

**Course Name: The Novel and Change**

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**Lecture 17**

Frankenstein - Part 6

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. We will start with a new essay today on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, which is a novel we are reading at the moment. And the essay which should be on the screen is by Josephine Johnston and very appropriately titled Traumatic Responsibility, Victor Frankenstein as Creator and Causality. So we can find how responsibility, as we've discussed already, along with accountability are the very, very important themes. These are the important themes in a novel. in terms of looking at the relationship between ethics and science, between accountability and science and what happens if science becomes reckless and risky and produces precarity, right. So an irresponsible science, a science which does not take into factor or doesn't factor in accountability as its moral intellectual principle. So this particular essay by Josephine Johnston delves in this philosophically and this is one of the two essays we will study for the rest of the time we will spend on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. So we will just dive in right away and this should be on your screen. A rich theme running through Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is responsibility, a straightforward even didactic way didactic means preachy so it is almost telling us in a you know teacher kind of a way almost in a didactic preachy framework the novel chronicles the devastating consequences of for an inventor and those who loves of his utter failure to anticipate the harm that can result from raw unchecked scientific curiosity So if you remember in one of the earlier classes we talked about how Frankenstein maybe compared from the position of science to let us say the entire moral dilemma about the atomic bomb, the nuclear weapons which created similar sense of uncertainty, moral ambivalence etc. because there was a sense of euphoria

around creating this super scientific product but at the same time It was also clear that this is a product which can be very quickly appropriated for evil use. And there have been instances in human history where nuclear ammunition has posed danger to humanity, a great risk to humanity. The novel not only explores the responsibility that Victor Frankenstein has for the destruction caused by his creation but also examines the responsibility he owes to him. So, there are two planes of responsibility over here.

One is how he becomes responsible for the creation that he does and for the all the destruction which the the quote-unquote creator, his progeny goes on to wreck. The second responsibility which is more complex in some ways is the responsibility he has as a parent to his, the subject that he has created, right. And what we see in this essay and also obviously in the novel is how both responsibilities are colossal failures. In both instances, Victor Frankenstein ends up being a colossal disaster. He fails as a responsible scientist equally and perhaps more problematically he also fails as a responsible parent. So, responsibility for the creation and responsibility to the creature. So both these odours are equally aligned to each other and obviously they are dramatized in the plot of the novel. The creature is a new being with emotions and desires and dreams that it quickly learns cannot be satisfied by humans, who are repulsed by his appearance and terrified of his brute strength. So, he is very much an uncanny outsider. So, the creature in Frankenstein is an order of alterity, alterity being the whole idea of the other, right. So, one can read Frankenstein in many ways, let us say through racial xenophobia, through racial discrimination. He is a political other, he is a biological other, so the entire novel may be seen as dramatization and the tragic consequences of alterity, of othering, right. So he cannot integrate, he finds very quickly that despite being a rational creature, despite being a sentient creature with emotions and passions and cognitive mechanisms, he will never be accepted as part of the human order, as part of the humankind and that obviously makes him even more violent. So that constant discrimination that he faces, a constant othering that he is subjected to makes him very violent and then it leads on to more destruction in the novel. So, at some point in the novel, you remember the creature will come to Victor Frankenstein requesting and then demanding that he makes a female companion with the promise that they will go and live separately and will not perturb humanity ever again and Victor obviously does not pay heed to his request.

