



NATURE AND NURTURE IN MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

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Abstract: The article entitled Nature and Nurture in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, tries to analyse the elements of Nature and Nurture in the novel. The monster Frankenstein's transformation serves as a poignant illustration of the interplay between innate and environmental factors. The creature's inherent disposition is shaped by its creator Victor's scientific experimentation, which is significantly altered by the rejection, suffering, and social isolation it experiences. This dramatic shift underscores the profound impact of nurture on human development, suggesting that environmental influences can override and reshape innate characteristics. Through the creature's tragic narrative, Shelley emphasizes the significance of social interactions, rejection, and suffering in shaping human identity, morality, and behaviour through the relationship between nature and nurture.

Index Terms - Environment, Behaviour, Ambition, Responsibility, Morality, Identity, Creation, Consequences, Guilt.

The theme of Nature and Nurture explores the relative contributions of genetics nature and environmental factors of nurture to human development and behaviour. Though nature and nurture are often presented as opposing forces, most experts agree they are interconnected. Genes provide a foundation for human development, but the environment plays a crucial role in shaping how genes are expressed. For instance, a genetic potential for intelligence may not be fully realized without access to quality education and intellectual stimulation.

The Nature perspective argues that human abilities and personalities are determined by genetics and biology, making them innate and unchangeable. It emphasizes that genetics significantly influences intelligence and personality. The Nurture perspective, however, contends that human abilities and personalities are shaped by environmental factors such as upbringing, experiences, and interactions. These characteristics are adaptable and can be influenced by learning, education, and training. The relative contributions of nature and nurture have significant implications for fields such as education, psychology, and social policy. If nature plays a dominant role, policies may focus on identifying and supporting innate talents and abilities. If nurture is more important, efforts may concentrate on creating supportive environments and experiences that foster growth and development.

Victor Frankenstein, a scientist in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, creates a monster whose natural tendencies are violent and aggressive, but its environment and experiences shape its behaviour and emotions. When Frankenstein is rejected by his creator and left to fend for itself, it becomes angry and hurt. However, when it meets the De Lacey family, who show kindness, it starts to feel happy and friendly. This demonstrates that the monster's behaviors are not solely determined by its genes but also by its environment and experiences. Similarly, Victor Frankenstein is driven by his natural curiosity and ambition, but his obsessive nature and lack of empathy are nurtured by his isolation in his experiments. Frankenstein's tragic story serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of playing God and attempting to control nature. By neglecting Frankenstein's need for love, acceptance and guidance, Victor creates a being capable of great evil.

Frankenstein is shunned by society because of his appearance, leading to feelings of loneliness and anger. Frankenstein argues that both nature and nurture shape human beings. The novel highlights the dangers of neglecting nurture and the consequences of societal rejection and prejudice. By exploring the complex interplay between nature and nurture, Shelley raises important questions about responsibility, morality and what it means to be human.

Adam's experiences, choices, and actions shape his personality, values, and beliefs in Adam Bede. "Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds" reflects how Adam's actions define his identity as a skilled carpenter and responsible individual. He also determines his deeds by making conscious choices, such as forgiving Arthur and taking responsibility for his mistakes. Through experiences, he develops skills and navigates complex social situations. Similarly, Frankenstein, created from dead body parts, is shaped by his experiences rather than being inherently evil. The comparison to biblical Adam emphasizes the role of nurture in shaping identity and morality.

Frankenstein feels rejected and longs for acceptance and happiness after Victor's abandonment and society's cruelty. Like the biblical Adam, he loses innocence and the potential for goodness. His creator rejects him due to his appearance, denying him love and connection. The comparison to a fallen angel emphasizes Frankenstein's belief that he has been unfairly cast out from joy and happiness. He asserts that he was not born evil but became so due to the suffering inflicted by Victor and society. "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" (Frankenstein 121). This statement indicts Victor's actions and underscores the impact of kindness and compassion.

Victor Frankenstein reveals profound self-awareness, recognizing his intense temper and passions. "The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine" (Frankenstein 43) reflects his wonder and curiosity, seeing the world as a vast mystery waiting to be uncovered. The word "secret" implies hidden truths, while his desire to "divine" them suggests an insatiable curiosity and passion for discovery. However, Victor's pursuit of knowledge without responsibility leads to tragic consequences. "My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement; but by some law in my temperature they were turned..." (Frankenstein 44). His passionate personality led to impulsive behaviour, yet he focused this energy into learning. This natural tendency helped him develop a love for knowledge that defined his identity. Victor's insight shows that recognizing and harnessing unique qualities can aid personal growth and identity formation.

