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## 1

## The Narrative Frame

*Frankenstein* is in the form of a series of letters from St. Petersburg, Archangel, and the Arctic Ocean, written by an arctic explorer called Robert Walton to his married sister Mrs Margaret Saville, in England. Mrs Saville only receives these letters – there is nothing from her in reply. So, the story of *Frankenstein* is told by Walton to his sister; he reports, apparently verbatim, the story Victor Frankenstein tells to him aboard his ship in the Arctic Ocean; and Victor Frankenstein purportedly reports verbatim the story the daemon tells to him when they meet on the ‘mer de glace’ in the Alps. In other words, *Frankenstein* is a story that comes to us via an elaborate series of frames. Such narrative framing devices are usually adopted to provide opportunities for the author to manipulate certain effects.

First, the story arrives to us mediated through the character of the narrator, and we are aware of him even when he is reporting another’s speech verbatim. This means that the story is subjected to two points of view before it even reaches us, which should enable the author to exploit irony. Secondly, each ‘frame’ inserts a distance between story and reader, and this distance can have a variety of effects. Thirdly, the narrators of *Frankenstein* all use first-person narrative. Consequently, we expect self-revelation, but we are never in the company of an omniscient narrator.

In the case of *Frankenstein*, the framed structure of the narrative raises a further issue for modern readers, because most of us believe

that we know the story before we start reading: after all, we are familiar with the mad scientist and his monster. We are therefore likely to be surprised when we begin to read about an explorer's arctic voyage. I have seen students glance back at the cover, to make sure that they have not picked up the wrong book by mistake.

We will start our study of *Frankenstein*, then, by looking at the three main narrators, in the order in which they appear: Walton, Victor, and the daemon. We take a passage for close analysis and comparison, from the beginning of each of their narratives.

### **Analysis: Walton's Narrative, pp. 15–17**

Here are the opening paragraphs of Walton's first letter:

St. Petersburg, Dec. 11th, 17

You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings. I arrived here yesterday; and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare, and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking.

I am already far north of London; and as I walk the streets of Petersburg, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves, and fills me with delight. Do you understand this feeling? This breeze, which has traveled from the regions towards which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes. Inspirited by this wind of promise, my day dreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There, Margaret, the sun is for ever visible, its broad disk just skirting the horizon, and diffusing a perpetual splendour. There – for with your leave, my sister, I will put some trust in preceding navigators – there snow and frost are banished; and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe. Its productions and features may be without example, as the phenomena of the heavenly bodies undoubtedly are in those undiscovered solitudes. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I may there discover the wondrous

power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent for ever. I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death, and to induce me to commence this laborious voyage with the joy a child feels when he embarks in a little boat, with his holiday mates, on an expedition of discovery up his native river. But, supposing all these conjectures to be false, you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine.

These reflections have dispelled the agitation with which I began my letter, and I feel my heart glow with an enthusiasm which elevates me to heaven; for nothing contributes so much to tranquillize the mind as a steady purpose – a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye. This expedition has been the favourite dream of my early years. I have read with ardour the accounts of the various voyages which have been made in the prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole. You may remember that a history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery composed the whole of our good uncle Thomas's library. My education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading. These volumes were my study day and night, and my familiarity with them increased that regret which I had felt, as a child, on learning that my father's dying injunction had forbidden my uncle to allow me to embark in a seafaring life.

These visions faded when I perused, for the first time, those poets whose effusions, entranced my soul, and lifted it to heaven. I also became a poet, and for one year lived in a Paradise of my own creation; I imagined that I also might obtain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated. You are well acquainted with my failure, and how heavily I bore the disappointment. But just at that time I inherited the fortune of my cousin, and my thoughts were turned into the channel of their earlier bent.

Six years have passed since I resolved on my present undertaking. I can, even now, remember the hour from which I dedicated myself to

this great enterprise. I commenced by inuring my body to hardship. I accompanied the whale-fishers on several expeditions to the North Sea; I voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep; I often worked harder than the common sailors during the day, and devoted my nights to the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science from which a naval adventure might derive the greatest practical advantage. Twice I actually hired myself as an under-mate in a Greenland whaler, and acquitted myself to admiration. I must own I felt a little proud, when my captain offered me the second dignity in the vessel and intreated me to remain with the greatest earnestness so valuable did he consider my services.

And now, dear Margaret, do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose? My life might have been passed in ease and luxury; but I preferred glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path. Oh, that some encouraging voice would answer in the affirmative! My courage and my resolution is firm; but my hopes fluctuate, and my spirits are often depressed. I am about to proceed on a long and difficult voyage, the emergencies of which will demand all my fortitude: I am required not only to raise the spirits of others, but sometimes to sustain my own, when theirs are failing. (F 15–17)

This extract contains a considerable amount of information about Walton. We have remarked how confused modern readers may be, but it is just as important that the original readers of *Frankenstein* were equally misdirected: contemporary readers expected a tale of marine exploration, just as modern readers worry that they have picked up the wrong book. Before we consider the overall effect of the Walton ‘frame’, however, let us study the passage.

First, we should look at the way this narrative is structured. Our extract consists of six paragraphs. We can summarize the subject-matter of these units as follows:

1. I have arrived in St. Petersburg, and I am well.
2. I am driven by dreaming of wonderful and beautiful discoveries and by the hope of bringing benefits to humanity.
3. I am filled with enthusiasm, and I have dreamed of this undertaking since I was a child.

4. When I first read the poets, dreams of poetic fame displaced my dreams of exploration for a year, but as a poet, I failed.
5. Then I inherited money, and returned to this enthusiasm. I trained hard for this expedition for six years.
6. I therefore deserve to succeed; but my feelings are changeable, I am sometimes depressed. I wish someone would encourage me.

It is always helpful to make a brief summary like this. Not only does it reveal how clearly the paragraphs are organized into separate statements, but also it helps to bring out the bare bones of the narrator's utterance, by removing much complicating detail. Three points may strike us. First, notice that each paragraph has a purpose, to express one clear part of Walton's narrative: paragraph 1 is an announcement and greeting; paragraphs 2 and 6 are reflection; paragraphs 3, 4, and 5 give a narrative of Walton's upbringing. The transition from reflection to narrative is smoothed by the start of paragraph 3, from 'These reflections' to 'This expedition has been the favourite dream ...'. The transition back from narrative to reflection, between paragraphs 5 and 6, however, is bald and sudden: 'And now, dear Margaret ...', not graced by any stylish link. So, our summary reveals that this opening is organized into paragraphs which develop the narrator's character in stages of reflection and narrative.

Secondly, the summary shows that Walton is constructing an argument. Each paragraph supports his opinion that he is right to undertake his voyage (i.e. to bring delight to himself and benefits to humanity; because it has been a 'steady purpose' throughout his life; because he has trained hard; because he has turned his back on a life of luxury). We will say more about the quality of Walton's argument later; for now, we need only remark that it is natural for him to justify himself: we know, from her regarding the enterprise with 'evil forebodings', that Margaret disagrees with her brother.

Thirdly, re-read our summary, and you are struck by Walton's self-absorption. He predicts his sister's feelings ('You will rejoice') and bosses her opinion ('you cannot contest ...'), but does not ask after her: all his interest is in his own concerns, and the summary reads as 'I' feel this; 'I' seek glory; and 'I' deserve, with an admixture of 'poor

me'. Keeping in mind the points that have arisen so far, we can now turn our attention to sentences.

There are many kinds of sentences, and our extract from Walton's letter shows a variety. The one beginning 'Inspired by this wind of promise ...' in the second paragraph is a periodic sentence because the main clause ('my day dreams ... vivid.') comes at the end; whereas the one beginning 'There, Margaret, the sun is forever visible' is a loose sentence, its main clause coming at the start. There are several double sentences, such as 'My education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading' from paragraph 3. We also find three questions: the first a plea for understanding; the other two plainly rhetorical; and an exclamation ('Oh, that some encouraging voice would answer in the affirmative!'); while some sentences are short to the point of abruptness, such as the eight-word 'I commenced by inuring my body to hardship' in paragraph 5, and others are very long (see, e.g., 'I accompanied the whale-fishers ... practical advantage' in paragraph 5-63 words; or 'But, supposing ... an undertaking such as mine' in paragraph 2-68 words). We can tell from this analysis that Walton's style is varied, with quick changes from statement to elaboration to questions and exclamations and back again suited to his argumentative purpose.

