



Life, Learning And Loneliness: A Study Through *Frankenstein*

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Abstract:

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a work of literature that reflects the profound theme of isolation, examining consequences through the experiences of its central characters. This paper aims to explore the depths of isolation portrayed in *Frankenstein* and its significance in shaping the narrative and characters. The paper will analyse the isolation experienced by Victor Frankenstein, the Creature, and Robert Walton, highlighting the ways in which their isolation shapes their identities and actions. By examining the psychological, emotional, and existential dimensions of isolation in the novel, this paper seeks to illuminate Shelley's exploration of human nature, alienation, and the quest for connection in a world filled with isolation and difference. Through a close reading of key passages and themes, this paper aims to offer insights into the enduring relevance of *Frankenstein* as a timeless exploration of the human condition and the dangers of isolation in the pursuit of knowledge and ambition.

Keywords: Isolation, alienation, human condition, ambition

Introduction:

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is more than just a tale of horror and science fiction; it is a profound exploration of human nature, ambition, and the consequences of isolation. The novel traces deeply the theme of isolation, portraying its various forms and the profound effects it has on individuals. Through the experiences of Victor Frankenstein, the creature, and Robert Walton, Shelley examines how isolation can shape identities, influence actions leading to tragic outcomes. Each character experiences isolation in unique and poignant ways, shaping their identities, actions, and ultimate fates. Victor's obsessive pursuit of knowledge leads to his self-imposed seclusion, the Creature's monstrous appearance condemns him to societal rejection, and Walton's ambitious Arctic expedition isolates him geographically and emotionally. This seminar paper aims to explore these depths of isolation, analysing how Shelley uses this theme to comment on the human condition and the dire consequences of severing oneself from society and human connection. By examining the psychological, emotional, and existential dimensions of isolation in *Frankenstein*, this paper seeks to illuminate Shelley's critique of the dangers of unchecked ambition and the essential need for empathy and companionship in a fragmented and often unwelcoming world.

Aims and objectives:

The aims and objectives of this research paper is to provide a very detailed insight into the various aspects of isolation, loneliness, and alienation that is seen or to be found within the novel *Frankenstein*. It will try to shed some light into the prevailing aspects of separation and segregation in the novel.

Research Methodology:

The framework of this paper is analytical and descriptive in nature and the paper follows both primary and secondary sources to justify the issues it raises. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* serves as the primary text; and the secondary sources are comprised of E-resources and other edited books.

Literature Review:

Frankenstein turns out to be one of the most famous exclusive works of Mary Shelley. It comprises of a number of themes of the 19th century British society. It is one of the most worked upon novel and many such interpretations came into existence. Anne K. Mellor's "Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters" (1988) highlights this duality, suggesting that both Victor and the Creature are victims of a broader patriarchal society that isolates and alienates individuals. Another notable observation can be noted in Spivak's "Frankenstein and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), the Creature's isolation can be interpreted as a critique of societal norms that marginalize those who are different, whether due to physical appearance, social status, or other factors.

Analysis:

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a novel comprising of themes that explore the human condition, one of the most prominent being isolation. This theme manifests in various forms, affecting multiple characters and plays a major role in driving the plot forward. Through the experiences of Victor Frankenstein, the Monster, and Robert Walton we can look into the various consequences of isolation evident in the novel.

The character of Victor Frankenstein in Shelley's novel is depicted as a man of science and his goal in life is to follow his dream of understanding the miracles of the world. He spends almost his entire time recreating life in the form of a monster. However, he is not aware of the consequences. In the end Victor spends his remaining time in life trying to destroy the same creation he tried so hard to create. During his period at the university where he makes the experiments, Victor isolates himself from society, and all his time and effort is devoted to the desire of knowledge. At first he lives with his parents as an only child in a perfect family. Over time he adopts a fascination for science and eagerly begins to educate himself. "I was, to a great degree, self-taught with regard to my favourite studies. My father was not scientific, and I was left to struggle with a child's blindness, added to a student's thirst for knowledge." (Shelley 30) Victor leaves his family in his younger years for studies in a different town and this does not seem to have any effect on him at all. He does not have any contact with his family, not even by letter. Any contact with his family takes place on his conditions. Victor's total attention goes to his scientific studies in Ingolstadt. He does not have many friends, and is not tempting to find any. Instead, he locks himself up in his room studying, and is not bothered about being alone.

