

21L.012, Frankenstein

(8 November)

(student presentation on Romanticists)

student exercise: sketch Frankenstein on board

- Who drew monster?
- Who drew Victor?
- What surprised you about the story?
- Many differences between popular conception and actual story
- What information does the title page present and not present?
 - Who was Prometheus?
 - myth: Titan, between gods and humans; stole fire from gods, gave to humans
 - myth: formed humans from mud
 - suggests that Frankenstein title refers to Victor
 - Is story about creature or creator?

recall what Victor tells of childhood:

- coddled by parents, in contrast to his care of monster
- title page: author's name omitted, because of gender

Why does story begin with a series of letters between other characters?

- explorer wants to:
 - discover something new
 - achieve glory
 - benefit humans

(13 November)

(student presentation on Sir Humphrey Davy)

Frankenstein

- note Davy quote in intro
- in beginning of 1800's, science was an amateur activity because only the wealthy could pursue it
- in the days of amateur science, normal educated people knew of science, counter to later specialization

previous works

- Odyssey: significant in paying homage to Poseidon
 - Athene prays to him
 - Odysseus must go on final voyage

- Don Quixote: note vision of comic acceptance: tied to worse side of nature regardless of efforts: our ability to improve things is limited

recall beginning of Frankenstein

- letters
- Walton adds to credibility of story
- Walton observed monster

narrative

Mrs. Saville ← Walton ← Frankenstein ← monster

- progressive steps away from social solidarity
- Walton can provide pathway to isolation
- opening and closing landscapes: barren

What constitutes beautiful and sublime?

- Burke: beautiful an experience of happiness; calm and peaceful
- sublime: parts of nature that seem indifferent to humans; can make us feel insignificant, unimportant (e.g., stormy sea)
- beautiful: world we're at home in
- sublime: monster's experience; world hostile, indifferent
- Poseidon: sublime force
- Don Quixote's lower side of human nature

Frankenstein suggests that some part of our soul could be alien to us

Shelley's perspective

- women keep men in touch with social world

the night Frankenstein succeeded

- Frankenstein exhausted
- has dream
 - divided between his love of Elizabeth, respect for father and pursuit of monster
 - Elizabeth morphs into dead mother; before mother died, she said to Elizabeth, "Elizabeth my love, you must supply my place," undone in dream; mother died after helping Elizabeth
 - Frankenstein may be motivated subconsciously to render women obsolete

monster embodies Frankenstein's side that he does not understand

(15 November)

*Alone, alone, all all alone,
Alone on the wide wide sea
And never a saint took pity on*

My soul in agony.

-S. T. Coleridge

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

(student presentation on film versions of Frankenstein)

Coleridge’s work influenced Shelley’s writing

- The passage above expresses despair—beyond the redemptive power of God
- a recurring theme in Frankenstein

recall the trial of Justine

- consider the role of Victor during trial
- vol. 1 ch. 8, pg. 86

What is the book’s attitude toward Victor?

- vol. 1, ch. 4: if everyone stays within the bounds of the familiar, progress is slowed
- admiration for striving for something new, but needs tradition to balance
- tension between 2 forces

Start of vol. 2: Victor exalts himself in perverse way

- exempts himself from advice
- monster challenges the primacy of Victor’s misery
- competition of who’s most miserable
- consider Oedipus the King
 - goes from best to worst
 - tragic hero
 - retains grandeur during fall
 - contest between Victor and the monster to be tragic hero of story
 - vol. 2, ch. 2

Why can Victor in the book Frankenstein inspire sympathy but not Victor in the film versions?

- in 1st person narrative (book), tendency to slide from explanation to justification
- vol. 2, ch. 1

“qui s’accuse, s’excuse” he who accuses himself excuses himself