He is about to make it but then he changes his mind, he destroys the female creature and which then creates more trouble and more violence in the novel. So the creature comes to Victor pleading and then demanding that he create a female companion with whom he can experience peace and love. While Victor was grappling intellectually and practically with the implications of being responsible for both for and to the creature. He is also experiencing responsibility as a devastating physical and emotional state. In this way, Mary Shelley raises a third aspect of responsibility, its impact on the self. So, there are three planes of responsibility over here. A, responsibility for the destruction caused by his experiment, responsibility to the creature that he has created and responsibility in terms of its impact on the self, right. So, how he is responsible for his own self. So, there are some philosophical notions and responsibility over here which we can maybe skip and then the last bit in this page which is page 201. In Frankenstein, Mary raises questions about who is and is not capable of moral responsibility. So, again the whole philosophy of responsibility it necessitates or it entails or it presupposes a very sophisticated rational human mind. It is only if you have that sense of rationality will be able to create a sense of accountability which will then produce guilt, which will then produce the failure of accountability, the failure of responsibility and so on and so forth. So, model responsibility is studied in the essay among other things also through a cognitive lens, right. So, it requires the whole idea of who is able to feel responsible and who is able to feel irresponsible. So, the feeling of responsibility, the feeling of irresponsibility, so these are connected to certain cognitive markers, you know, moral markers as well as cognitive markers. At the beginning of the book, she introduces a protagonist who appears capable of being held morally responsible for his actions and an antagonist, the creature who does not. But as the story develops, she raises questions about which of the two is a truly rational actor, Victor, who is addled by ambition, fever and guilt, or the creature who acquires immersion, language and an intellect. So, If you remember in one of the earlier classes we talked about how the creator and vector of Frankenstein may be seen as alter egos of each other. So, the distinction between the two in terms of moral abilities, intellectual abilities, rational abilities begin to get very problematized.

The borderlines are not very distinguishable. They actually become quite porous and so the whole idea of the other and the self they begin to get merged. And of course, we also entertained a reading, if you remember, where the grotesqueness of the creature, which can be classified, which has been classified as a monster very problematically, may also be seen as the projection of Victor's own monstrosity, of Victor's own forms of violence and of his own externalization, if you will, of what is happening inside his brain, what is happening inside his mind. So, the monster is a constant and grotesque and spectacular reminder for Victor of his own inner, you know, inner being, inner self, inner grotesqueness, ok. So, that becomes a very important reading, which is why the third order of responsibility also becomes important. To what extent is Victor responsible for his own self, right, in terms of how he projects his self. Right. So, Victor experiences, and this is the paragraph, the final paragraph on your screen. Victor experiences the two basic meanings of the word responsibility. He creates a creature, he causes it to exist. So, he is literally, you know, he fathers it, he authorizes it. And again, we can have an interesting analogy between this and let us say creating a robot or creating a very sophisticated artificial intelligence program which can run on its own. So, the contemporary connections can be very, very productively made. So he creates a creature, he causes it to exist, and therefore he has at least some responsibility for what the creature goes on to do. As a creature's maker, Victor also has both a duty to others to keep them safe from his creation and, Mary seems to be saying, a duty to his creation to ensure that his existence is worthwhile. Right, so there are two things over here.

So, one is the responsibility or the duty to keep safe the creature and others safe from his own creation and at the same time a duty to his creation to ensure that his existence is worthwhile. So, you bring to life a creature, an organism, so you are responsible for the organism's action. But equally you are also responsible for the comfort of the organism. It is almost like parenting a child. You parent a child, you bring a child up, you raise a child. So obviously as a parent you are responsible and accountable for the child's action.

At the same time you are also responsible for the comfort and well-being of the child and Victor obviously fails on both counts which we will see in this essay and obviously in the

novel. So, in a very straightforward way, Victor causes the monster to exist. So, he unleashes monstrosity and you know the different ways you can look at monstrosity over here, one in a very physiognomic, anatomical way you know the organism is misshapen from a human perspective. So, again the sense of othering is there happening over here. At the same time his monstrosity is escalated by his constant experience of humiliation, this constant experience of discrimination and othering, the fact that he is constantly pushed away from all human forms. He builds him freely and with a hope, indeed the intention that he will come to life. This creation is no accident. Although many factors can arguably interfere with attributions of responsibility, including compulsion and delusion, there is no suggestion that Victor does not intend to make the creature, despite the frenzied way he goes about it. So, it's a very important point because one cannot exonerate Victor by saying, well, this was just an unhappy accident. Obviously, it was a very well thought out process. It was part of his long ambition. It was part of his long thought out plan, design that he had in mind. So it was through a very, very systemic process that he creates this, you know, quote unquote monster. So obviously one cannot decouple him from his creation this way, right. So, it is very much a well thought out scientific agenda and hence the whole experiment, the whole laborious way that he goes about it, stitching the limbs, stitching the things together and we talked about the whole stitching thing also in the introduction, how the entire novel may also be seen as an analogy, as some kind of a parallel analogy with the way Victor brings together different forms and tries to create this organism which then obviously becomes out of control, spirals out of control. Indeed, Victor anticipates his future responsibility for the existence of the creature with pleasure and excitement, even triumph. A new species would bless me as its creator and so many happy and excellent natures owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.