Our impression of Walton's self-absorption is confirmed by the number of phrases in which he is the main actor: 'I arrived', 'I am already', 'I feel', 'I am advancing' start an avalanche of 'I' phrases running throughout the extract to 'do I not deserve', 'I preferred glory', 'I am about to' and 'I am required' in the sixth paragraph. This insistent assertion of self also gives an impression of energy: 'I also became a poet', 'I dedicated myself', 'I commenced', 'I accompanied', 'I voluntarily endured', 'I often worked harder', 'I actually hired myself'. Many of these statements are boasts, including the false modesty of 'I must own I felt a little proud'. Our impression of a self-absorbed, self-justifying man arguing his point is enhanced.

However, there is something in this extract that irritates us: something about the way Walton connects his ideas is suspect. Notice the opening sentence, which begins 'You will rejoice' and ends with 'evil forebodings'. Does this happen again? It can be enlightening to compare the beginnings and the ends of sentences, to see how Walton's thoughts lead him from topic to topic or from mood to mood. For

example, the second paragraph begins 'I am already far north of London', and the sentence ends with the word 'delight'. It is as if Walton means to give a prosaic account, but 'delight' bursts in on his narrative. Is this movement from negative emotion, to ecstasy, found again? Yes: Walton tries to think of the pole as 'the seat of frost and desolation', but ends this sentence also with 'delight'. The next paragraph begins by referring to 'the agitation with which I began my letter', but leads to 'a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye'. So, just as doubts yield to 'delight', 'agitation' yields to fixed permanence. This seems to be a recurrent motif, and shows how Walton shores up his spirits, irrespective of where his reflections begin. There is one startling example of the opposite movement, however; in paragraph 6 Walton appears close to outright contradiction, so suddenly does he fall from confidence into doubt: 'My courage and my resolution is firm; but my hopes fluctuate, and my spirits are often depressed.'

From the moment that the word 'delight' bursts into the text, Walton's diction is enthusiastic, and his emotion is grandiose. His daydreams are 'fervent and vivid' and he seeks a 'region of beauty and delight', the 'country of eternal light' lit by 'perpetual splendour'. His curiosity is 'ardent' and he will start his voyage with 'joy'; his 'enthusiasm . . . elevates [him] to heaven', he read with 'ardour' and 'passionately'; poetry 'entranced' his soul and 'lifted it to heaven', then he 'dedicated' and 'devoted' himself to his undertaking. Clearly, Walton is a man of strong passions. Walton's diction is also rich in absolutes, superlatives and intensifying adjectives, so that every element of his reflections is heightened. So, for example, at the pole the sun is 'for ever' visible and 'perpetual'; and that region may surpass 'every' region hitherto discovered, its features 'without example' and its light 'eternal'. Magnetic power is 'wondrous', and his discoveries will last 'for ever', bringing 'inestimable' benefits to 'all' mankind to 'the last generation' so that his enthusiasm conquers 'all' fears. These superlatives and intensifiers build Walton's aims into that 'steady purpose' he admires, which he describes as 'a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye'. The language of enthusiasm and absolutism is already so marked that the reader is provoked to question Walton's wisdom, even on the second page. The mixed metaphors of a 'point' where the 'intellectual eye' of a 'soul' may 'fix' its regard strike a note of

absurdity. Probably, such a 'fixed' and absolute ideal is a mistake, as it goes against nature. The near-comic mixing of metaphors adds to our doubts.

Another element of Walton's vocabulary fosters the reader's critical attitude. Notice that even the six paragraphs of our extract contain significant repetition. We have already remarked that the personal pronouns 'I', 'me', 'myself', 'my' and 'mine' occur frequently (e.g., 20 times in paragraph 5 alone), and that there are many superlatives such as 'ever', 'never', 'all' and 'only'. Walton also appears to have a repetitive vocabulary for describing his emotions: 'delight' appears twice, and he is both 'ardent' and feels 'ardour'. However, the two most revealing repetitions occur where the contexts differ. The first of these is the word 'heaven': Walton feels that his heart 'glows with an enthusiasm which elevates me to heaven', when talking of his voyage to the pole; then, he says that poetry 'lifted [his soul] . . . to heaven' and continues the idea by remarking that poetry enabled him to live in a 'Paradise of my own creation'. The conjunction of 'elevated . . . to heaven' and 'lifted . . . to heaven', the one for an ideal he asserts is right, and the other for an ideal he admits was a mistake, suggests that he has learned nothing from his poetic failure; the further idea of a 'Paradise of my own creation' suggests that his present enthusiasm is as unrealistic as was the last.

The second revealing repetition is of the word 'enticements'. First, Walton describes his hopes from discovering the pole, and says that these are the 'enticements' that lead him on; then, he congratulates himself on rejecting 'every enticement that wealth placed in my path'. This repetition undermines his claim of self-denial. In voyaging to the pole, Walton is responding to 'enticements', and therefore doing what he wants to do. He prefers 'glory' to ease and luxury, further emphasizing the selfishness of his motive. Walton's dreams of glory are further confirmed when he explains his supposed altruism: he will be able to 'confer' benefits on all mankind. 'Confer' conveys a superior and patronizing position; Walton hopes to bask in fame and the gratitude of humanity. Notice that Walton has never been shy when dreaming of fame: as a poet, he hoped to equal 'Homer and Shakespeare', and used quasi-religious diction ('niche in the temple', 'consecrated') to imply the quasi-divine status to which he aspired. Walton is not a humble

man, then! So, the repetitions of 'heaven' and 'enticements', added to the other features we have noticed, render us thoroughly suspicious of Walton and critical of his ideals, even within his first six paragraphs.

It remains for us to ask, what kind of an opening is this, for the novel? And, what kind of a narrator is Walton? We have learned that Walton is a self-justifying man who rationalizes his enthusiasms; and at the very beginning of the novel, he energetically argues his case against both his sister's 'evil forebodings' and his own latent doubts. We are bombarded by his self-absorption and his hyperbole: it is as if he must use absolute language, in order to silence any voice of contradiction. Walton's repetitions already convey the uneasy impression that his language has nowhere to go: having begun with 'fervent', 'ardent' and 'delight', 'for ever', 'never' and 'all', 'heaven' and 'Paradise', Walton's language allows him no space to grow over the succeeding 200 pages. The repetitions of 'heaven' and 'enticements' underline the serious doubts we already harbour about Walton's reasoning, which seems to be full of holes. Finally, there are strong hints of an over-demanding ego and vainglory: his motive may partly be to benefit humanity, but most of his drive seems to come from dreams of achieving a quasi-divine 'glory'.

At the same time, there are strong hints that Walton is insecure. The very vehemence of his arguments suggests that he wishes to silence his own doubts, and the story of his poetic failure casts doubt on his choice of object. This is a man who will be recklessly ambitious about something, and it hardly matters what.

For the reader, this must be a profoundly unsettling opening to the novel. First, it is in the nature of a framing device that there is a 'narratee' as well as a narrator. Walton's letter is addressed to his sister, so the first page of the novel pulls us into an intimate family relationship; and as we begin reading, we naturally compare our role with that of Mrs Saville, who does not write a word but only receives and reads. It would be wrong to regard Mrs Saville as entirely passive, however. Although she is not the author of a single word of *Frankenstein*, Mrs Saville is the outermost 'frame', and we must be alert to three aspects of her that are immediately apparent, even as we slot into our position alongside her. First, she is married and is in England: in other words, she is in a civilized life surrounded by family

and domestic security, in contrast to Walton who writes from the borders of human habitation, about to venture into unexplored wastes. Secondly, Mrs Saville is female: so, there is an implicit gender conflict, as soon as Walton begins to argue his case. Thirdly, we are immediately informed that Mrs Saville is sceptical about his plans, for she harboured 'evil forebodings'. So, this outermost 'frame' encourages us to adopt a sceptical and implicitly feminine attitude; and highlights the contrast between our own civilized security and the perilous isolation of the adventurer.

