

Understanding the novel's format

Frankenstein is a frame narrative which features a story within a story, at times within yet another story. Sound confusing? You will see how it works once we start reading, so let's get started!

Notice how the novel begins with a series of letters. To whom are these letters written? Who is writing them?

Before we read the letters, here is more information about the frame narrative.

They were popular in nineteenth century English literature.

Allow author to introduce multiple characters and perspectives.

Samuel Coleridge uses this format for *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

The main frame of Shelley's novel is Captain Walton's letters to his sister Margaret Saville.

It is within these letters that the two inner frames are told respectively by Victor Frankenstein and the Creature.

The Letters

Letter 1: What do we find out about Walton? What are his goals? Passions? Is he ambitious? How do we know?

Letter 2: Look at your notes from our research presentations. What allusion does Walton make? More importantly, why does he make it? What's the point he's wanting to express? Also, where do you see elements of Romanticism?

Letter 4: Walton meets Victor. Tell us everything we know about Victor from Walton's description. What does Victor mean to him?

From Letter 4 - Victor speaks!

Victor says to Walton (we are told from Walton's letter): "Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me--let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!"

Shelley has established that we will hear Victor's story (tale). What is his purpose in telling it?

Warm Up - Letter 4

Walton explains to Victor that “one man’s life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought; for the dominion [control] I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes [basic enemy] of our race.”

- Do you agree with him that one man’s death is a small price to pay for knowledge that could save mankind from its enemy? Support your answer with a specific example.

Warm Up continued

Walton continues, “As I spoke, a dark gloom spread over my listener ...”.

Finally Victor speaks: “Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me -- let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!”

- What does Victor say here?

Dialectical Journal Example - Letter 4

“I spoke of my desire of finding a friend - of my thirst for a more intimate sympathy with a fellow mind than has ever fallen to my lot; and expressed my conviction that a man could boast of little happiness, who did not enjoy this blessing. ‘I agree with you,’ replied the stranger; ‘we are unfashioned creatures, but half made up, if one wiser, better, dearer, than ourselves - such a friend ought to be - do not lend his aid to perfectionate our weak and faulty natures.’”

Archaic

Response

Walton speaks of the importance for man to have friendship/companionship. Victor wholeheartedly agrees with him. Remember this, it will prove to be ironic once we see what the monster asks of Victor and what he denies him.

Dialectical Journal Entry - Letter 4

“Even broken in spirit as he is, no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions, seems still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth.”

Response:

These are very Romantic ideals...the notion that nature and one's appreciation of nature can transform one from a low and desperate state to a place of serenity and contentment. Romantic idealism valued the impact that nature had on human beings.

Dialectical Journal Entry - Letter 4

“You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine had been...when I reflect that you are pursuing the same course, exposing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me what I am, I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale...Prepare to hear of occurrences which are usually deemed marvelous...many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions which would provoke the laughter of those acquainted with the ever-varied powers of nature...”

Response

The theme of the danger of seeking knowledge is expressed through the metaphor of a serpent who stings you. Knowledge is the serpent and it is also referred to as dangerous. It is these dangers that have made Victor what he is today. He tells him that he will share his story in hopes to caution his pursuit of too much knowledge to the point of disregard for anything else. Again, we have Romantic elements: He uses the words marvelous, wild, and mysterious to refer to his story.

Chapter 1: Victor's Story

- 1) Victor describes his childhood. What does he reveal about it? How does he feel about his parents?
- 2) Reread the last two paragraphs. Write down all the words that Victor uses to refer to and describe Elizabeth.**

Chapter 2

- 1) In what way is man's thirst for knowledge revealed in this chapter?
- 2) Much of the information from our research projects comes into play here. What do the references made to past scholars tell us about Victor? Review your notes on Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus
- 3) Again, referring back to our research, how does Henry represent the ideals of Romanticism?

Chapter 2

Make a chart for the three main characters developed in this chapter: Elizabeth, Victor, and Henry Clerval. In each chart, state the important information that is revealed about them. Include descriptions, their interests, their focus in life, etc.

Elizabeth

Victor

Henry

Dialectical journal examples for chapter 2

Chosen Quote:

“I feel the exquisite pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind, and changed its bright visions of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self....Natural philosophy is the genius that has regulated my fate; I desire; therefore, in this narration, to state those facts which led to my predilection for that science” (46-7)

Like many sentences/passages from the novel, you may need to read it over a few times to grasp its meaning. Here is why I chose it.

My comment on the previous quote from ch. 2

Victor acknowledges here that the joys of a happy childhood do not continue into adulthood and it is his love of science that has led to his life of despair. He refers to his pursuit of knowledge as “misfortune” and the cause of misery. It “swept away all my hopes and joys.” He explains that he will now tell his story of how this pursuit and love of science began. Interestingly he believes that this pursuit of science is his destiny, his fate. He mentions this idea in several ways throughout the passage.