Victor's unchecked ambition leads to his downfall and the tragic demise of loved ones, including Clerval and Elizabeth. The monster's actions, born from rejection and loneliness. Through these threads, Shelley warns against unbridled ambition and emphasizes responsibility in human relationships. "A mind of moderate capacity which closely pursues one study must infallibly arrive at great proficiency in that study; and I, who continually sought the attainment of one object of pursuit and was solely wrapped up in this, improved so rapidly that at the end of two years I made some discoveries" (Frankenstein 62). Frankenstein's journey demonstrates that dedication leads to achievement. His "mind of moderate capacity" suggests diligence rather than inherent genius. However, his relentless pursuit of knowledge leads to the creation of the monster and devastating consequences. His existence catalyses a chain of events that ultimately lead to Victor's downfall, serving as a warning about unchecked ambition and the need to consider the consequences of human actions.

"The moon gazed on my midnight labors with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding-places" (Frankenstein 65). The moon, a silent observer, casts a glow over Victor's workspace as he delves into the mysteries of nature. His eagerness never falters despite setbacks. His obsession with discovery leads him to neglect his well-being and relationships. Convinced that unlocking the secrets of life and death holds the key to humanity's greatest mysteries, he risks everything. The moon continues to gaze down, casting an otherworldly glow over his experiments, but Victor ignores the beauty of creation. His obsession consumes him, leaving him isolated and alone. Driven by an insatiable curiosity, Victor presses on, ultimately creating Frankenstein. The moon, a silent witness to both triumph and tragedy, remains a reminder of human ingenuity and the pursuit of knowledge.

Victor Frankenstein's years of tireless work culminated in a moment of fear on that dreary November night. As he prepared to bring his creation to life, Victor was consumed by emotions, including anxiety, excitement, and fear. The weight of playing God by creating life from non-living matter was crushing. He had invested too much to turn back and was determined to see it through. The "lifeless thing" was the culmination of his research, a being stitched together from body parts and brought to life through electricity. Victor wondered if the creature would be intelligent or a brute. As the moment approached, his anxiety grew. He knew he was doing something that could change human history. Victor infused the spark of being, and Frankenstein stirred, its limbs twitching as it took its first breath. The moment was both exhilarating and terrifying, leaving Victor reeling. He had unlocked the secrets of life and death, becoming a creator. But as he gazed upon Frankenstein, he felt trepidation, wondering what he had unleashed.

"I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body." (Frankenstein 70) Victor's relentless pursuit of knowledge led to the infamous monster. His work and experimentation culminated in a moment of triumph and terror. The creature was grotesque and horrifying, a patchwork of human limbs and organs, reflecting its unnatural creation. Despite his scientific achievements, Victor felt pride but also deep-seated fear and disgust. The creature embodied his ambition but also its consequences. Its rejection by society and its acts of violence profoundly impacted Victor, leading to his downfall and serving as a cautionary tale about unchecked scientific ambition. Victor sought to understand the principles of existence. Through his work, he hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the human condition and even cheat death. The creature was capable of good and evil, and its existence led to Victor's downfall.

"Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived." (Frankenstein 70) Victor met with a sight so horrific it was unbearable. The creature's face was twisted and distorted, a living nightmare. Even unfinished, it had been ugly, but once animated, it became even more terrifying. The movement of its muscles and joints made it a living, breathing monster. Victor was horrified by his creation and realized he had made a terrible mistake. The creature's appearance defied human comprehension. Victor had sought to create life, but he had unleashed a monster. The creature's animation brought it to life and revealed its full horror. Victor faced the consequences of his actions, understanding he had played God and created something beyond his control.

"Absence cannot have rendered you callous to our joys and griefs," (Frankenstein 87) Robert Walton, the Arctic explorer, speaks to Victor, believing that despite Victor's prolonged absence, he still has the capacity to feel deeply. Victor's absence left him isolated and alone. He missed out on the joys and sorrows of those who cared about him. Walton's words suggest that Victor is not beyond redemption and still has the ability to connect with others. This highlights the importance of human connection and foreshadows Victor's downfall. His obsessive pursuit of knowledge ultimately destroys him. Absence profoundly impacts relationships, showing that we remain connected to those who care about us.