The second point to notice about the opening is that it is a blatant mis-direction. Everything until Letter IV leads us to believe that the novel will be about polar exploration; then, as we meet Frankenstein and embark upon his narrative, we may well feel deceived: if Walton's voyage is irrelevant, why do we have to read about it? For a modern reader, familiar with the daemon and his creator from numerous films and popular culture, this irritation will arise sooner than was the case for the original readers, but the effect is the same: it is likely to foster both annoyance and surprise in the reader. If there is a moral to be drawn from this aspect of the outer 'frame', it may be that this novel's universe is unpredictable; for when you set out on a voyage of exploration, you cannot know what you will find. Like Walton himself, we set off on a voyage North, only to discover a horror that was born far to the South, at Ingolstadt.

We will return to these two matters later. For now, it will be enough to notice how our extract introduces the themes of *Frankenstein*, despite being a cul-de-sac in the story. By revealing a self-absorbed, ambitious but insecure idealist, Walton's opening paragraphs announce a major theme. First, there is ambition which seeks personal glory, combined with an idealistic philanthropy. Then, the character is isolated – either in conflict with or facing discouragement from his family; and his romantic dreams are likened to those of a romantic poet. Finally, he is unmistakably male, and engaged in a gender-argument against feminine scepticism. We have also noted signs of misplaced energy in these opening paragraphs: the heightened diction of absolutes, the bullying tone ('you cannot contest', 'do I not deserve . . .?'), and some suggestive metaphors and terms

initiate an exploration of the male idealist's psychology that will be a persistent concern of the novel. Critics have pointed to the sexual innuendo in Walton's desire to 'discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle'; and we could add that his 'fervent' dreams, anticipation of 'delight', and sensations of being 'elevated' and 'lifted' to 'heaven', all contribute to the idea that male idealism is being driven by a misdirected sexual energy.

### **Analysis: Frankenstein's Narrative, pp. 33–35**

We will return to these issues later. Now let us turn to Victor Frankenstein's narrative. As with Walton, we will analyse the opening paragraphs of his story:

I am by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counselors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him, for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business. He passed his younger days perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country; a variety of circumstances had prevented his marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a husband and the father of a family.

As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I cannot refrain from relating them. One of his most intimate friends was a merchant who, from a flourishing state, fell, through numerous mischances, into poverty. This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a proud and unbending disposition and could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence. Having paid his debts, therefore, in the most honourable manner, he retreated with his daughter to the town of Lucerne, where he lived unknown and in wretchedness. My father loved Beaufort with the truest friendship, and was deeply grieved by his retreat in these unfortunate circumstances. He bitterly deplored the false pride which led his friend to a conduct so little worthy of the affection that united them. He lost no time in endeavouring to seek him out, with the hope of persuading him to begin the world again through his credit and assistance.

Beaufort had taken effectual measures to conceal himself; and it was ten months before my father discovered his abode. Overjoyed at this discovery, he hastened to the house, which was situated in a mean street near the Reuss. But when he entered, misery and despair alone welcomed him. Beaufort had saved but a very small sum of money from the wreck of his fortunes, but it was sufficient to provide him with sustenance for some months, and in the mean time he hoped to procure some respectable employment in a merchant's house. The interval was, consequently, spent in inaction; his grief only became more deep and rankling, when he had leisure for reflection; and at length it took so fast hold of his mind, that at the end of three months he lay on a bed of sickness, incapable of any exertion.

His daughter attended him with the greatest tenderness; but she saw with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing, and that there was no other prospect of support. But Caroline Beaufort possessed a mind of an uncommon mould, and her courage rose to support her in her adversity. She procured plain work; she plaited straw; and by various means contrived to earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life.

Several months passed in this manner. Her father grew worse; her time was more entirely occupied in attending him; her means of subsistence decreased; and in the tenth month her father died in her arms, leaving her an orphan and a beggar. This last blow overcame her, and she knelt by Beaufort's coffin, weeping bitterly, when my father entered the chamber. He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care; and after the interment of his friend he conducted her to Geneva, and placed her under the protection of a relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.

There was a considerable difference between the ages of my parents, but this circumstance seemed to unite them only closer in bonds of devoted affection. There was a sense of justice in my father's upright mind, which rendered it necessary that he should approve highly to love strongly. Perhaps during former years he had suffered from the late-discovered unworthiness of one beloved, and so was disposed to set a greater value on tried worth. There was a show of gratitude and worship in his attachment to my mother, differing wholly from the doating fondness of age, for it was inspired by reverence for her virtues and a desire to be the means of, in some degree, recompensing her for the sorrows she had endured, but which gave inexpressible grace to his behaviour to her. Every thing was made to yield to her wishes and her

convenience. He strove to shelter her, as a fair exotic is sheltered by the gardener, from every rougher wind, and to surround her with all that could tend to excite pleasurable emotion in her soft and benevolent mind. Her health, and even the tranquillity of her hitherto constant spirit, had been shaken by what she had gone through. During the two years that had elapsed previous to their marriage my father had gradually relinquished all his public functions; and immediately after their union they sought the pleasant climate of Italy, and the change of scene and interest attendant on a tour through that land of wonders, as a restorative for her weakened frame.

From Italy they visited Germany and France. I, their eldest child, was born at Naples, and as an infant accompanied them in their rambles. I remained for several years their only child. Much as they were attached to each other, they seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon me. My mother's tender caresses and my father's smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me, are my first recollections. I was their plaything and their idol, and something better – their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed upon them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that while during every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control, I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed but one train of enjoyment to me. (*F* 33–35)

At first reading Victor Frankenstein sounds quite distinct from Walton. Victor narrates in statements, without the rhetorical questions and argumentative features of Walton's letter; and Victor does not address his listener using the second person, whereas Walton addresses his sister as 'You' with his first word, and addresses her directly at regular intervals. Another difference we are likely to notice immediately is that Victor does not pepper his narrative with the personal pronoun. Indeed, it is remarkable that the only information he gives about himself is that he is a 'Genevese', before he digresses to tell us about his parents' marriage. Our first impression, then, is that Walton's agonized self-obsession and his self-justifying tone are absent from this narrative.

Let us begin, as before, by looking at how the extract is structured. Here is a summary of Victor's seven paragraphs:

1. I am from Geneva. I am from a first-class family and my father was a very important man who did not marry young.
2. I want you to understand my father's character, so I will tell you about his marriage. His rich friend Beaufort lost all his money and, with his daughter, hid himself in Lucerne. My father tried to find him to help him.
3. It took ten months, and misery was all he found at Beaufort's secret dwelling. When he moved there, Beaufort had had enough money to survive for a few months, and intended to find a job; but he became depressed and ill during the first three months.
4. His daughter nursed him, and took in plain work to earn a little money and keep them from starvation.
5. In the tenth month Beaufort died, and my father found the daughter destitute and weeping by the coffin. My father looked after her, and two years later they were married.
6. My father and mother loved each other strongly despite the disparity of age. My father gave up his public duties, and they went to Italy as soon as they were married.
7. Then they went to Germany and France. I was born at Naples. My parents loved me, and taught me good principles which I hardly noticed.

On re-reading this summary, we may be surprised: it does not support the idea of a calm, well-organized narrative. There are several jumps between different subjects, such as the first and most obvious 'I am by birth a Genevese, and my family ...', which leads to the assumption, by the second paragraph, that the narrative subject is Victor's father, not himself. Also, the narrative does not treat time chronologically: the story of Beaufort's illness and death is a flashback sandwiched between two accounts of Victor's father's arrival; and, most surprisingly, Victor continues his account of his parents' travels to mention Germany

and France, then has to backtrack to mention his own birth at Naples.

The more we look at our summary, the more peculiar the arrangement of the narrative seems to be. Victor appears to begin in a settled style, but what he actually says is,

*I will tell you about myself. My father . . .*

*I will tell you about my father. His friend Beaufort . . .*

*My father arrived. Ten months earlier . . .*

*They went to Germany and France. Before that, at Naples . . .*

Our analysis shows that the story is already disorganized and rambling in the opening six paragraphs, even before Victor makes the astonishing mistake of rushing past his own birth, which he has to patch in, retrospectively, as it were. At this point a reader may remember the opening words, ‘I am by birth a Genevese . . .’. Clearly, what Victor means by ‘birth’ is ‘family’, the high social position into which he was born, not the physical event of birth, which happened at Naples. The very disorganization of this narrative, then, raises questions. In particular, why does this narrator seem so reluctant to tell about himself? And, why is he so intent on skirting, rushing past, or suppressing the physical event of his own birth? This narrator is clearly not what he purports to be – that is, calm and clear. Despite the even surface of his style, his ideas are agitated. Even these opening paragraphs induce us to read him sceptically.