Another significant quote from chapter 2

“Under the guidance of my new preceptors, I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life; but the latter soon obtained my undivided attention. Wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” (48-9).

Preceptors = teachers

What does Victor dream about doing here?

My response to the previous quote from ch 2

He has high scientific visions to be the person who discovers how to prolong human life. This clearly foreshadows his creation of the monster. He says that such a discovery is way more important than money/wealth.

Third and final quote I chose from chapter 2

“When I look back, it seems to me as if this almost miraculous change of inclination and will was the immediate suggestion of the guardian angel of my life – the last effort made by the spirit of preservation to avert the storm that was even then hanging in the stars, and ready to envelope me.... It was a strong effort of the spirit of good; but it was ineffectual. Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction” (50-1).

All this talk of destiny reminds me of Macbeth! Find this quote in the text and read it in context. What does Victor feel is his destiny?

My response to previous quote from ch. 2

Prior to this quote Victor describes a powerful experience in his childhood where he witnesses the power of electricity first hand. A man present explained his theory and Victor was fascinated. These new ideas overpowered his obsession with Cornelius Agrippa who he studies religiously. This conflict between his old ideas and new information brought a change to Victor and he found himself turning to Mathematics for answers. He sees this change as a sign from his guardian angel; he was almost saved. But fate and destiny were too strong and he returned to his previous studies. Again, this area of study is what lead to “terrible destruction.” There is so much foreshadowing in these first chapters.

Chapter 3 - Foil characters

A foil is a character who contrasts with another character to highlight particular qualities of the other character.

How are M. Krempe and M. Waldman foils to each other?

Chapter 4 - Sample Quote for Journal

“Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (64).

Why might I have chosen this for my journal? Why is it significant? What does it mean?

Ch. 4 - My Response to Quote

One of the main themes of the novel is the danger in seeking knowledge. This quote illustrates Victor's struggle with his passion to learn, know and create. He calls it dangerous and it is the cause of man's despair.

Chapter 4 - another sample quote

“When I found so astonishing a power placed within my hands, I hesitated a long time concerning the manner in which I should employ it. Although I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation, yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour” (64-6).

What is this saying? Why is it important?

My response to quote:

Initially I read the first sentence to mean that one has to be careful and cautious with power (scientific advancement in this case). That is a theme in the novel. But further reading shows not that Victor is contemplating the magnitude of this feat and the responsibility that comes with it but literary how he will physically put his power to use.

Ch. 4 - Another Quote and Response

“A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” (65-6).

Victor is not approaching his creation with caution but with a sort of arrogance. He claims to deserve gratitude and full credit for his creation, but with that comes responsibility as well. We'll see if he lives up to that responsibility.

Ch. 4 - Second to last Quote (such an important chapter)

“It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest...but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature....Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labours, but I did not watch the blossom or the expanding leaves—sights which before always yielded me supreme delight—so deeply was I engrossed in my occupation” (67-8).

Response to previous quote

The very things that were cherished in the Romantic period: reflections upon nature, observing the natural world around you, were lost to Victor and his scientific endeavors. Perhaps this is Mary Shelley's critique of the pursuit of science which was popular during the Enlightenment period. Remember, the Romantic era which came right after is a response to those values. Romantics valued nature and observation of the natural world.

Final quote from chapter 4

“If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful...not befitting the human mind....I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines,...than an artist occupied by his favorite employment” (68).

What does Victor compare himself to here?

Response to final quote

This creation has become an unhealthy obsession for Victor. Notice the strong language he uses by referring to himself as a slave who is doomed. He admits that this is NOT his “favorite” way to spend his time. It has taken over his life. I wonder how this will affect his attitude towards it?

Chapter 5 - Another important chapter,
but for different reasons

Spoiler Alert!!!! The creature comes to life

- 1) Record all the words that Victor uses to describe or refer to his creation.
- 2) What does Victor do once it awakens?
- 3) Who comes to see Victor and how does this both help and complicate things?

Chapter 8 - The Trial and the Confession

- 1) Who confesses to the murder? Why?
- 2) How is Victor feeling about his circumstances? Support your answer with at least one quote from the text.

How is Victor feeling about his circumstances?

Guilty, sorrowful, and sorry for himself. He claims that his misery is worse than Justine's and Elizabeth's - here's proof

“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” (103).

“But I, the true murderer, felt the never-dying worm alive in my bosom, which allowed of no hope or consolation. Elizabeth also wept and was unhappy, but hers also was the misery of innocence, which, like a cloud that passes over the fair moon, for a while hides but cannot tarnish its brightness” (107).

Let's stop at the end of chapter 8 to reflect on things!
In some editions, this ends volume 1.

Who is the biggest victim in the novel thus far?

Victor? William? Justine? The creature? Or someone else?