The reader can understand from the novel that Victor has himself chosen this isolation from people. No one has forced him to a life in solitude. Victor Frankenstein's journey into isolation is self-imposed and begins with his academic pursuits. His obsession with uncovering the secrets of life leads him to isolate himself from his family and friends. Victor's seclusion in his laboratory represents a physical and intellectual isolation as he distances himself from human connections to focus solely on his experiments. This period of intense solitary study marks the beginning of his detachment from society. Likewise, Victor's creation of the Monster marks a turning point in his life, further deepening his isolation. Filled with horror and guilt at what he has created, and his reluctance to share his secret with others, fearing judgment and rejection, traps him in a cycle of loneliness and despair. His self-imposed isolation increases his mental

anguish, leading to a state of guilt and paranoia as can be seen in the lines “I was unable to remain for a single instant in the same place; I jumped over the chairs, clapped my hands, and laughed aloud” (Shelley 55). Despite being surrounded by loved ones, including his fiancé Elizabeth and his best friend Henry Clerval, Victor remains emotionally detached. This detachment prevents him from seeking the comfort and support he desperately needs, ultimately contributing to his tragic downfall.

The creature's isolation begins at the moment of his creation. Abandoned by Victor, the Creature is left alone in a world that views him with fear and disgust. His monstrous appearance ensures that he is physically isolated from human society, as people react to him with violence and rejection which can be seen in the lines “The whole village attacked me, some fled, some attacked me, until grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons” (Shelley 102). This physical isolation forces the Creature to live in the shadows, away from any form of companionship. His attempts to integrate into human society are met with brutal rejections, deepening his sense of alienation. The Creature's isolation leads to profound loneliness and a growing resentment towards his creator and humanity which further fuels his existential crisis, as he struggles with questions of identity without anyone to share his thoughts and feelings with.

Robert Walton, the novel's frame narrator, experiences isolation in the context of his Arctic exploration. His ambitious quest to reach the North Pole isolates him geographically from the rest of humanity. The desolate and harsh environment of the Arctic serves as a backdrop for his loneliness and desire for companionship. Walton's letters to his sister reveal his emotional isolation. Despite his crew's presence, Walton feels a deep sense of loneliness and a yearning for a friend who shares his intellectual passions and ambitions which has been portrayed in the lines “I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me” (Shelley 09). His encounter with Victor Frankenstein offers a brief pause from this isolation, as he finds a comparable spirit in the doomed scientist. Walton's isolation is also intellectual. His lofty aspirations and visionary goals set him apart from those around him, creating a sense of intellectual solitude. His longing for a companion who can understand and share his dreams underscores the theme of isolation in the novel, highlighting the human need for connection and understanding.

Isolation in *Frankenstein* is closely linked to the theme of ambition. Both Victor and Walton are driven by their ambitious pursuits, which lead them to isolate themselves from society. Their quests for knowledge and glory come at the cost of human connection, illustrating the dangers of unchecked ambition and the alienation it can cause. The Monster's isolation, on the other hand, shapes his identity as an outcast and fuels his desire for revenge. The novel underscores the importance of human connection and the detrimental effects of its absence. Victor's refusal to seek support and the creature's inability to find acceptance led to tragic outcomes for both characters while Walton's isolation highlights his introspective nature and his search for meaning in the vast, empty Arctic.

Conclusion:

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* offers a profound exploration of isolation in its various forms. Through the experiences of Victor Frankenstein, the Creature, and Robert Walton, Shelley examines the psychological, emotional, and existential dimensions of isolation. The novel highlights the destructive effects of isolation on the human psyche and underscores the importance of connection and empathy. It depicts how isolation profoundly impacts the lives of Victor Frankenstein, The Creature, and Robert Walton, leaving a trail of devastation and tragedy. Victor's obsessive pursuit of scientific glory leads him to isolate himself from his family and loved ones, ultimately tearing apart his familial bonds and contributing to his psychological deterioration. His refusal to share his burdens and seek support results in the deaths of his brother, wife, and his best friend, highlighting the destructive power of self-imposed isolation. Similarly, The Creature, abandoned by Victor and rejected by society, experiences a deep sense of loneliness and alienation. His physical isolation, as well as emotional and intellectual solitude, fuels his rage and desire for vengeance. The Creature's tragic journey of life reflects the human need for acceptance and companionship, and how the lack of guidance can lead to monstrous outcomes. Likewise, Robert Walton too through his Arctic expedition, embodies the theme of geographic and intellectual isolation. His encounter with Victor serves as a tale, illustrating the outcome of isolation driven by unchecked ambition. Walton's eventual decision to turn back from his quest signifies the recognition of the importance of human connection and the dangers of extreme isolation. Ultimately, *Frankenstein* reveals how isolation, in its various forms, leaves an everlasting mark on the lives of its characters, leading to irreversible consequences. Shelley's exploration of this theme highlights the essential human need for empathy, companionship, and the dangers inherent in severing oneself from these fundamental aspects of the human experience. By delving into the depths of

isolation, *Frankenstein* remains a timeless exploration of the human condition and the dangers of alienation in the pursuit of knowledge and ambition.

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