So, there is this innate hubris that Victor has at the beginning of the novel, which we have discussed already the hubris and hamartia, how the hubris or the sense of, you know, excessive pride also causes Victor to create this fatal error of judgment through which the entire, you know, the entire tragedy, the violence of the novel get unleashed, right. So, there is an innate sense of superiority that Victor was harboring away that no father would be as proud of the child as I would be. No father would be more closely connected in a

kinship way to the child that I would be. Because also remember, this creation doesn't require a mother. This creation doesn't require a woman. It was entirely a masculinist male process through which one man is creating another man. And that is a kind of scientific process that Victor wants to not just introduce but also to systematize. And we can see how the ambition over here, among other things, is also to do away with the woman. So, right, so there is this innate violence against women embedded in the experimental victim, right. So, that violence against women gets externalized later with so many women are attacked, so many female bodies are attacked and violated and you know absolutely defamed and defaced which then shocks Victor, right? But the psychological violence that he harbors in terms of creating this super scientific system, which doesn't require a female presence anymore, which doesn't require a female agency anymore, is itself quite violent in quality. So, there is that, I mean, that psychological scientific violence, which is subliminal, embedded in the experiment, it gets externalized in different forms, in more dramatic, more spectacular forms subsequently in the novel. Victor's error in failing to think harder about the potential replications of his work. So again, he doesn't anticipate the violence, he doesn't anticipate the entire spiraling out that happens later. Although he says that he hesitated for a long time about how to use the astonishing power to bestow animation upon lifeless matter, this hesitation is due to the many technical hurdles that he needs to overcome rather than to any concern for the questionable results of success. So, the hesitation over here has more to do with the technical logistic you know issues rather than any moral issues, right. So, he is thinking in terms of resources rather than in terms of responsibility. He considers the good that might come from his discovery. It might lead to development of a method for bringing the dead back to life. But he fails to consider the future of his initial experimental creation. Although he is aware that a single-minded pursuit of his scientific goals is throwing his life out of balance, he utterly fails to consider the possibility that a form he has stitched together and will soon animate may go on to cause harm to anyone, including Victor himself.

So it is failure to imagine the future. This is a very fundamental failure in Frankenstein. And again, it can be connected back to a cognitive failure, the failure to anticipate the future, the failure to imagine the future, right and that comes in a certain sense from a

failure to empathize, you know the empathy crisis in the novel. So he is entirely self-absorbed, he is entirely and almost industrially oriented towards himself and in the process he fails to see what is outside of himself, right and then in the process he creates this creature, this organism who constantly goes through a process of othering, right and then it becomes a monster and violent and wrecks a series of violent actions on other people around him including Victor's own family, right. We might compare Victor and this is a contemporary comparison that the essay is making and we have also made this constantly and consistently. We might compare Victor to some modern scientists who have stopped their work to consider its potential for harm such as those who gathered at Asilomar in the mid-1970s to consider the implications of research on recombinant DNA or those who recently called for a moratorium of germline gene editing. So different kinds of different instances in history where scientists have paused, where scientists have stopped their work to think of the moral implications, the social, ethical implications of the work and in the process, you know, stopped or at least hit a pause button to the different experiments they were doing, right. So that again that can be compared to what does not happen in Victor Frankenstein and Mary Shelley's novel, right. Victor's failure to thoroughly anticipate responsibility, to consider that there might be both upsides and downsides to his technical achievements, is his downfall.