Victor’s sentences have much to do with our initial impression of calmness and clarity. Most of them have the main clause at or near the beginning, and most of the main clauses are plain narrative statements. For example, we read, ‘His daughter attended him . . .’; ‘There was a considerable difference . . .’; ‘There was a sense of justice . . .’; ‘There was a show of gratitude . . .’. Where Victor uses double sentences, there is a clear causative link between the two statements (as in ‘This last blow overcame her, and she knelt by Beaufort’s coffin, weeping bitterly . . .’); or the sentence is structured as a zeugma (‘He strove to shelter her . . . and to surround her . . .’). There are some sentences

having the main clause at the end, but with one exception they are too short for their structure to be a noticeable feature (e.g., ‘Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.’).

The exception is the final sentence of our extract, which describes his parents’ sense of their duty, then their tenderness, and then adopts a roundabout construction (‘it may be imagined that while . . .’), then mentions the good principles his parents taught him, before finally making the equivocal statement, ‘I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed one train of enjoyment to me.’ This sentence, then, stands out from the rest of our extract as the only periodic sentence of substantial length. Its content also stands out, for it is Victor’s first potential comment on his own character; and we have been waiting for it, for some time.

We use the phrase ‘potential comment’ because this sentence, although provoking us to question, think, and perhaps judge, still falls short of making any comment itself. The question is, *was Victor spoiled?* The sentence gives us most, but not all, of an answer: his parents were conscious of their duty, and they loved him; so, they taught him, but so lovingly that he experienced no hardship. The implication comes in the contrast between the listed virtues – ‘patience . . . charity . . . self-control’ – and the easy phrase ‘one train of enjoyment’. So we are left with the possible conclusion that Victor did not learn self-control because he never had to control himself. But the sentence does not comment, and we are therefore thrown back upon our beliefs. How do children learn? Do we learn from words or by example, as Victor was taught ‘every hour’; or, do we only learn from experience? Victor’s failure to comment therefore raises the fundamental question: how is character formed? Are we born with innate character, or are we shaped by our experiences? If the latter, then Victor was spoiled. This sentence is both unusual and characteristic of Victor: we will frequently find that he assembles all the facts that would normally lead to a judgement, but refrains from judgement himself.

At this point, we have considered structure and sentences, raising several questions both about Victor and about the content. Now let us look at the language.

Remembering what we found in Walton’s diction, we will already have noticed that here, again, there is noticeable repetition. In

particular, there are some abstract nouns and terms describing emotion, that are repeated: 'affection' and its variants, 'tenderness', 'honour', 'distinguished' and 'benevolent'. Added to this, Victor, like Walton, makes liberal use of intensifying adjectives, although he is not quite as insistently absolute as Walton. In the first two paragraphs, we find 'indefatigable', 'perpetually', 'most', 'truest', 'deeply' and 'bitterly'. It is no surprise, then, to read of Beaufort's daughter nursing him with the 'greatest' tenderness, or of Victor's parents and their 'devoted' affection, the 'inexpressible' grace of his father's behaviour or their 'inexhaustible' affection for Victor. Clearly, this narrator – like Walton – uses a heightened language suggesting dramatic events and emotions. It is also possible that Victor has a limited vocabulary of ethical and emotional terms, and consequently repeats them; although we cannot be sure of this yet, on the basis of one extract.

Victor also provides us with clusters of words and phrases, in a manner reminiscent of Walton, who listed his efforts when training for the polar expedition. In Victor's opening paragraphs, there are two noticeable clusters: first, Victor treats his father to 'honour', 'reputation', 'respected', 'integrity' and 'indefatigable attention' within three lines; and these terms of high approval are set against a background beat of 'public situations', 'public business' and 'affairs of his country'. Thereafter, the strong impression created by these praises needs only to be touched in. So, in paragraph 6, there is brief reference to the 'sense of justice' in 'my father's upright mind'. The cluster of terms with which the elder Frankenstein is introduced, then, prepares us for a motif of uprightness and duty that is repeatedly connected to his character. The second cluster describes the relationship between Victor's parents. Here we find 'bonds of devoted affection', 'gratitude and worship', 'attachment', 'reverence', 'virtues', 'desire', 'inexpressible grace', 'excite pleasurable emotion' and 'soft and benevolent'. Heightening the effect of this closely grouped set of terms is the metaphor of Victor's father as a gardener 'sheltering' his wife, a 'fair exotic', from 'every rougher wind'. Leaving the issue of gender stereotyping aside for the present, this cluster presents an uneasy grouping of terms. For example, 'worship', 'reverence' and 'grace' suggest a religious metaphor for Victor's father's love; then, 'means' and 'recompensing' suggest a mercantile way of thinking; these sit uneasily

with 'desire' and 'excite pleasurable emotion', as well as the simile of a gardener sheltering a 'fair exotic'. Victor seems to be struggling to dismiss the age difference between his parents, to distinguish between his father's marriage and 'the doating fondness of age', but he is not wholly successful, as 'Every thing was made to yield to her wishes and her convenience.' Remarkably, this cluster of descriptive efforts only draws attention to the failure of Victor's attempt to explain his parents' love.

Victor's narrative contains more imagery than Walton's. We have remarked on the simile of the gardener and the religious diction surrounding his father's love. In this extract there are also four other significant images. First, the elder Frankenstein arrives at Beaufort's dwelling 'like a protecting spirit'; secondly, Victor's parents 'seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love' to lavish upon him; thirdly, as an infant, Victor was their 'plaything and their idol'; and finally, he was brought up 'guided by a silken cord'.

The first of these images elevates the ideas already gathering around Victor's father (duty, respect, uprightness, etc.), and we briefly glimpse this pillar of virtue in a supernatural, all-powerful light. The metaphor of a 'mine of love' not only effectively conveys the affection lavished upon Victor, but also raises questions because it is set within a surprisingly apologetic context. He could simply have said that his parents loved him, but instead he makes another effort to explain what does not need explanation: that they loved each other, but still had lots of love left over (in the 'store', in the 'mine'), as it were, to spend on him. The image-idea treats love as a commodity, something that might run out. We sense insecurity in the man who has to explain that his parents had enough love to spare for him; we should also notice that this is Victor's second unsuccessful explanation. The third image – of the infant Victor as his parents' 'plaything and . . . idol' – is also double-edged: he intends to convey a favoured childhood, but the choice of metaphors is questionable as both are objects. He was a toy, or a graven image for pagan worship: neither of these metaphors fits a human baby. Finally, and at the end of the exceptional sentence on which we have already remarked, Victor describes his upbringing as being 'guided by a silken cord', where 'silken' carries overtones of expense and luxury. This strengthens our

suspicion that he was spoiled, and learned none of life's lessons as a result.

In short, all five of the images in this extract raise disturbing questions. The faultless, and then supernatural, father; the 'fair exotic' mother; Victor's insecurity about how much love there is to go around; his depiction of himself as an inanimate object; and his guiding 'cord' of luxury: all these provide fruitful areas for psychoanalytical speculations. If we add to these hints, the evasiveness of the narrative's organization, the burying of his own birth, and the disproportionate effort Victor puts into unsuccessful explanations, we realize that these opening paragraphs have – despite their evasiveness and delay – told us much about Victor Frankenstein that he never intended to reveal. The narrative presents an idealized picture of Victor's father, his parents' love, and his own early childhood. Victor's language, heavy with a limited range of positive terms such as 'tenderness' and 'devoted affection', with an admixture of neo-religious diction, and rich in intensifying adjectives, insists on this idealized picture. For the present, we are interested in Victor as one of the novel's narrators, and it is enough to say that the reader does not buy the story he tries to sell: we read sceptically, suspiciously, and treat him as an unreliable narrator.

In Walton's letter, we noticed that the 'misdirection' of its subject-matter belied the relevance of its theme: *Frankenstein* will not be about polar exploration, but it will be about male idealism and hubris. The present extract is similarly deceptive. Apparently telling a background story and saying little about Victor, the extract nonetheless announces three themes that will be central to the novel: social class and privilege; the father-child relationship; and the gender-stereotyping of women.

Social class is an apparent topic from the opening sentence, and is present in the 'silken cord' at the end of the extract. Victor's snobbery is even more glaringly revealed in the remainder of Chapter I, when Elizabeth is described as coming from a 'distinct species' with angelic connotations, different from her foster-siblings who were mere 'hardy little vagrants'. This theme, then, is prominently announced in Victor's opening chapter and will be central to the daemon's account of his life as an outcast, and his observations of human society.