Victor's encounter with his creation left him exhausted and emotionally drained. His anguish was visible, and his loved ones sensed something was wrong. Despite his attempts to hide the truth, Elizabeth discerned his secret. She knew Victor had worked on a mysterious project that had gone horribly wrong. Victor's expression betrayed the secret, revealing his suffering. Elizabeth's empathy allowed her to understand what had happened. Secrecy and concealment are central themes in the novel. Victor's attempts to keep his creation a secret led to devastating consequences, showing the importance of honesty in relationships. The emotional toll of Victor's actions affected those closest to him, leading to far-reaching consequences.

"The snowy mountains, 'the palaces of nature,' were not changed." (Frankenstein 90) The mountains symbolize a force beyond human control, standing in contrast to Victor's devastating creation. They remain untouched by human hands, reminding us of nature's power. The creature, created by human hands, spirals out of control, bringing destruction. The mountains highlight the dangers of unchecked ambition and the need to respect the natural order. Nature's resilience and majesty transcend human suffering. Victor's pursuit leads him to the Arctic wilderness, where he meets his demise.

"This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits; I clasped my hands, and exclaimed aloud, 'William, dear angel! this is thy funeral, this thy dirge!'" (Frankenstein 91) Victor sees the storm as a funeral dirge for his murdered brother William. The storm provides solace, offering comfort in the face of tragedy. It reminds Victor of nature's power, making him feel small and insignificant. This moment sets the stage for the tragic events that follow as Victor realizes his responsibility for William's death.

"The wounded deer dragging its fainting limbs to some untrodden brake, there to gaze upon the arrow which had pierced it, and to die was but a type of me" (Frankenstein 113) Victor compares himself to a wounded deer, symbolizing his emotional pain. Like the deer dragging itself to a secluded spot to die, Victor seeks isolation to escape his guilt. The arrow represents the emotional wound he inflicted upon himself by creating the monster. He feels responsible for unleashing destruction and struggles to accept the consequences. His creation has become a symbol of his guilt and shame. Like the deer, he is pierced by the weight of his conscience, haunted by what he has done.

"One was old, with silver hairs and a countenance beaming with benevolence and love; the younger was slight and graceful in his figure, and his features were moulded with the finest symmetry, yet his eyes and attitude expressed the utmost sadness and despondency" (Frankenstein 131) The old man's face exudes kindness, while the young man is filled with sorrow. Their contrast represents different life stages: the old man embodies wisdom and compassion, while the young man reflects emotional despair. Their contrasting emotions highlight the complexities of human nature.

“My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement; but by some law in my temperature they were turned not towards childish pursuits but to an eager desire to learn.” (Frankenstein 44) Victor's strong temper and intense passions fueled his scientific pursuits. He was consumed by curiosity and obsessed with unlocking nature's secrets. His determination drove him to great achievements but also led to his downfall. His story serves as a cautionary tale about unchecked ambition. His passion for discovery shapes the novel, while his flaws lead to tragic consequences.

Victor's emotional state undergoes a significant transformation, transitioning from darkness and despair to joy and affection. “I felt also sentiments of joy and affection revive in my bosom; my gloom disappeared and in a short time I became as cheerful as before I was attacked by the fatal passion” (Frankenstein 74). The gloom that had previously consumed them dissipates, replaced by a renewed sense of cheerfulness. This is not merely a superficial change, but a deep-seated emotional transformation.

Elizabeth is envisioning a scenario where someone they care about is ill and being cared for by a nurse who is solely motivated by money. “I figure to myself that the task of attending on your sickbed has devolved on some mercenary old nurse, who could never guess your wishes nor minister to them with the care and affection of your poor cousin.” (Frankenstein 77). Elizabeth worries that the patient would be left in the hands of someone who doesn't genuinely care about them.

Charles Darwin embarked on the Beagle's five-year journey, during which he began to grasp the profound impact of the environment on the natural world. “Environment is the key to unlock the secrets of the universe.” (Darwin's The Voyage of the Beagle). He observed how the environment shaped the characteristics, behaviours, and survival of plants and animals. Darwin understood that the environment is the driving force behind the evolution of species. Through his experiences, Darwin gained insights into the fundamental laws of nature. He realized that the key to understanding the intricate web of life on our planet is the environment.

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