As soon as the creature opens its dull yellow eye, Victor is filled with breathless horror and disgust. So, the creature becomes an abject creature. So he's immediately rejected on being born. So his moment of birth and his moment of rejection are almost simultaneous at a very temporal level. He opens his dull yellow eye, and he's immediately rejected by his creator. So the moment of abandonment happens exactly in the moment of inception in the novel, right? He flees, initially so agitated, he's unable to stand still, eventually falling into a nightmare-filled sleep in which he sees his fiancée Elizabeth first in a bloom of hell and then as a rotting corpse. So, this is what happens in the novel as well. The Elizabeth, Victor's love interest The one who goes on to marry eventually is killed by the creature later on. But Victor seems to have a premonition of it when he runs away after creating this creature and you know he's so full of disgust, he's frenzied and feverish and he goes on to a fever-induced sleep and in that fever-induced sleep he has a nightmare where he sees

Elizabeth first happy and healthy and then as a rotting corpse, as a dead body. Victor is woken by the creature but escapes again. He is unable to face his creation and is unprepared for the creature's independent existence. Now this should tell us something because we talked about how the creature becomes an immediate, an instant projection of Victor, a mirror image if you will, which makes him uncomfortable, which makes him agitated, which makes him very, very unsettled because he gets to see the inner workings of his brain in a grotesque form or the grotesqueness or the gruesome quality of his inner brain in the form of the monster. So, he runs away, he doesn't want to you know encounter it, he doesn't want to confront it and his lack of confrontation, this inability or the failure to confront what is created is the beginning of the failure of accountability in the novel. The fact that he chooses to run away, he doesn't want to face it, doesn't want to encounter it and his inability to face his creation is exactly you know It dials back to his unpreparedness as a scientist, the fact that he did not prepare himself to anticipate the future, anticipate the consequences of his creation, right? As the story progresses, Victor's initial emotional reactions to seeing the creature come to life, disgust and horror are substantiated by the creature's actions. So the creature, you know, creates, does a series of actions in a course of novel which brings to life the whole idea of Victor's initial disgust. So those things are instantiated, exemplified, corroborated by the creature's actions. But also, one has to remember that the part of the violence that a creature unleashes is also coming from being discriminated, being humiliated, being constantly othered by all the humans around him. Victor learns that the creature has killed his young brother, William, whose death is then blamed on a family friend, Justine. But Victor knows the truth. So, there's some dramatic irony over here.

The characters in the novel, some of them don't know the truth. The audience knows the truth and only one character or two characters know the truth. So there is some inequality about knowledge distribution in the novel which is a classic trope of dramatic irony which happens in the novel in a very tragic way. So his own brother gets killed and a family friend Justine who has been with the family for a number of years, the most loyal, kind, compassionate person, she is suspected of causing this murder and she is sentenced to you know very, very severe punitive judgment, right. But Victor knows the truth but he is

unable to come up with it, you know to utter it. He understands that he would be implicated in her execution if she was convicted as well as in the murder of his brother. So, essentially Victor is responsible for the murder of his own brother and also for the capital punishment meted out in the most unfair way to his family friend Justine and both of which are consequences of his action. The result of my curiosity and lawless devices would cause the death of two of my fellow beings. He suffers greatly under this guilt - the tortures of the accused did not equal mine. She was sustained by innocence, but the fangs of remorse tore my bosom and would not forego their hold. But he does nothing to intervene. The girl is unjustly convicted. I, not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer. So the sense of accountability comes back to Victor in great scaled up version, right. But also look at a sense of narcissism here as well. If you look at the quotation that he is comparing his own trauma, his own guilt, his own pain and he is saying that well this is superior to the one that who has been sentenced to death which is a bit absurd because here is a woman Justine who has done absolutely nothing wrong and who has been sentenced to death and yet Victor seems to think that his pain is more than Justine because he thinks Justine is at least absolved by her or sustained by her innocence, while I am constantly consumed by my guilt. But that itself tells you something about the narcissism inherent in Victor Frankenstein even when he is comparing himself with a person about to be sentenced to death. He seems to think that his pain is more supreme, his pain is more superior compared to hers because of the fact that she is innocent and he is not, right. So even in his self-flagellation and guilt and remorse and repentance there is this constant presence of narcissism, the constant presence of superiority which was initially what had been the backbone of his super scientific ambition, super scientific project which was his ultimate hubris. Victor continues to hold himself responsible for both the existence of the horrifying creature and the creature's deadly deeds.

