



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Ahead Of My Time: Madness In Victorian Age

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*Abstract:* Historically, writers like Christopher Marlowe, William Blake, and PB Shelley, were seen as mad or a threat to society because they challenged societal norms and explored taboo subjects, often at great personal cost. Old English Law defines lunacy as, a person who had understanding but by disease, grief or other incidences had lost the use of his reason while still retaining some lucid intervals. Victor Frankenstein, in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818) experiences grief due to the dismissal of his beloved mother. He was continuously denied opportunities to process his grief. His repressed grief and isolation turned him into an ambitious man, perhaps a madman in the eyes of society. Although Victor wasn't a good person or even a human being with humanity towards his creation, Victor was ahead of his time in understanding and creating a human life, and so was Mary Shelley for challenging the "Victorian values" and exploring themes like sexuality, grief, ambition, God and creation. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was ahead of its time. Be it for its scientific approach and being the pioneer of the sci-fi genre but also for commenting on nature vs nurture and forcing the reader to question *whether a monster or a madman is born or created by society.*

*Keywords-* madness, taboo subjects, grief, ambition, Victorian values and nature vs nurture.

### I. Introduction

The Victorian age is denoted by its glory. The glory of the monarch over the nation and overseas with its colonies. Evolution, revolution and invention, all were in the air. Where Christianity dominated the religious landscape, Charles Darwin's *The Theory of Evolution* (1844) challenged the Creator of all and threatened the civilization of Victorian society. Before Darwinism, there was Galvanism which was the generation of electricity by chemical means and causes muscle spasms in the body of the dead. Fascinated by this phenomenon, Mary Shelley took her pen and became the Creator herself, by giving birth to a new genre, a science fiction, a gothic tale, a character and a creature, created from scratch. *Frankenstein* is the story of an ambitious scientist who understood the means of life and decided to curate life himself. He created a creature who was just like him, ahead of its time. It's a tale of two individuals growing up and seeking love and belongingness from the people around them. The trajectory of rejection makes them who they are, a madman and an animal. Even Mary Shelley faced partial rejection for her revolutionary novel for playing God. John Wilson Croker, criticised the novel's lack of moral guidance and described it as 'tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity'.

## II. Research Methodology

This study will take *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818) as the primary source of the study. It will also take the model of Five Stages of Grief by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) into consideration to understand the underlying presence of grief in the novel.

## III. Discussion and Conclusion

“I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous”

Mary Shelley started writing *Frankenstein* at the age of 18 and published it at the age of 20. During this time, Shelley went through a lot in her personal life. The novel projects her insecurities towards motherhood, childbirth and life in general which is well researched about in the past by the critics. There are also scientific and historical influences as well, such as *Galvanism* and *Victorian Values*. Apart from these influences, there is a presence of grief in the novel. Mary Shelley lost her mother and so does the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein. This theme of grief goes on throughout the novel and is overlooked. Victor Frankenstein suffers the loss of his mother at the age of thirteen. Soon after the dismissal of his mother, Victor's father decided to send him off for his education. Victor describes this incident as, “My departure for Ingolstadt, which has been deferred by these events, was now again determined upon. I obtained from my father a respite of some weeks. It appeared to me sacrilege so soon to leave the repose, akin to death, of the house of mourning and to rush into the thick of life. I was new to sorrow, but it did not less alarm me. I was unwilling to quit the sight of those that remained to me; and above all, I desired to see my sweet Elizabeth.” Victor's mention of being “new to sorrow” and wanting to stay a little longer, especially, around the remaining loved ones shows his vulnerable state of mind. He felt he wasn't ready to resume his life and dive straight into the thick of life just yet. His father believed that Victor was to resume his life as soon as possible and fulfil his duties as a man. This also throws light upon the strict gender roles and stereotypes prevailing in the Victorian era, where Elizabeth was expected to stay at home and take after the household duties and Victor was forced to look away from his emotional needs and continue life as a stoic. Time and again, Victor was deprived of the opportunities to come to terms with the death of his mother, to whom he was the closest, which leads Victor to repress his grief.

Upon Victor's departure to Ingolstadt, he explains his emotional state, “ I threw myself into the chaise that was to convey me away and indulge in the most melancholy reflections. I who had ever been surrounded by amiable companions, continually engaged in endeavouring to bestow mutual pleasures, I was now alone. In the university, whither I go, I must be my own protector.” Even upon his arrival, Victor finds himself isolated and alone. He throws himself into the study of Natural Sciences and uses it as a distraction. With this Victor enters the first as well as the second stage of grief, shock and denial. Victor begins to isolate himself further, he spends his days studying and understanding the means of life. He wouldn't eat, moreover, deprive himself of sleep. He distanced himself from his family and refused to respond to their letters. He spent his days buried in books and nights with the dead, “Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel-house.” After understanding the cause and source of life, Victor began to collect skin, bones and limbs from the dead beings and animals. Victor was at the stage of anger, bargaining and depression. He was so keen to bring back a life, a companion who was made by him and for him, who would understand the purpose and cause of Victor. A creature who wouldn't call his ambition “sad trash” like his father did or “madness” like his professor did. Victor created the creature with his own hands. He made him handsome, beautiful like Great God yet he found him hideous when he woke up. The man he saw magnificent a second ago was not hideous to him the moment he opened his eyes. Victor was filled with anger and grief, hate emotions

which manifested into the creation of the creature. The creature was a result of grief from which Victor ran the moment it was alive to face him.

There is a transformation Victor goes through. He says “Remember, I’m not recording the vision of a madman.” to confession to Walton and his friend. Henry that he is unwell, he is becoming mad. This transformation here is of Victor being an individual to seeing himself from the same lens as of the society. This madness is derived from his ambition and that ambition was the result of his repressed grief because he was ought to be a man.

Victor mentions his childhood on various occasions. He mentions it to Walton and the readers several times. He took great pride in discussing his childhood and his relationship with his parents, especially his mother. He had good memories of his childhood yet he would discuss a sense of isolation he felt amongst them which continued as he grew up. He would reason this feeling by reminding himself time and again that he has everything. He has a family who loves him and great friends yet that loneliness wouldn't leave him. He didn't feel understood by them. His mother couldn't understand or see his calibre and his father wouldn't consider his capabilities worth considering. He needed a better companion in his life, hence the creation of a male creature which also brings Victor's sexuality into question. Old English Law defines lunacy as, a person who had understanding but by disease, grief or other incidences had lost the use of his reason while still retaining some lucid intervals. Victor with his repressed grief lost his ability to reason. In his episodes of lunacy or emotional breakdowns, he was dictated by societal norms. He abandoned his creation, and his sanity and began to see himself the way people around him saw. He abandoned his passion for Natural Sciences and did nothing throughout his days but sulk. A sad trash like his father said. He presumed himself to be a menace to society and a madman. When his friend, Henry Clerval visits him, he tells him that he has lost track of life and he is sick, he is becoming mad. Victor began to see himself with the same lens as of the society but with his lucid sense, he thought of his creation and his well-being.

Victor inculcated the same feeling of insolation and lack of belongingness in the creature as he is incapable of giving love and compassion when he himself received none. Victor and the creature are the two sides of the same coin. They both were ahead of their times, they both wanted to be loved and feel belonged in a society where their ambition and capabilities were seen as a threat. They both were virtues by nature but the victims of society. One turns into a madman and the other into an animal, a monster. They were benevolent by nature but nurture, a misery, made them a fiend.

#### IV. Reference

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