The father-child relationship will also be a central topic of *Frankenstein*. It is the crux of the novel's determining event – the night

when Victor animates and deserts his creation – and is debated at length between the daemon and Victor both on the ‘*mer de glace*’ and on Orkney. In this extract Victor emphasizes parental responsibility: his parents’ duty was to bring him up to ‘good’, and his ‘future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me’. His parents had a ‘deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life’. These statements are unequivocal, and will resonate through Victor’s story as the daemon repeatedly challenges him to fulfil his parental duty. Notice, also, that Victor’s statements are overwhelmingly determinist: life’s ultimate ‘misery’ or ‘happiness’ will be determined by upbringing – by how one’s parents ‘fulfilled their duties’. We are aware of the irony. Walton has already told us that Victor is ‘broken by misery’ and ‘destroyed by misery’: how can this be, if he was loved by parents with a ‘deep consciousness’ of their duty?

The stereotyping of women is a constant element of this extract, and is at its most obvious in the simile of the gardener sheltering Victor’s mother, a ‘fair exotic’, because her ‘soft’ mind may not stand up to ‘rough’ winds. However, Caroline Beaufort’s devotion to, and dependence on, first her father and then her husband, is elaborated throughout the extract. We should notice, for example, that Victor’s father needs to ‘approve highly’, and know her ‘tried worth’ before loving her; that she is no ordinary woman because she has ‘courage’; and that she then becomes the recipient of her husband’s ‘worship’, is ‘sheltered’ by him, and all ‘her wishes and her convenience’ are indulged. As with the theme of social class, Victor’s gender-stereotyping of women becomes even more obvious and extreme with the description of Elizabeth Lavenza’s adoption, before the end of Chapter I (according to his mother, Elizabeth is ‘a pretty present for my Victor’), and an exploration of masculine and feminine stereotypes remains a central concern of the novel throughout.

One further comment on this passage will serve for the present. The opening paragraphs of this, the second ‘frame’ narrative of the novel, appear to alter almost everything: the gender of the ‘narratee’ changes, the novel’s setting moves several thousands of miles, and we – like Mrs Saville – become anonymous, second-hand witnesses as a completely

new story re-starts. On the other hand, numerous features of this new narrative are surprisingly consistent with Walton's, and the themes announced in both are central to each other, and to the novel.

### **Analysis: The Daemon's Narrative, pp. 102–104**

We now turn to the daemon's story: the account he gives to Victor when they meet on the 'mer de glace', and which Victor renders to Walton in the form of direct speech. Again, our extract comes from the beginning of this narrative, as the daemon entreats Frankenstein to listen to his appeal:

'I expected this reception,' said the daemon. 'All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends.'

'Abhorred daemon! fiend that thou art! the tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil! you reproach me with your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed.'

My rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled by all the feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another.

He easily eluded me, and said –

'Be calm! I intreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine, my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and

trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.'

'Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight in which one must fall.'

'How can I move thee? Will no intreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me. 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. If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great, that not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of its rage. Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands.' (*F* 102–104)

This is the first time that we hear the daemon's voice. His task in this extract is to induce Frankenstein to listen to his story, and he speaks in three paragraphs, interrupted by brief replies from Victor. We will

follow our usual practice, summarizing the daemon's three paragraphs, to gain an overview:

1. I am miserable and hated. We are bound together as creator and creature. If you do your duty to me, I shall do mine towards you. If not, I shall destroy you.
2. Please listen. I am stronger than you, but I will be docile if you do your duty to me, which you owe me. I was good. Misery made me wicked. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.
3. I was created good, but I am terribly alone, cast out by mankind, and forced to live in bleak and empty places. I should revenge myself on mankind, but you, and only you, can prevent this. Listen to my story first, then decide whether to condemn me or help me. Defendants in courts can speak in their own defence, so I only ask what any felon is allowed.

The first feature we notice is the repetition of the argument. Roughly, the daemon's case falls into four related parts. First, a statement: there is a mutual bond and obligation between Frankenstein and the creature he has brought to life. Second, an appeal for pity, because the daemon's life is misery caused by loneliness. Third, a threat: misery causes him to become wicked, and will lead him to murder Frankenstein, his relatives, and thousands of others. Finally, an offer: if he becomes happy, he will again become good, and thousands of lives will be saved.

Notice that all four parts of the daemon's argument are expressed in all three of his paragraphs. It is a brilliant combination, appealing in turn to justice, sympathy, fear, and hope. The daemon first gives Frankenstein responsibility, then paints vivid pictures of misery and disaster, then brings out the tempting offer: Frankenstein can avert disaster, because the solution is within his power. Our summary, however, already shows that the daemon's discourse is different from those of Walton and Victor: his paragraphs vary only in emphasis and tone. Rather than changing from reflection to narrative and back again, as Walton does, or rambling, as Victor does, the daemon builds upon the same material, without altering his subject between the three paragraphs of the extract.

Turning our attention to the daemon's sentences, we find a greater variety than in either Walton's or Victor's narratives. There are numerous rhetorical questions, beginning with the telling accusation, 'How dare you sport thus with life?', and including the series of four, appealing for compassion, at the start of the final paragraph. Sentence-length is also extremely varied between the very short (such as 'But hear me.')

and comparatively long (such as the 46 words beginning 'Yet it is in your power . . .' in the final paragraph). What is most marked, however, is the tight and logical structure of the daemon's language. In terms of sentences, this shows in two features: first, the number of what we can call 'balanced' sentences – those which consist of two parts which equally balance each other; and secondly in the number of 'paired' sentences – that is, two sentences which balance each other.

Perfect examples of balanced sentences occur in the first paragraph: the daemon constructs his sentence around a pivotal comma: 'Do your duty . . ., and I will do mine . . .'; then, expanding the same balanced statement in his next sentence, he constructs this around a pivotal semi-colon: 'If you will comply . . .; but if you refuse . . .'. There are further examples, as the daemon re-iterates his double-pronged attack of threat and lure, stick and carrot. Paired sentences are used for the same purpose, with the added advantage of condensing the argument into a terse, pithy style: 'I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.'

The daemon's style intensively emphasizes logic, the explanation of cause and effect. For example, he follows the statement, 'These bleak skies I hail', with an explanation *because*: 'for they are kinder to me than your fellow beings'; and his appeal, 'Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and trample upon me alone', is completed with the explanation: 'to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due'. Every part of the daemon's discourse is thus heavy with reasoning. Listen first, then judge, the daemon implores. Why? *Because* 'The guilty are allowed . . . to speak in their own defence'. Our first encounter with the daemon, then, creates a powerful impression. Every rhetorical device is used to strong effect; the argument is elaborated to emphasize different parts of the appeal; constructions are relentlessly logical throughout; and a balance of good

and evil consequences is hammered home in the structure of many sentences.

We may remember, at this point, what we found in Victor's narrative: that he hands responsibility for his own 'happiness or misery' to his parents; mentions the principles he was taught, casts doubt on their effectiveness, and leaves us there. In other words, having assembled all the elements of an argument, he fails to connect them and fails to express a judgement. We now notice a strong contrast between Victor and the daemon: where Victor fails to draw his ideas together and judge, the daemon does so insistently and repeatedly.

Turning to the daemon's diction, we should notice the wide range of tones at his command. These range from the patient fatalism of his opening phrase: 'I expected this reception'; to outrage: 'How dare you sport thus with life?'; to cutting irony: 'Oh, praise the eternal justice of man!'; to appeal: 'How can I move thee?' To illustrate the range and flexibility of this language, notice the contrast between a placid tone, 'leave them and you at peace', and the sudden viciousness of both sound and image in the daemon's threat to 'glut the maw of death'. From studying Walton, we distinguished a self-justifying tone with a whining overtone of self-pity, as the dominant 'voice' of that narrator. Victor's style appeared – on the surface – noticeably calm and clear, more like a written than a spoken narrative. Now, in the daemon's discourse, we are for the first time in the presence of a truly flexible 'voice', a narrative in which we can hear the natural alterations of emotion, as we read. So the daemon's diction provides another contrast to Victor's 'framing' story.