He spends his remaining days on Earth chasing the creature across the Arctic, intending to kill him. But in his understanding of his responsibility, he is alone. No one else in the novel sees Victor as anything but a causality of unspeakable misfortune. Although he is at one time accused of murdering his friend Henry Clerval, who is killed by the creature, that charge is eventually dropped. Ironically, as Victor leaves the prison, an observer remarks,

he may be innocent of the murder, but he has certainly a bad conscience. Now, this is a very interesting point in the novel where, you know, an observer who is hardly an important figure in the novel suddenly seems to have a glimpse into truth, suddenly seems to see through Victor's brain and say, you know, He may be exempted, he may be released from the guilt, but there is something deeply wrong and rotten in his conscience that is suddenly revealed before an almost unimportant person. And this is kind of a metalepsis in the novel, where the sudden interruption of someone coming in from outside, making a comment and then going back, acts through the depth of the novel, the narrative depth, the ontological depth of the narrative in the novel. Even Robert Walton, the explorer who encounters Victor on the ice and to whom Victor narrates his entire story, judges him to be noble, gentle and wise, right. So, all the people around Victor, all the world around him, Robert Walton who is the ultimate narrator of the novel, the Chinese box narrative style, he thinks very highly of Victor and considers him as a wise man, a noble man, a noble sufferer in a very Hamlet kind of a way. But like Hamlet, Victor too is deeply narcissistic, like Hamlet he is also manipulative, he is also selfish and he also has a tremendous sense of self-pity through which he makes other people believe in his nobility, right. So that there is some interesting parallel to be drawn over there. It is left to Victor's own conscience and to the reader to assess the extent to which he should be held responsible for the creature's deeds.

On this question, Victor is resolved. Although he allows that he did not intend to create a creature capable of such evil, he continues to hold himself responsible for the creature's existence and for the deaths the creature causes and dies. believing himself duty bound towards his fellow creature to destroy his creations. The widow's death ultimately is a physical example of his failure as a parent, failure as a scientist and a failure to take any responsibility. So the sense of responsibility continues in the essay and especially on his deathbed when Victor says that you know he has this moment where he says well I also have responsibility towards him. If you remember the beginning of the essay, we said there are three orders of responsibility over here. One, being responsible for you know the creature's actions, second being responsible to the creature for the creature's comfort and well-being and thirdly most complexly being responsible you know to his own self and of course we can see how the creature and Victor may be seen as alter egos of each other. So

it really becomes a very complex psychological existential dilemma. So on his deathbed, Victor also acknowledges that he is not just responsible for the creature, but also responsible to him. I was bound towards him to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. So, again, this failure as a parent that I failed to give him happiness and well-being. The creature himself makes his argument forcefully when he confronts Victor in the mountains overlooking the Chamonix Valley. The creature relates all that has transpired since Victor abandoned him. He has learned to find food and shelter. By closely observing a human family, he has learned about emotion and relationships as well as how to speak and read. Now, This is a point in the novel where we realize how supremely intelligent the creature is, how you can just pick up knowledge, pick up language, pick up morality, pick up rationality simply by overhearing a conversation, simply by eavesdropping in a slightly voyeuristic way into conversations with family and he is sort of picking up all his knowledge, all his data all his emotional complexity just by listening.

