

Frankenstein

Mary Shelley

Model questions and answer

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Narrative technique of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Frankenstein of Mary Shelley was written in flashback technique offering a story within a story format. The framework of the novel was presented through the narration of first narrator Robert Walton who during his adventure of exploration met the protagonist Victor Frankenstein. Victor narrated his story to Walton about his creation of the monster and its consequence. After this again Walton became the narrator of the novel who continued it up to the death of Victor who concluded the novel.

The narrative technique of Frankenstein is highly complex. It maintains the form of Chinese Box technique whereas there was a story inside a story. First the readers got four letters of Walton written to his sister Mrs. Seville. Here narration through epistolary technique is apparent. However, the epistolary technique was concluded soon and the readers entered in embedded narrative where Frankenstein told the story of his life to Walton. He also narrated the story that was told to him by his monster delineating his experiences in several situations. Then Victor again took the role of narrator till his death. After his Walton concluded the narration of the

fiction. Through the utilization of Chinese Box technique in the narration Shelley attempted to show that every story of the fiction was distinct. No story was begun from a particular narrator and every story was handed over to another before the ultimate end. However, interconnection of the stories is vividly apparent.

A valid question had been raised whether the changes in narrative voice would offer any impact upon the readers. It is also a valid question where every narrative voice was independent or not. Actually every narrator had distinct appeal and consequently the story of every narrator had new and distinct appeal, attraction for the readers. However, it is also slightly problematic to search differences among the narrative voices as the whole novel was narrated in frame narrative technique. In spite of having three narrators every narrator is to be considered as first person. However, the realism of presenting multi voices in narration is to be evaluated. It is interesting that the narration of the monster is a pivotal point of the novel. It suggested many layers of the plot obviously. Through this narration the monster became the essential part of the novel through which the impact of his narration is apparent upon two other narrators. His narration was the connecting link between the narration of Victor and Walton. The open ended conclusion of the novel is closely associated with the narrative technique. Basically there is no proper conclusion of the plot and the narration. Though through the death of Frankenstein, the novel is concluded but the plot is incomplete. The novelist didn't inform anything about the monster. There was no textual trace about this matter. Mary Shelley was basically intended to show not to tell too much in Frankenstein. The technique of narration is also photographic whereas the camera one by one shows the slides on different types of society, man, nature, social institutions. There is close connection of a slide with the next one that makes up the whole plot of the

novel. The narration may be called a successive vision that offers multi layer interpretation of a visual slide. It makes the novel more realistic.

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Presentation of women in *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley had peculiar viewpoints in delineating the women characters in *Frankenstein*. The condition of women was related with the socio-political, economic situation of the period. So the interpretation of gender roles and the presentation of women reveal the social position of the time. Frankenstein obviously had presented the patriarchal western society of nineteenth century that was overall intended to subjugate women along with domestic confinement. Whereas Victor and Walton was bust in invention and exploration the existence of women members of their families were confined within letters.

Basically the plot of *Frankenstein* is confined within the narrative voices of Victor, Walton and the monster. Active role of women in narration is not vividly apparent. In most of the cases the vagabond life became the masculine identity of male characters without any direct connection with women. In this regard Victor mentioned that the extreme modesty of Elizabeth in home helped him to indulge intensively in research. Lack of direct companionship from women helped the

male characters to satisfy their ambitions. In this regard, the desire of the monster is to be mentioned who wanted a female companion from his creator. However, the prayer was not granted by Victor, perhaps he destroyed the half-made female creation. This symbolically indicated the female foeticide by the patriarchal whims.

Justine is a passive female character of the novel. She is a notable victimized character of the novel who was caught between the masculine egos of Frankenstein and his creation, the monster. Justine was accused of killing the brother of Victor, William Frankenstein whereas the actual deed was committed by the monster as a sort of revenge against Victor. This plot shows the silent suffering of a helpless socially marginalized woman in the set-up of patriarchal society. Justine was sentenced to death due to false allegation of killing William. In spite of knowing the fact Victor remained silent otherwise his fault in scientific research would be revealed. Another important female character is Agatha who was very gentle, modest bearing high sensibility. The monster learned tender behaviours from her. However, the presentation of the character of Agatha is not extremely active. Safie of the same house is another female character of the novel from whom the monster learned something. The academic learning of the monster was started from Safie. The monster's desire of learning the scientific knowledge was germinated from this point. However, the existence of Safie was so much limited that she could not bring major change in the plot of the novel.