So far, our analysis has led us to admire the daemon: we are impressed by the natural power of his rhetoric, and by the emotional appeal of his language. We now turn to consider the content of his argument more closely. This will lead us to a fuller appreciation of the moral and logical problems he poses and the consequently problematic nature of our response to him. He is problematic because he has to be considered in two separate contexts: an ethical/logical, or 'philosophical' context and a simultaneous emotional context. We will consider these in turn.

First, notice that the daemon and Frankenstein agree that parents are responsible for the 'happiness or misery' of their children, and

have a duty to those children to provide them with happiness if that is possible. The daemon expresses this opinion forcefully in each of his paragraphs. In the first, he claims the creator–creature (or, father–son) bond, saying he is one ‘to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us’, and further talks of Frankenstein’s ‘duty’ to him. The idea that he and Victor are tied to each other for life is prophetic of the story’s ending, but for the moment we simply note the assertion of bond and duty.

In the second paragraph, the daemon develops two other metaphors for their relationship. First, he describes himself as ‘devoted’, ‘mild and docile’, and describes Frankenstein as ‘my natural lord and king’. This idea is then elaborated using the language of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates about monarchy and society, and in particular the theories advanced by Locke and Rousseau. The daemon challenges his ‘king’ to give him his rights, for the Social Contract demands that a monarch should be ‘equitable’, rule with ‘justice’, and ‘even clemency and affection’. The daemon offers his part of the contract in return – that is, to be ‘mild and docile’. The framework of the daemon’s ideas, then, derives from a contractual concept of the father–son relationship. Notice also, however, the implication of the metaphor: comparing Frankenstein to a ‘lord’ and ‘king’ confers upon him absolute power. This passes all responsibility to Victor, but is also flattery of a heady kind, and – in psychological terms – echoes a child’s exaggerated perception of the father’s power. The ‘king’ metaphor, then, carries multiple connotations and a flattering temptation to Victor. The daemon’s next metaphor is even more extreme, for he likens them to God and Adam. This takes flattery to a new level, although his purpose in raising this analogy seems to be his subsequent mention of himself as Satan rather than Adam, of which more hereafter.

In the third paragraph, there is renewed mention of Frankenstein’s obligation, for other people ‘owe me nothing’ while, by implication, Victor should ‘look [on the daemon] with a favourable eye’ and show ‘goodness and compassion’, still in a quasi-biblical diction that implies a religious analogy. As he continues, however, the daemon changes the metaphor again, and casts Frankenstein as a judge and himself as a guilty defendant. This time, his appeal is not to the relationship of

creator and creature that binds them nor to a Social Contract of mutual duties, but to the rules governing justice in human courts.

These statements of the relationship between them are powerful, but all are flawed. First, if their fates are tied together for life: Victor readily offers a solution to this, saying 'let us try our strength in a fight in which one must fall'. Secondly, if they are parties to a contract: which party to a contract can make his compliance conditional on the other's? Surely, a contract must be willingly entered into by both parties; and the force of Locke's and Rousseau's arguments derived from their assertion that the contract on which society is founded furthers the self-interest of both government and individual. Finally, if Victor is judge and the daemon defendant: the judge should listen first, and condemn after. This is a sound legal principle, but notice that the daemon says, 'then, if you *can*, and if you will' (my italics), enforce the sentence. In his second paragraph, he has already pointed out that Victor is weaker than he is. So, the courtroom analogy falls down, because the judge is powerless to punish the guilty.

In ethical and logical terms, then, the daemon's argument is internally consistent and powerfully argued, but his analogies are of varied quality. Those founded on Frankenstein's responsibility as his creator, and on a form of contract, are stronger; while the religious analogy is specious (was Satan banished from heaven 'for no misdeed' and was the murder of William 'no misdeed?'), and the courtroom analogy, from the unpunishable murderer of William and framer of Justine, is flagrant sophistry. However, the daemon's argument is founded on an underlying philosophical stance. The daemon re-states or adjusts his case many times, but his view of life remains consistently, even relentlessly, determinist. That is, he believes that people are formed by their environment: people have natural qualities, but these are weaker than environmental influences, so it is society, not nature, that makes everyone what they become. Consequently, if a person has become evil, society should correct its mistake, so that they become good. The daemon states this plainly: 'misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous'. Further, the daemon specifies society's error: social exclusion and loneliness are the culprits. These will, inevitably, breed hatred and violent revenge. He puts forward a simple stimulus and response model for the formation of

character: stimulus = rejection, response = fiend; stimulus = affection, response = benevolent creature.

The daemon goes further. Notice that he twice asserts that he was born virtuous, saying 'I was benevolent and good' and 'I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity'. This belief in natural goodness echoes beliefs of the Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth's 'not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home. Heaven lies about us in our infancy ...'.<sup>1</sup> The daemon, then, agrees with the Romantics, that a newborn creature is naturally good. How omnipotent, then, must be environmental influence, which can change goodness to its opposite. This is a strong determinist statement: that our very nature can be transformed into its opposite by environmental forces. It is remarkable that Mary Shelley, writing at the very beginning of the century of the great determinist trinity, Darwin, Marx and Freud, should have articulated the daemon's outlook so powerfully.

These are the philosophical assumptions that lie behind the daemon's argument, then, and they clearly distinguish him from both Victor and Walton. They have crucial implications for other topics that we can call themes of *Frankenstein*, such as nature, science, responsibility, and fate. So, for example, we notice that Victor places responsibility for his own 'happiness or misery' on his parents, ironically just as the daemon places responsibility upon him. Yet the contexts of these two statements differ widely. Within ten pages Victor asserts that 'Destiny' was the responsible party (*F* 43); he fails to complete his own logic, and shies away from judgement. The daemon, in contrast, follows his ideas through to clear conclusions.

We now turn to the daemon's emotional appeal. We have remarked that his argument appeals to justice, fear, sympathy and hope; we should now notice how effectively his voice enforces these appeals. In the simple case of justice, he uses outrage ('How dare you sport thus with life?'), persistent and repeated balance in sentences, and cutting irony ('praise the eternal justice of man!'), to urge his plea for justice; while even his desires for retribution are shot through with the concept of fairness: 'Shall I not then hate them who abhor me?' The appeal to fear is reinforced by threats, of which there are two in this extract. Notice that the promised destruction grows from 'your

remaining friends' to 'you and your family, [and] thousands of others', and that both threats are expressed in metaphors of eating: first, to 'glut the maw' of death until it be 'satiated'; then, that thousands will be 'swallowed up'.

The most effective appeal in the daemon's speech, however, is to sympathy. If we select those words and phrases which call upon us for compassion, we quickly find that they make up by far the largest element of his speech. From his observation, 'all men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!', to the apogee of his appeal in the third paragraph ('How can I move thee? . . . The desert mountains . . . the caves of ice . . . These bleak skies . . . arm themselves for my destruction.'), the passage repeatedly returns to ideas of 'suffered', 'misery', 'anguish', 'trample upon me', 'bliss . . . I alone am irrevocably excluded', and 'am I not alone, miserably alone?'. This appeal is effective in eliciting the reader's compassion. Victor echoes our response when deciding to hear the daemon's story. First, he 'weighed the various arguments he had used', and felt 'curiosity', but it was 'compassion' that 'confirmed my resolution' (*F* 104).

The daemon's narrative is, therefore, deeply problematic not only for Victor Frankenstein, the nominal listener, but also for the reader. We recognize the arguments used and the philosophy behind them. These arguments and the determinist outlook driving them are flawed, ethically questionable, and possibly repugnant to us. Certainly we may feel badgered and blackmailed by the daemon's use of alternating threats and promises. On the other hand, we feel sorry for him, understand his pain and loneliness, and commiserate his outcast condition, which is vividly represented.

Our 'problem' may be put another way. The argument so strongly advanced by the daemon is clearly incomplete and unsatisfactory to us as a whole; yet each part of his reasoning seems natural and sound in isolation. To illustrate this point, we can ask some questions: does the daemon's rejection by society explain his misery? Yes. Does this excuse the murder of William and the framing of Justine? No. If misery made him a fiend, would happiness make him good? Theoretically, yes.

So, we are faced with a system of thought that is deeply flawed, strongly imposed upon us, but is put forward without being rebutted.

It is, however, the daemon's attempt to find an explanation for his existence and his experiences. We can understand, and sympathize with, the genesis of these ideas in his life-story as he relates it in the succeeding chapters; but the daemon's argument remains one of several in *Frankenstein* that are proposed but never effectively rebutted, and this gives rise to a doubt about the process of interpreting experience.