So, that obviously goes to show how sophisticated his brain is and that makes him a super creature in some sense, a super sentient creature, a super intelligent creature, right? It's almost like a very, very complex and sophisticated AI program which can pick up data, pick up intelligence, pick up information very, very quickly and effortlessly. By finding a collection of books, he learns the rudiments of human society and history. Yet in each attempt to engage with humans, the creature is disastrously rejected, sometimes even attacked. He learns that humans are repulsed by him. So, this constant experience of other people getting repelled by him and also getting attacked, that shapes the violence in the creature's mental makeup. And obviously he is physically superior, so he is more directly able to carry out acts of violence. Concluding that humans will never accept him into the mortal community he comes to see humans as the enemy. So you know once he experiences xenophobia he creates the other as well. So, humans have made him as other so he ends up making humans the other as well in the end and then he decides not to have any compassion for humans. He now lays his pain and loneliness on Victor's feet. So, the sense of being constantly abandoned and alienated, he goes back to his creator and demands, you know, a female creature, but also he attacks his creator for being heartless, for being absolutely,

having no sense of moral responsibility for being a poor parent, a bad parent. And this is what he says, unfeeling, heartless creator. So he's blaming the Creator for making him intelligent. He's blaming the Creator for giving him the attributes to pick up knowledge, pick up emotions, pick up pain, pick up passions and then the same gifts that he is endowed with will alienate him further, right. The same gifts that the same intellect, the same rationality, the same cognitive toolkit that he has, that a creator has given him will make him suffer more. So, in a way he is blaming the creator for making him so supreme, so for making him so perfect. So as I mentioned at some point before if you remember the the borderline between sublimity and monstrosity in the novel is very thin, very porous, very, very blurred, right. And of course, then comes the dramatic moment in the novel where he implores and then demands Victor Frankenstein make a female creature for him, right. Of course, Victor doesn't do it in the end and then he goes back and attacks Elizabeth, Victor's fiancée as a form of retribution because Victor in the middle of creating the female creature you know destroys the creature physically destroys the creature, mutilates her. Again, one more instance of the attack on the female body, right, which is constantly happening in the novel. So, the violence meted out to the female subject, the violence meted out to the female body is a constant theme in the novel. And then obviously the violence escalates other forms of violence and the monster in this act of retribution kills another woman. So, so many women become collateral damage in this male pursuit of excellence and perfections and sublimity, right. So, there is that very, very scathing feminist critique which comes in. To assuage his loneliness, rage and pain, the creature demands that Victor create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. So the succour and sympathy that it does not get from other humans. So he demands that Victor makes a female who will be his companion.

The creature tries to reason with Victor. Oh my creator, make me happy. Let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit. Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing. Do not deny me my request. So he wants reciprocity of emotions and he figures out the only way he can get it is through a female form. Although Victor's sympathies are stirred by the creature's story and his plea for companionship, Victor immediately refuses out of a sense of responsibility to protect the world from wickedness.

Now, here is where the sense of responsibility really gets fractured because on one hand this could be seen as a responsible act. Victor doesn't want to create another creature, another potential monster which can do a lot of damage to humanity. So in that sense he's being a responsible scientist. In another sense, he is being supremely irresponsible because he is absolutely denying the well-being and comfort and companionship of his creation. So, in that sense, he is being extremely irresponsible, right. So, this interplay of responsibility and irresponsibility, you know, gets dramatized, gets dramatized in this point in the novel. By having an inventor create a sentient being, in particular one whose intellect and emotions rival or surpass those of a supposed protagonist, Mary sharpens the point about the responsibility that we might owe to our creations. Parents understand this point, and in many ways Victor is placed in the role of a parent, albeit one who rejects and abandons his child. So, Victor is very much the abandoning parent. So, the child is born and the child is symbolically and literally abandoned and the parent despairs. It is like these police cases where an infant is abandoned because the parent does not want the infant anymore, right. So, it is that scale of irresponsibility, that scale of unfairness that the creature is subjected to from the very moment of his birth. And so most scientists working to create new or modified life forms carry a responsibility to their creations.