However, Shelley's presentation of the character of Elizabeth, wife of Victor Frankenstein is to be discussed broadly. Her presentation is more influential than any other female character of the novel. She was a modest, decent woman having an extreme tender heart. There was no objection from the part of Elizabeth whereas her would-be husband Victor didn't make any direct connection with her

being confined within scientific explorations. Even she was ready to sacrifice her dedication for the sake of exploration and experiment of Victor. Though Victor married her but she was killed by the monster created by him. Elizabeth became the victim of masculine ego of two male characters. In spite of knowing the threat of the monster, Victor didn't take any special precautions for the protection of his wife. However, the most passive character of the novel is Margaret, the sister of Walton. Without her, the novel is partially absurd because the plot is fulfilled with the letters sent to her by her brother Walton. The readers are not accounted with her directly and they didn't know her reactions after reading the letters. She is a distant character of the novel, probably having no other purpose except of wishing good fortune for her explorer brother.

Shelley from another point presented the subjugation of women. Throughout the novel for several times she presented the nature as mother. The personification of nature as woman is mentioned in the text as "He had partially unveiled the face of Nature, but her immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery (Shelley 41)." It is to be assumed that science was a tool of masculine ego and desire to reveal the mystery of nature in feminine form. In this regard Shelley critiqued the scientific exploration of her time with the reference of gender interpretation.

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Romantic elements in *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley presented several academic and literary points brilliantly in *Frankenstein* that made the text significant and relevant even in twenty first century. However, being a text of nineteenth century (1818) the impact of romantic literature is clearly apparent upon the novel. In characterization, selection of subject matter, delineation of plot *Frankenstein* had earned the prestigious position as a fiction of romantic literature.

The setting of the novel is highly romantic. Throughout the novel Mary Shelley presented natural elements in showing emotion, turmoil, pleasure and gratification. This kind of treatment of nature is also apparent in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* of Byron. Nature played important role when Victor met his created monster. In victor's description, several pine were scattered throughout the area, the silence of nature was being broken by the sound of waves. Even the sound and light of thundering were being reverberated from the mountain. Such setting of the plot offered romantic visualization of the author. Such setting has resemblance with the description of Lord Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*- Canto 3 that

“From peak to peak, the rattling crags among/ Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,/But every mountain now hath found a tongue.”

Nature played important role when the monster of Frankenstein was getting life. Shelley mentioned in the text that “It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils...It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes,... I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs (Shelley 58).” The horrible appearance of the monster got matched with the tumultuous nature of outside. Shelley presented nature as a mysterious entity here that was relevant with the mystery of giving life to the monster. Similarly when Victor was going to Geneva due to death of William, he faced a terrible tempest. Here the horrible tempest around Frankenstein reminded the reader the storm in *Prelude* of William Wordsworth.

The novel *Frankenstein* is associated with the conception of sublimity. The romantic poets and authors intend to get sublimity through personal experiences. Victor’s intention of giving life to his creature is the desire of feeling the experience of sublimity. Victor declared in the text that “No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world (Shelley 55).” William Blake in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* attempted to feel the same sublimity that he expressed through pictorial poetry.

Victor had the desire of exploration and breaking the bounds. He tried to offer something new that the world had not experienced earlier. Walton had the

similar desire of inventing new territories and mysteries of the world. Like his creator, the monster was also an explorer. The monster invented warmth, coldness, dryness, love, refusal, hatred, hope, pessimism from the world. It enables the readers to reinvent the feeling , emotions from the experience of the monster. The monster had romantic feeling in his description of the nature.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley offered several supernatural elements that are generally not to be interpreted logically. This is one of the most notable characteristic features of romantic literature. The appearance and activities of the monster added also such type of feeling. His physical capability, mobility is much better than any human being. Even offering life to a man made creature offers supernatural setting. Walton saw the creature suddenly in his way of lonely adventure. This situation can be compared with the appearance of “Death” and “Life in Death” in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* of S.T.Coleridge. All of the features certainly presented *Frankenstein* as a suitable fiction of romantic literature.

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