Lit Sac – Frankenstein Views and Values

How does Shelley use Binary Opposition and Juxtaposition to reflect her views and values?

Shelley’s *Frankenstein* presents a realm of juxtaposing images and binary oppositions to advocate her views and values towards 18th century England, a corrupt and hierarchal driven society. Shelley explores the growing evolution of scientific discovery within the natural world. Moreover, she investigates the beauty and solace found in nature, permeating her view that scientific constructions do not fit inside the make-up of the natural world. Shelley demonstrates this by exposing her characters Victor Frankenstein and the Creature additionally analyzing the emaciating effects of seclusion and loneliness. Through the contrasting personas of Frankenstein and the creature Shelley investigates the value of responsibility and neglect. Moreover reiterates her value towards the transition of human nature and human experience which may ultimately result in an evil damnation.

After the innocent creature is conceived, Frankenstein is ‘repulsed’ by the final product of his “laborious studies in natural sciences.” Frankenstein cannot endure the “repulsive countenance” of the creature “mingled with horror” and “a bitter disappointment.” Thus, we see Frankenstein seek a peaceful refuge in the magnificent scenery of the Alps, finding comfort in the beautiful landscapes and “solitary grandeur of the scene.” Here, Shelley communicates not only Frankenstein’s gaze on the “wonderful and stupendous scenes”, but his first interest into the obscure world rather than purging into scientific discovery. Shelley employs a binary opposition placing Frankenstein, who may represent a bi product of science, in a contrasting rugged and natural setting. This works to endorse Shelley’s view that serenity may be restored through “majestic mountains and mystic valleys” that we see Frankenstein witness. Furthermore, the use of the binary opposition serves to support Shelley’s criticism of scientific discovery and curiosity. In the natural setting Frankenstein is exposed as “troubled” and “sorrowful”. Shelley’s characterization of Frankenstein is used to affirm her value that the pursuit of knowledge, immorally led, is conditional and may result in a “bitter anguish.” However, Shelley may not automatically be condemning scientists like Frankenstein who “seek the secrets of heaven and earth” rather legitimizes the importance one’s natural environment contributes to one’s character.

We see this later demonstrated in Shelley’s construction of the creature, who is born a “sulking new born child” filled with a “gentleness and eloquence.” However, subsequently he is shortly rejected by his creator, his one and only father, thus subjected to a hostile environment, stranded and “utterly lonely.” However, despite the knowledge that society may never be available to him, the creature similarly to Frankenstein exhibits a unique connection with nature and continues to grow “impressed by the sweet serene sounds of birds.” Shelley employs a binary opposition of the natural world and the creature, a result of science, to reiterate her value that relief and liberation can be found in nature. Placing the creature in a terrain environment, Shelley permeates her criticism of society’s fascination with science and refusal to accept the natural world for what it is. The exotic locations contrast with the creature’s “abhorred” presence “a sight so tremendous”, further reiterating her romantic influence and value of nature rather than knowledge. However, Shelley’s novel was imagined during a time of scientific discovery and wild curiosity thus the actions her characters Frankenstein and the creature will take, can in some form be condoned.
Upon Frankenstein’s “intense application” towards his creation, his “infuses a spark” into the “lifeless being.” However, as the creature emerges to life, Frankenstein cannot do anything but run in fear of what he has produced. Frankenstein demonstrates a consistent devotion to his studies however upon the creatures development he reveals a truly “gross neglect.” Here, Shelley discloses Frankenstein’s selfish motivations but more importantly his lacking parental role as a father for his ‘child’. Thus as the creature develops his is separated from his only family, all as a result of his father’s fear, creating life and then rejecting it. Shelley employs juxtaposition in the characterization of Frankenstein and the creature presenting Frankenstein, who should have been a noble character with regard to his “saintly” childhood, yet continues to demonstrate a selfish neglect. Furthermore the creature who still resembles a person yet is left without a family, with no idea who he is or how he came to be. This juxtaposition serves to endorse Shelley’s values that a child does not need biological ties to a parent to be deserving of an abundance of love and care. Consequently Shelley reinforces her criticism of Frankenstein’s rejection of the creature affirming her belief that refusing attention to those that warrant love and respect from us can only result in a “tormenting loneliness.” This is reiterated through the creature’s cursed existence of which he believes is “hardly a blessing” as a consequence of his father’s moral error, one that will ironically result in his own bitter loneliness and emaciation.

Throughout the novel Shelley investigates the prospect regarding the good nature we are born with and the evil action one make take as a result of human experience. Infused by the cruel prejudice of society, Shelley challenges society’s injustice towards those that differ from the common and ordinary. Shelley explores this through the creature’s characterization, who possesses an “innocent and benevolent” disposition, “muttering inarticulate sounds” with an “eagerness for love and understanding.” However, Shelley’s description of the creature contrasts with society’s reaction towards his “devilish appearance” calling him a “monster” and “filthy demon.” Thus the creature is separated from humanity in its entirety, and as a result Shelley permeates her view that we should feel sympathy for the creature and his “desolate existence.” Shelley acknowledges the creature’s malevolent behavior as he slowly “wreaks havoc upon society” inflicting harm on Frankenstein and his family. However Shelley does not condemn him for it, rather undermines Frankenstein’s perverse preoccupation with scientific creations revealing her view that Frankenstein may in actual fact be the true monster of this story. The creature luckily enough, remains superior in Shelley’s eyes due to his “loving nature and merciful manner.” Therefore Shelley’s documentation concerning the creature’s rage, unlike Frankenstein, is driven by the turmoil of rejection, hence the creature’s only purpose left in life is to make himself worthy of separation ultimately justifying why his “only passion resides in revenge.”

Through the use of critical juxtapositions and explicit binary oppositions Shelley challenges the prejudice that underpins society’s acceptance of human nature and more wholly the natural world. Scrutinizing the scientific curiosity and ignorance society exhibits towards nature, Shelley presents the dreadful consequences humankind may cul: By reiterating the significant beauty found in nature juxtaposed with the bi products science accumulates, Shelley reinforces her values for the natural world further more exposing the romanticism of her time. Through the use of her complex characters, Frankenstein and the creature, Shelley’s values that fortify the novel in its entirety are reinforced, that responsibility, love and attention are all crucial measures of human existence and should always be infiltrated through our
human nature no matter the form of our metaphysical make up or where we may reside “whether it be joy or sorrow.”

This is very good and shows considerable research, thought, and reflection. Be careful with the odd turn of phrase. Would it have been stronger if you had put it this way: “Shelley advocates balance by using extremes.” Well done!