It is not just enough to say that we are responsible for our creation but from a scientific perspective it is also important equally to say that we are responsible to our creation. So, in that Victor is a colossal failure as well. We can take the point even further. A sense of responsibility can be experienced by anyone who pours time and energy into a project, even if that project does not result in a new life form. We can legitimately speak about feeling an obligation to our work, right. So the whole idea of work, knowledge, project, experiment also becomes some kind of an organism to which the scientist must be responsible and accountable for. Right. So, responsibility as an experiential category. So, till this point we are looking at responsibility as a moral category, responsibility as a rational category, but how about responsibility as an experiential category, as an experience. One of the most striking aspects of Mary's treatment of responsibility is a depiction his emotional and physical tone. Before Victor gains any insight into the deadly consequences of his scientific work or the onerous duties he has thereby acquired, he

experiences responsibility as an emotional and physical state, so the experiential corporeal sense of responsibility. At the very moment he animates the creation, his creation, The beauty of the dream vanished and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. So again, there's almost like a visceral gut feeling of rejection comes to Victor and that horror and disgust that becomes in a way some kind of a corporeal irresponsibility and the irresponsibility which is created out of that moment is a very physical sense of abandoning the object, right, the physical abandonment of the object.

So, the irresponsibility over here becomes a visceral category, an experiential, visceral, corporeal category. He obviously abandons it physically and he escapes. He runs from the room, paces back and forth, unable to compose my mind to sleep. He becomes like almost a hyper-visceral, hyper-embodied state of arousal, awakening and disgust. And then, obviously, he falls into a slumber which is equally disturbing, equally frenzied, equally nightmarish, where he has this terrible, horrible, dark dream of his fiancée being absolutely you know, beaten to death and then, you know, appearing as a rotting corpse, the most disturbing image. He falls into a sleep filled with nightmares, portending the death of his fiancée and wakes in a cold sweat with his limbs convulsing, right. So, again the convulsion, the absolute agitation, the physical corporeal visceral agitation that Victor was going through gives a new dimension to responsibility over here, a more corporeal dimension. He goes outside and by chance meets his friend, Henry Clerval, who notices his agitated mood and then spends several months nursing Victor through a nervous fever during which the form of the monster on whom I had bestowed existence was forever before my eyes. And I raved incessantly concerning him, right? So he has this series of nightmares, series of very deep, dark, feverish episodes where the image that he has seen

He cannot unsee it anymore. It is an image of horror, the image of abjection, the image of absolute terror, right, and that is something which is stuck to him and it is in a very cognitive, visceral, almost skin-like way, right, and he cannot get rid of it, right. Victor recovers from this first episode but his recovery is short-lived and we see a series of violence which is meted out especially against women. As the creature kills his family and friends, Victor grapples with the realization that he is responsible for the existence of the

creature and to a certain extent is therefore responsible for the creature's deeds. His grief at the death of little William and then of Henry are compounded and tainted by his guilt at the role he has played in the deaths. He cannot sleep and his physical health declines. His concerned father implores him to move beyond his grief and re-enter the world. For excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment, or even the discharge of daily usefulness, without which no man is fit for society. So again, he moves into being a post-utility subject. He cannot function anymore. And his father implores him to be, you know, re-rationalized and, you know, gives him this injunction against excessive sorrow, excessive emotion because he is becoming useless. And the sense of utility is important from being a very, very, you know, industrial, you know, industrious scientist who is obviously creating a new world order. Victor goes back and declines into, you know, something, almost degenerates into a post-utility subject, right, someone who is of no use to society anymore. But Victor was unable to respond. I should have been the first to hide my grief, to console my friends, if remorse had not mingled its bitterness with my other sensations.