### Concluding Discussion

#### A Journey to Revelation, or to the 'Centre'

We have now sampled the three major narrators of *Frankenstein*, each of whom acts as a 'frame' for the core of the story. What effects are produced by this form of narration?

First, let us consider the reader's position in relation to the story. The opening encourages us to identify with Mrs Saville, implicitly inviting us to adopt a feminine viewpoint, sceptical of male ambition. We remain with Mrs Saville, receiving the rest of Walton's letters, but our relation to Victor's narrative becomes complicated, because it is in direct speech. A further complication is added when the daemon's narrative is also couched in direct speech. One effect of this structure is that the only *written* narrative – Walton's to his sister – is progressively relegated to the background while the bulk of the novel speaks to us first in Frankenstein's, then in the daemon's, voice. We are therefore simultaneously with Mrs Saville in England reading letters, with Walton in the Arctic listening to Frankenstein, and eventually also with Frankenstein above the glacier, listening to the daemon. This is a bewildering series of locations, and serves to underline the 'misdirection' of the novel's opening: that the ultimate destination of the story could not be predicted and was not signalled.

In her study of the frame structure of *Frankenstein*, Beth Newman remarks, '... it might seem that the purpose of a narrative technique that transfers a story from teller to teller is to direct the reader to questions of point of view',<sup>2</sup> but goes on to suggest that, because each listener accepts each narrative, 'without question ... we are given no new perspective'. She also asserts that the different narratives are given

in 'a sameness of voice that blurs the distinction between tellers instead of heightening them', and reaches the conclusion that in *Frankenstein* 'a story is emphatically separable from the character who first tells it'.<sup>3</sup> We noticed, above, that there are unresolved questions, which create the impression of a gap opening up between actual life and the way we attempt to interpret life, or, if you like, between a story and its teller. However, is a 'sameness of voice' and a blurred 'distinction between tellers' what we have found in our study of three narrators?

The answer must be an emphatic no. We have found an insecure and argumentative idealist (Walton); an evasive snob whose moral and philosophical reflections are remarkably incomplete or opaque (Victor Frankenstein); and a powerful rhetorician with a forceful, single, determinist argument (the daemon). Each of these narrators has a distinctive voice, and there is a particularly noticeable contrast between Victor's and the daemon's 'points of view', despite the fact that they do not contradict each others' versions of events. The story does exist independent of its tellers, as Beth Newman remarks, because it remains one story no matter who tells it, and events remain unchallenged; but at the same time, the contrasting voices focus the reader's attention onto differences between the narrators' points of view. These are exploited in several ways.

First, some crucial events are reprised in Victor's and the daemon's narratives. Different accounts are not contradictory, but a brief examination of one example shows how important the question of point of view can be. When William is killed and Victor sees the daemon, he tells us that 'No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth . . . Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child. *He* was the murderer! I could not doubt it', and he reflects that the daemon must be 'a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery' (*F* 78). The daemon's version, on the other hand, reveals a much more complicated situation. He seizes William with the thought that an unprejudiced boy may have no 'horror of deformity', and may become his companion. His words to William are 'Child, what is the meaning of this? I do not intend to hurt you; listen to me', clearly still appealing for friendship. It is only when William echoes adult fears, saying 'you wish to eat me and tear me to pieces', and when he shows himself as great a social snob

as Victor ('he is a syndic . . . You dare not keep me'), that the daemon resorts to violence. Even then it is not clear that he intends murder, for he says, 'I grasped his throat to silence him' (all quotations are from *F* 144).

What does this second account reveal? First, it tells us that the event appeared very differently to these two narrators. Secondly, however, the re-telling of William's murder raises important thematic questions. William's childishness and innocence are frequently referred to by Victor, Elizabeth, and Victor's father, and his appearance of innocence impressed the daemon. The re-telling reveals that William's innocent appearance was false: he was already socialized – disgusted and frightened by the daemon's looks, and fully trained in family pride and snobbery. He threatens the daemon with punishment and calls him names which, the daemon tells us, 'carried despair to my heart'. Clearly, although the event is unquestioned, the two accounts present entirely different points of view, exploited by Mary Shelley to develop her critique of romantic and social conventions. The murder of William highlights the class divisions in society, and contributes to the theme of the daemon's social exclusion. It also criticizes the concept of childhood innocence, an idea that was dear to romantic poets including Percy Shelley himself. William's behaviour reveals that he has already been corrupted by his social training. By implication, therefore, this second account of William's murder supports the daemon's determinism, against romantic idealism.

Secondly, Victor's and the daemon's direct speech narratives provide the author with opportunities for characterization through extended, self-revealing speeches. In our analysis of extracts, we have been provoked to ask questions about the psychology of each of them, and even from these limited studies, we have formulated critical conclusions about each narrator. For example, we noticed how Walton uses grandiose language to bolster his own confidence, and to exclude the depression to which he is intermittently prey. We noticed that Victor evades his own story to the point where he fails to mention being born, and has to backtrack awkwardly. Finally, we noticed the daemon's flawed argument and the unevenness of his metaphors set beside the

relentless demand for sympathy that is the most powerful element of his appeal. Having studied only short extracts so far, we are confident that further complexities of character in all three of our narrators will be revealed as we read on.

Thirdly, the themes treated by the three narrators, and their circumstances, are very closely interwoven, so that we are provoked to compare them with each other, and notice ironic similarities and differences. For example, we have read of Walton's idealistic mission, motivated by paternalistic benevolence and vainglory. A more extended treatment of a very similar mission, with similar motives, comes when Victor describes his scientific enthusiasm, in Chapters 3 and 4. So, where Walton writes of the 'inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind', Victor dreams that 'a new species would bless me as its creator and source' (F55). The novel repeatedly returns to explorations of male idealism, irrespective of the narrator. Another example of a theme echoing between narratives comes with Victor's statement that parents are responsible for the 'happiness or misery' of their offspring. Even from our study of these limited extracts, we have remarked that the daemon echoes this idea in his demand that Victor should 'Make me happy'. These are two very noticeable examples, where successive narratives further explore the same themes.

Mary Shelley has woven her different narratives together so densely that there are also many subtle effects to be found on every page: slight echoes continually jog our minds to make comparisons or realize ironies. One such example begins with Walton's rhetorical question: 'Do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose?' When we read the daemon's argument, we are bombarded by similar rhetorical constructions: 'But am I not alone, miserably alone?' and 'Shall I not then hate them who abhor me?' What is the implication of two such different creatures, in widely different circumstances, both justifying their needs in such an echoing manner? Such effects occur on every page, so that it seems as if the different narratives are continually placing further overlays upon the same themes. The themes themselves therefore increase in complexity and substance, as if they are being built steadily throughout the novel – irrespective of the differences between narrators.

This close linking of the narrators to a limited range of recurrent themes and situations has an effect that counters what we might normally expect from 'framed' narratives. As Beth Newman remarks, one effect is that the story itself – never challenged – exists independent of its narrators and therefore acquires a power of its own. Another effect is that the reader is allowed no escape: for we find each new narrator trapped within the same system of ideas and events as the one before, so that eventually, a feeling of being irrevocably enclosed by the story and themes is transmitted to us as well.

We will briefly discuss some further effects of 'framed' narratives, before drawing conclusions from the beginning of our study.

First, a frame commonly introduces a distance, insulating the reader from the story. However, in some celebrated cases, and particularly where direct speech is extensively used, the frame acts paradoxically: the power of the story bursts through the frame and speaks directly to the reader, so that the breaking of the frame actually enhances the immediacy of the story rather than interfering with it. This happens, for example, with Heathcliff's and Isabella's narratives in *Wuthering Heights*. What do we find in *Frankenstein*? The answer seems to be that the framing structures here work in both of these ways. First, the structure sets up distance: reading about an explorer's ship caught in the ice of the northern ocean, then about a hut above an Alpine glacier, from Mrs Saville's home in civilized England, emphasizes the distance and isolation of Walton, Frankenstein, and the daemon, and impresses upon us that these events take place far away, in an extremely remote setting. The opening misdirection we have remarked upon increases the reader's disorientation, adding to an impression that the story takes place somewhere unpredictable, but definitely beyond the limits of civilization. Then, reading with Mrs Saville encourages us to read sceptically, sharing her 'evil forebodings'. So distance, and the isolation of the characters, is one effect of the frame structure of the novel.

