - *"The sight of the awful and majestic in nature had indeed always the effect of solemnizing my mind and causing me to forget the passing cares of life." (chapter 10)*
 5. Ask students to discuss the alienation and bitterness that the monster feels as a result of isolation and rejection and to find passages in chapter 10 that demonstrate ways nature acts as a refuge or healer for him, too.

Suggested Responses:

- *"The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge."*
 - *"I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge."*
 - *"These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow beings."*
6. Point out that Victor Frankenstein attempts an act of creation, something we all do now and again, although not on the scale of his ambition. Distribute **Handout 11**, and review the directions. Set a date for

students to bring their creations to share with the class. After students present their work, conduct a discussion on how many “saw that it was good” and how many felt that their work was a failure and wanted to destroy it. Link students’ responses to the text.

Discussion Questions: Chapters 4–10

Directions: Use the following questions to summarize key events and insights into characters.

1. What field of study does Victor Frankenstein pursue at the university in Ingolstadt? For what aim?
2. What is wrong with Victor's lifestyle at the university?
3. What is the material out of which Victor makes his creature? How graphic are Mary Shelley's descriptions?
4. What is Victor's emotional and physical reaction to the sight of his creature? What specific aspect of the monster's appearance horrifies Victor?
5. What first death does Victor feel responsible for, and why?

Frankenstein's Mental State

Directions: Record passages from chapters 7–10 that provide insight into Frankenstein's state of mind. Then record passages that address how he experiences nature as a restorative power.

1. State of mind (fear, anguish, remorse, despair, guilt, etc.)

2. Power of nature

The Act of Creation

Directions: Review the content of chapters 5 and 6. Then create an original art work alone, with a partner, or with a small group. Choose one of the following projects, and jot down your ideas.

1. Short video or PowerPoint presentation with musical background and/or voice-over
2. Series of drawings representing emotions of joy and sorrow
3. Original poem titled by a phrase from chapter 5 or 6
4. Original sculpture that reflects some aspect of the novel
5. Other creative project in a medium of your choice