So, remorse, guilt, the failure, the absolute failure of creating the subject, his desired subject, all begin to consume Victor over here. As the story progresses, Victor continues to suffer emotionally and physically. His family and friends are alarmed and try to help him. But Victor cannot be reached. He withdraws from the company, floating aimlessly on a boat on the lake, unable to find peace. He travels to England ostensibly to see the world before settling down in marriage, but in reality, to build another creature. He describes his time as two years of exile. Again, the sense of othering is happening here as well. So see, notice the parallels between Victor's life and the creature's life. Both are being othered. And to a large extent, Victor's othering is a self-imposed othering. It's authorized by himself. And he bemoans his inability to enjoy the journey or the people he meets on his way. He describes the visit to Oxford, noting that he enjoyed the scene and yet my enjoyment was embittered both by the memory of the past and the anticipation of the future. I'm a blasted tree, the bolt has entered my soul, and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit what I shall soon cease to be, a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity, pitiable to others, and abhorrent to myself. So the entire idea of self-revulsion, a form of othering,

an experiential othering which is imposed by himself, all become dramatized in this point in the novel. As the book concludes, Victor lay dying in Walton's boat. So, the death of Victor at the end is the ultimate, you know, abandonment, the ultimate failure of his responsibility. He's not even, he doesn't succeed in killing the monster, killing the creature because that would have been the closure to his life and he fails to find closure. The explorer and the reader are left in no doubt that what has killed him. When the creature boards aboard and sees a newly dead Victor, he claims responsibility for his death. Notice how the responsibility is reversed in the end.

When the creature comes, he holds himself responsible for Victor's death. And in taking responsibility, the creature also humanizes himself and elevates himself and sublimates himself into a moral category, into a moral creature, right? So that moment of accepting responsibility for his father's death, for his creator's death also elevates the creature into a higher moral stature in the novel. So that also becomes some kind of a strategic form of sublimation, sublimating into a different higher level. That is also a victim, the Creator exclaims, I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all that lovest. Yet it is not only the loss of his family and friends that destroys Victor, but also the guilt and remorse that came with being the one who so naively created the creature and gave him life. So, what we can see? the conclusion in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and again the essay concludes and summarizes that three aspects of responsibility, Victor's responsibility for the deadly actions committed by his creature and the threat the creature's existence poses to his family, Victor's fear, the entire world, Victor's responsibility to his creation, you know the fact that he is unable to give him well-being and comfort for the creature's well-being and you know welfare and the consequences of his weighty responsibility for Victor both physically and emotionally. So, there is this gothic horror element in the novel. The plot is fantastical, the scenery dramatic and the hero doomed. But it is also a cautionary tale with a serious message about scientists and engineers' social responsibility. So Mary Shelley conveys a concern that unchecked scientific enthusiasm can cause unanticipated harm. So the fact that he fails to imagine or anticipate the consequences of his action, that becomes an intellectual failure, a moral failure. For Victor, scientific curiosity threatens the integrity of his family and disrupts his ability to engage with nature and enter into relationships.

So, the whole idea of the whole fact that the ecosystem around him gets destroyed, his kinship system around him gets destroyed is a corroboration of the fact that it is absolute failure to anticipate responsibility, anticipate the consequences of his actions. Lastly, the reader is left to wonder whether the story could have unfolded differently if Victor were to have behaved more responsibly. So, that is an open-endedness that we can think about. What if Victor were more responsible? What if the creature he created was more reined in, was a more suitable creature, quote unquote suitable creature which fit in the human scale? Might he have anticipated the brute strength of his creation and decided not to create it? Or might he have altered his plan so that our creature would be less powerful and less horrifying or less terrifying? Rather than abandoning the creature, might he have stepped into his parental role and worked to ensure the creature's happy existence? Mary does not tell us what Victor should have done differently. That is a reflective work that we readers must do as we consider our own responsibility to and for our modern-day creations. And lastly, the third responsibility is on our self. So this novel becomes a cautionary novel, a morality tale. dressed in a superficial Gothic furniture, a Gothic landscape. But deep inside, it's an extremely modern tale as well. And it keeps finding its resonance in a very diachronic way across generations, across different points of historical time, across different scientific epochs. And in many ways, it is deeply and very uniquely resonant in a post-digital, post-algorithmic and post-bioscientific artificial intelligence world which we inhabit and internalize today. So, with that we end this particular essay on Mary Shelley's Victor on Frankenstein. We will have one more essay which we will read in the subsequent sessions and then we will wind up with a text and move on to a new text. So I will see you again in the next class with another essay on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Thank you for your attention.