When the daemon begins to speak, on the other hand, we hear a highly distinctive and powerful voice; and as we have found, his appeal is internally consistent and relentlessly presented. This is a sharp contrast to the evasiveness of Victor's 'framing' narrative. The daemon's

voice is so much stronger than the less forthright narrators whose accounts supposedly enclose his, that his narrative breaks through the structural restraints set around it. When we consider that this voice speaks to us from a hardly imaginable geographical distance (and from the human distance of his difference, his daemonhood), it is clear that the final effect is greatly to magnify the potency of his narrative. In short, when an elaborate double frame has been set up, nothing is so powerful as to break it.

This discussion of distance, and of the daemon's voice, shows how the structure of narratives in *Frankenstein* takes us on a journey towards the 'centre', or the 'core' of the novel and its story. As we are taken first to the northern ocean, then to Geneva, Ingolstadt, Geneva again, and finally to the *mer de glace*, the frames and the story build up suspense as well as distance and isolation. The daemon's narrative is situated at the centre of the novel: it is the revelation we have been waiting for. It has been advertised by Victor's references to horror, disgust, and fear, so that the reader approaches it with trepidation. In this way, the frame structure plays upon suspense, so that the daemon's narrative gains status as the ultimate or central revelation. To put this in another way, the daemon, speaking to us through so many frames from the very centre of the novel, has an authority denied to the two outer narrators, whom we read with scepticism.

The final surprise is the nature and style of the daemon's story. What do we expect from him? Grunts, the gnashing of teeth, and blood-thirsty threats, perhaps. What, then, is our surprise when he speaks in cultured language and pleads his case with an appeal that engages our sympathy? We could say that the daemon's voice, when it finally comes, is the second major misdirection of the novel: first, we find ourselves reading a science-fiction horror story instead of an account of polar exploration; then, the inhuman fiend turns out to be the most articulate and intelligent speaker, and the one to whom we feel most drawn.

## Conclusions to Chapter 1

As we leave this chapter, we should draw some tentative conclusions, which may be confirmed and further developed in the succeeding

chapters. Our analyses have indicated certain *themes* that seem likely to be major concerns in *Frankenstein*.

1. *Masculine and feminine*: We noticed that Walton writes argumentatively to his sister; and that the opening of his letter reveals some specifically male characteristics, such as the simile in which he compares his project to a childish game and the possible sexual *double-entendre* that he hopes to ‘discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle’. Walton also sees himself, in patrician manner, able to ‘confer’ benefits on all mankind. In Victor’s narrative there are further signs that Mary Shelley is placing male attitudes under a critical spotlight. For example, Victor comments on Caroline Beaufort’s ‘mind’ as ‘of an uncommon mould’, and that his father has to ‘approve’ of her before loving her, whereupon he shelters her ‘as a fair exotic’, and her ‘mind’ suddenly becomes ‘soft and benevolent’. Looking at Victor’s hope from his great discovery, we read that ‘No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs’. In short, there is a continuing vein of gendered references and attitudes in both Walton’s and Victor’s narratives, signalling that a critique of masculine attitudes is likely to be a theme of the novel.
2. *Science and the pursuit of knowledge*: So far, we have only met Walton’s ideal of exploration, and briefly referred to Victor’s scientific endeavours. However, we can be confident that enthusiastic projects like Walton’s are to be a theme of the novel. Walton’s idealisms are already satirized by his grandiose references (to rivalling Homer and Shakespeare, for example), and are clearly the subject of controversy between him and his sister. Furthermore, Walton already appears insecure, and argues to bolster his ego. Grandiose idealistic undertakings, whether in science or exploration, are clearly set to become a theme in *Frankenstein*.
3. *Nature*: We can include nature in our list of potential themes, because of Walton’s descriptions of the region of the pole, on the first page of the novel. We remember that he tried to believe it ‘the seat of frost and desolation’, but his imagination saw instead

‘the sun . . . diffusing a perpetual splendour’ and ‘a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered’. It is clear from this that nature, and misperceptions of nature, is a subject closely allied to Shelley’s interest in the masculine projects of Walton and Victor. Inevitably, then, nature will develop into a major concern or ‘theme’ of the novel.

We have discussed the *framing structure* of *Frankenstein*, almost all of which comes to us in the words of *three narrators*. Having studied a sample from each narrator, and considered the relations between them and between them and the reader, we suggest that the effect of this structure is dual and paradoxical:

1. First, we found that the text reveals three distinct characters, and that their voices do vary (with the most marked contrast in ‘voice’ between Victor and the daemon). On the other hand, the use of a small range of ‘touchstone’ terms common to all three narrators (‘benevolent’ and ‘ardour’ are good examples); the fact that no narrator’s story is challenged by another; and the continuous play upon a specific group of themes in all three narratives minimize the narrators’ differences, and *enhance our impression of the unity of the text*. These elements also have the effect of separating the story from its particular teller, so that the story appears to exist independently of the narrators.
2. On the other hand, we have found that the frame structure emphasizes distances and isolation, and is used by Mary Shelley to incorporate *two daring misdirections*: first, from polar exploration to Swiss and German science-fiction; then, by reversing our expectations of the daemon’s speech. So, the frames encourage *uncertainty* in the reader, and enhance the *unpredictability* of the story. As we read the frames towards the centre of the novel, the effect of gradual revelation or ‘journey towards a centre’ heightens authenticity and suspense. Paradoxically, the ability of the daemon’s voice and appeal to *break through the frames* directly to the reader, while *speaking from so far away* both within the elaborate frames and in terms of geographical distance, enhances his power and the authority of his narrative.

### Methods of Analysis

We have approached the analysis of three extracts, using a range of analytical techniques:

- We made a brief summary of the extract, paragraph-by-paragraph, then considered our summary in order to understand the structure of the narrative. This technique revealed, for example, Walton's argumentative purpose and Victor's evasiveness.
- We focused on sentences, analysing the kinds of sentences used, their length, and variety. Using this analysis as a basis for asking further leading questions has brought insights into the narrator's character. For example, we noticed how Walton's sentences lead from depression to delight, or vice versa, as his moods alternate or his language bolsters his hopes; that Victor's reflections are sometimes incomplete; and the logical cause-and-effect reasoning densely worked in to the daemon's style.
- We examined diction – the choice and use of words – and found this a particularly fruitful area of inquiry into our extracts. In particular, we noticed that all three narrators use significant repetition of what we have called 'touchstone' terms, such as Walton's 'delight' and 'fervent', Victor's and the daemon's 'benevolent'; and how Walton's avalanche of first-person pronouns underlines his self-absorption.
- We considered imagery – similes and metaphors – and examined these both critically (e.g., we noticed that the daemon's judicial analogy is flawed, inferior to his contract analogy; and we noticed Walton's mixed metaphor of the soul's 'intellectual eye') and for their interpretation (e.g., we noticed the recurrence of an eating motif in the daemon's threats).
- Finally, we turned our attention to the particular concern of this chapter, asking of each passage:
  - What kind of a narrative is this?
  - What relationships between language, thought about life, and life itself, are represented in this narrative?
  - How does it function as a frame or within the novel's structure?
  - As readers, in what relation do we stand to this narrative and this narrator?

- After analysing the extracts, we surveyed the three analyses we had carried out, and discussed some of the topics that had arisen, seeking to develop our ideas further in a *concluding discussion*. Again, this involved formulating and then pursuing questions about the text, focusing on this chapter's main concern. In other words, we asked questions to explore just how the structure of 'framing narratives' works, and what effects it generates, in *Frankenstein*.

### Suggested Work

Using the approaches and techniques demonstrated in this chapter, analyse *either* Alphonse Frankenstein's letter to Victor (pp. 73–75) *or* Elizabeth's letter to Victor (pp. 191–192). Your analysis should include consideration of the context of each letter (i.e., where Victor reads it, in what circumstances, and how he receives the content) as well as content.

Consider how these letters contribute to the narration of the whole story; whether they present any different personalities as narrators, and how they relate to all three main narratives.

You may then look at Elizabeth's letter to Victor, pp. 65–68, analysing this in a similar manner. This letter is often criticized as an awkward narrative device, a clumsy way for Mary Shelley to introduce the character of Justine Moritz. What do you think?

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