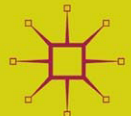


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Mary Shelley

Frankenstein

Nicholas Marsh



Mary Shelley: Frankenstein

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Mary Shelley: Frankenstein

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For Doctors Barthelemy, Caillard, Perret
and Bahnini, in recognition of their services
to English Literature

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General Editor's Preface

This series is dedicated to one clear belief: that we can all enjoy, understand and analyse literature for ourselves, provided we know how to do it. How can we build on close understanding of a short passage, and develop our insight into the whole work? What features do we expect to find in a text? Why do we study style in so much detail? In demystifying the study of literature, these are only some of the questions the *Analysing Texts* series addresses and answers.

The books in this series will not do all the work for you, but will provide you with the tools, and show you how to use them. Here, you will find samples of close, detailed analysis, with an explanation of the analytical techniques utilised.

At the end of each chapter there are useful suggestions for further work you can do to practise, develop and hone the skills demonstrated and build confidence in your own analytical ability.

An author's individuality shows in the way they write: every work they produce bears the hallmark of that writer's personal 'style'. In the main part of each book we concentrate therefore on analysing the particular flavour and concerns of one author's work, and explain the features of their writing in connection with major themes. In Part II, there are chapters about the author's life and work, assessing their contribution to developments in literature; and a sample of critics' views are summarised and discussed in comparison with each other.

Some suggestions for further reading provide a bridge towards further critical research.

Analysing Texts is designed to stimulate and encourage your critical and analytic faculty, to develop your personal insight into the author's work and individual style, and to provide you with the skills and techniques to enjoy at first hand the excitement of discovering the richness of the text.

A Note on Editions

Frankenstein was published in 1818 with a short preface written by Percy Bysshe Shelley. In 1831, Mary Shelley revised the novel for Colburn and Bentley's 'standard novels' series. The author carried out some extensive re-writing, particularly in the early chapters dealing with Frankenstein's childhood and upbringing; and she added her 'Introduction' explaining how the idea for *Frankenstein* came to her.

Critics and teachers differ as to which text they prefer, and there are a large number of editions available. In this book we have chosen to refer to the 1831 text, and all our references are to the Penguin Classics edition (ed. Maurice Hindle) revised in 2003. The advantage of this edition is that Appendix I gives a 'Select Collation of the Texts of 1831 and 1818', enabling readers to check the differences between the two texts. Readers can then judge for themselves both what Mary Shelley changed and which version they prefer.

Introduction

It is difficult to approach *Frankenstein* without preconceptions: the name 'Frankenstein' alone makes such an ubiquitous figure in popular culture that we cannot hear or read it without picturing an image from a film, and without activating our own particular reaction to 'horror' films or literature. In her 1831 Preface, Mary Shelley claims that she sought a story to 'speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart'.¹ So *Frankenstein* comes to the modern reader, billed as a 'chiller' and surrounded by unreliable assumptions about its content, derived from film or hearsay. We start by acknowledging all this baggage, in the hopes we can then set it aside, and approach the text itself in a spirit of open-minded inquiry.

Partly because of its celebrated position in popular culture, and partly because of the extraordinary circumstances in which it was born, *Frankenstein* has also attracted a particular kind of criticism. There exists a plethora of theories and interpretations, psychoanalytical, feminist, anthropological, historicist and so on. For example, Margaret Homans suggests that 'the novel concerns a woman writer's anxieties about bearing children, about generating bodies that would have the power to displace or kill the parent',² and develops the view that Mary Shelley criticizes 'interference' in childbirth by 'a masculine economy', but does so involuntarily because it is 'a criticism written in her own blood'.³ Joseph Kestner comments on the scene in which Frankenstein corrects and augments Walton's notes: 'the men thus share the pen/penis, and the act of writing, like the act of narrating through the

mise en abyme, becomes a narcissistic and onanistic gesture'.⁴ Other theories connect Mary Shelley's creation with her father, William Godwin; or as a veiled critique of her husband, Percy Shelley; or as a reaction to the death of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft; or as an embodiment of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, a comment on the Industrial Revolution, or a reaction to the French Revolution. The two examples quoted suffice to show that *Frankenstein* critics are often engaged in an effort to explain. Implicitly, there seems to be a vein of disbelief behind many criticisms: a disbelief that can be expressed by the question Mary Shelley herself asks in her 1831 'Introduction': 'How I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?' (F 5). Attempting to answer this question, critics tend to explain the book in ways that move the focus away from the text itself. Are we reading about *Frankenstein*, or psychoanalysis of Frankenstein the character, or psychoanalysis of Frankenstein the real person he would have been had he not been a character, or Mary Shelley's biography, or psychoanalysis of Mary Shelley, or even psychoanalysis of Percy Shelley?

This is not to denigrate the criticism that has been written – far from it. As we will find in Chapter 8, the wide variety of theories *Frankenstein* has attracted make the criticism particularly rich, and provide an equally wide variety of illuminating insights. However, the aim of this book is different. In *Part 1, Analysing Frankenstein*, we intend to focus on how the text works: how the story is told, why it is so gripping and so exceptionally rich in implication; and, why it is such an intense and apparently unified reading experience. We will choose short extracts for detailed analysis, beginning with a close focus on the style and narrative framework. As our knowledge of the text grows, we will increasingly be able to discuss the significance of *Frankenstein*, building our own ideas on firm foundations. The final chapter in *Part 1* sets out the conclusions our study has produced. It is in the hope of approaching our study in *Part 1* with an open mind, that we have acknowledged the pervasive images of popular culture, and the varieties of critical opinion, in advance.

The three chapters of *Part 2, The Context and the Critics*, provide the background information students of *Frankenstein* will need. There is an account of Mary Shelley's life and works, and discussion

of relevant features of the historical and cultural context, as well as an assessment of *Frankenstein's* place in the development of the English novel. Additionally, a selection of critics' views are summarized and compared, and there are suggestions for Further Reading, in order to provide a bridge to the academic critical controversies *Frankenstein* has so plentifully spawned.

PART I

ANALYSING *FRANKENSTEIN*

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 counsellors 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