Be sure to justify your answer.

Chapters 9 & 10

Find quotes that illustrate how returning to nature is how one finds solace and peace...a very Romantic notion.

Let's return to our anticipation guide's statement: All people are inherently good. Does the creature support or refute this statement? Find quotes to support your answer. (hint: reread the last couple pages of chapter 10.)

Explain what the creature means when he says, "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel" (122).

Study Sync Excerpt

Study Sync has chosen parts of chapters 5 and 10 to examine (page 11).

Do Focus Questions, page 14.

Chapters 11 - 15 Questions

The Creature's Story

- 1) Where does the Creature live when he leaves the laboratory?
- 2) What does the Creature do with his time?
- 3) Who are Felix and Agatha? Explain their story. What is their role in the novel?
- 4) Who is Safie? What influence does she have on the other characters?
- 5) The creature devises a plan that he carries out at the end of chapter 15. What is his plan and how well does it go?
- 6) The monster finds a suitcase. What is in it that has some effect on him?

Chapters 11 - 16 Significant Quotes for my Journal

The next few slides show 5 quotes from these chapters. See if you chose any of these same quotes. If so, is your response similar? If you chose other ones, are they similar in idea and theme?

From chapter 12 - Quote

“This trait of kindness moved me sensibly. I had been accustomed to steal a part of their store for my own consumption, but when I found that in doing this I inflicted pain on the cottagers, I abstained and satisfied myself with berries, nuts, and roots which I gathered from a neighbouring wood. I discovered also another means through which I was enabled to assist their labours....[After collecting firewood for the family] I observed, with pleasure, that he [Felix] did not go to the forest that day; but spent it in repairing the cottage and cultivating the garden” (135-6).

Response

This shows that the creature is not innately bad or evil. He values kindness. He does what he can to make others, those he loves, happy. He helps them. He finds joy from seeing them joyful. This is purely humane behavior and what we expect from decent people. It is also what family members want and do for each other.

From chapter 13 - Quote

“These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings....To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honour that can befall a sensitive being; to be base and vicious, as many on record have been, appeared the lowest degradation....I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased and I turned away with disgust and loathing” (145).

Response

The Creature observes Felix teaching Safie, hence teaching him as well. The Creature learns not only language through Felix's instruction but about history and religion, war and government. He hurts just hearing about innocent people being killed and learning about the brutal capabilities of man. These teachings open his eyes to a side of human behavior that he finds repulsive. By questioning bad, it shows that he is innately good.

From chapter 14 - Quote & Response

“I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man....Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?” (146).

As the Creature learns about life, history, the nature of man and the idea of companionship, he reflects on his place in the world. It becomes more apparent to him that he is different and, even worse, that he is not accepted because of these differences.

From Chapter 15 - Quote

“Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy, and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition, for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me” (157-8).

Response

The Creature's knowledge of life and ability to reflect upon it is even greater after reading the texts, especially *Paradise Lost*. He connects with this text and the characters: God created Adam like Victor created him. This makes Victor God, and acting like God can be a dangerous thing. But the differences between the Creature and Adam are telling; the Creature is not perfect and is not guarded by his creator and is not able to learn from superior beings. He is alone, shunned, abandoned. For this he is envious of those who have others, who are accepted. And "envy" makes him more like Satan.

From Chapter 15 - Quote

“Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from him in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred” (158).

Response

The Creature finally gets to ask his Creator “why”. He again aligns himself with Satan, but only to say that even he had companionship. His, the Creature’s, is the worst plight imaginable. A lack of human connection is worse than any other fate.

Before reading ch. 17 discuss

Will Victor make a companion for the monster?

Should he???



Chapter 17 - The heated conversation

Read chapter 17 in pairs, one person reads the part of Victor, the other reads the monster. Try to capture the appropriate emotion in your voice. Notice how the passionate demands and refusals become thoughtful arguments and acquiescence.

Reread ch. 17 and find lines in the creature's argument that would support the nurture side of the debate.

Nature
-v-
Nurture



Before leaving chapter 18, note whom Shelley quotes!

Lines from William Wordsworth's famous Romantic poem *Tintern Abbey*.

The poem opens with the speaker's declaration that five years have passed since he last visited this location, encountered its tranquil, rustic scenery, and heard the murmuring waters of the river. He recites the objects he sees again, and describes their effect upon him.

(I have broken my wordiness rule)

Wordsworth 101

Major English Romantic poet

Launched the Romantic age



Friends with Samuel Taylor Coleridge (remember
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner)

Back to *Frankenstein*

Notice what Shelley does just prior to quoting Wordsworth! What are the previous two pages about?



Beginning of Chapter 20 - Victor's fears

After refusing to question his decision to make a female creature, Victor's fears get the better of him. What specifically does he fear happening?

What does he ultimately do because of these fears?