Frankenstein Passage Analysis Two — Rebecca Breadmore

Passage One: Page 59 – 60
Passage Two: Page 132 – 133
Passage Three: Page 170 – 171

Passage Two impresses upon the reader the dangers of man’s prejudice, as Shelley conveys that whilst the creature was born deformed, it was not born “demonical”. Such a notion underpins the entirety of her gothic novel, Frankenstein, as Shelley asserts that the crimes of the Creature are in essence the crimes of a rigid society and a man failing to see merit in imperfection; who, without knowledge of the consequences, turn loose a monster of their own making. During his first confrontation with Victor Frankenstein, in Passage Two, the Creature proclaims, “my form is a filthy type of yours”, as Shelley suggests that the Creature, however figments, still maintains human qualities, and thus, the capacity for ‘good’. Here, the word “filthy” implies a sense of contamination, which, in turn, suggests that the Creature’s once benevolent disposition was etaphorically infected by his exposure to the barbarity of mankind. Moreover, in Passage One, Frankenstein serves as a singular representation of a broader societal bigotry, as he asserts that “no mortal could support the horror of that countenance ... so hideous as that wretch”, as he uses the word “mortal” to establish an immediate divergence between himself and his own creation. In this sense, Shelley looks to expose the notion that the Creature’s world is governed by man’s prejudice, and that his monstrosity only comes as a result of the pressure to conform to the expectations imposed by a collective force.

As a direct result of his physical deformities, and man’s reaction to them, the Creature also experiences a distorted view of self. Shelley introduces Paradise Lost in the second passage, as the Creature grapples with parallels between his own existence, and that of both Adam and Satan. Here, the Creature’s confused notions of self are encapsulated in his statement, “Like Adam I was apparently united by no link to any other being ... yet] many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition”, as Shelley places an direct emphasis on the antithetic divergence between the two. In a wider sense, Adam and Satan represent the conflicting elements of the Creature’s being, as he is neither one nor the other, and thus, once again, isolated from all. Moreover, this juxtaposition also reflects society’s incongruous treatment of the Creature, as he is scolded like Adam, yet, cursed like Satan. A notion captured in Passage Three, when Victor paradoxically refers to the ghastly grin” of the Creature, as the conflicting connotations of the two words reflect the contradictions at the core of the Creature’s being. Shelley is hence establishing a broader conviction that the Creature’s internal onflicts are only heightened by a society, which, as it continually does, convolutes one’s perception of self.

As indicated by Passage Two, Frankenstein is hence critiquing the superficiality of society, reflecting man’s inability to move beyond their aesthetic predispositions in a universe governed by physicality. Here, the creature’s own benevolent words, “could they turn from their door one ... who solicited their compassion and friendship”, are neutralized by his “personal deformity”, as his exterior undermines his interior. In a wider sense, this preeminence of the external appearance over words, the expression of the soul, further suggests the inmanate nature of the society that produced the work, as a Romantic celebration of aesthetic qualities effectively paved the Creature’s wretched path. Stemming from the same make-up, the only thing that separates creature and creator is the, supposed, beauty of their being, as the Creature asserts that he is merely a “filthy type of [man]”. In essence, then, by placing Victor in a god-like position, Shelley suggests that the Creature’s world is one dictated by aesthetical value, as universal hierarchy is determined not by action, nor by virtue, but by the “beautiful and alluring” qualities of human physicality.
In a similar sense, Shelley suggests that true knowledge is only attained through experience, rather than mere reception. Together, Passages One and Three establish a direct juxtaposition, as Shelley explores a newfound understanding, from the creation of the first, which hinders Victor’s ability to complete the second of his unhallowed experiments. Shelley's repeated use of the personal pronoun, “I”, in the first passage, highlights the narrow-minded nature of Victor’s scientific self upon the creation of his first being, as he, without knowledge of he consequences, thinks only of himself. Conversely, however, by the time he comes to form the second being, Victor has an innate understanding the potential consequences that not only he, but also a broader humanity, will face. Here, Frankenstein’s allusion to the “existence of the whole human race” denotes his collective concerns, as he fears he may unleash a brutal horror on an unsuspecting world. Moreover, Shelley utilizes a continuum of questions in this passage, “... came before his eyes the female form? ... Had I a right? ... To inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” to convey the rationalization Frankenstein lacks in the first passage, and indeed, in the creation of his first “monster”. In a broader sense, Shelley is hence suggesting that knowledge gained from the past allows for future consideration, as one has experienced the consequence that may arise first hand.

However, knowledge is never absolute, as Shelley’s suggests it is multifarious in nature, and in the case of Frankenstein, never fully attained. Throughout the text Shelley employs the motif of light as a symbol of knowledge, discovery and, naturally, enlightenment. By stating that Frankenstein does “not [have] sufficient light”, in the third passage, Shelley conveys the notion that he is still shrouded by a metaphorical darkness that inhibits his understanding of his predicament. Here, the disparaging language used by Frankenstein towards his creations is laced with a sense of duality, as the “[ignorance]” of the Creature, also pertains to the Creator himself, and thus, Shelley suggests that Frankenstein still remains unaware of weight of his responsibility. Moreover, the images of the Creature’s “grin”, paralleled in passages one and three, conveys Frankenstein’s continual inability to accept the potential benevolence of his creation, as even after the telling of the Creature’s wretched tale, Frankenstein depicts the “grin” with the negative connotations, “a ghastly grin”. In this sense, Shelley implies that Victor also views his creation in “[insufficient] light”, as he remains unable to ‘see’ the other facets of his composition, and thus, has a limited knowledge of both the being, and their binding fate. Ultimately then, through her exploration of the conflicting perceptions of the Creature, Shelley looks to suggest that understanding is subjective and, that because no one true knowledge exists, humanity is left in a state of perpetual ignorance.

Shelley, in one sense, celebrates this ignorance, as an exploration of the corrosive nature of forbidden knowledge underpins her gothic tale. Shelley’s own contemporary world was one of scientific progression, and thus, she looks to deal with the destructive implications of human knowledge through the tangled fate of her eponymous protagonist Victor Frankenstein. The profundity of Frankenstein’s question, in the third passage, “Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” has, indeed, a universal resonance, as Shelley addresses her own fears regarding the boundaries of knowledge, and the potential disaster that may arise if they are violated. If anything, the Creature serves as a lasting representation of the results of science, a force, rather than a character, capable of reducing “the very existence of the species of man [to] a condition precarious and full of terror”. Moreover, the duality of creature and creator further conveys the extensive consequences of the unknown, as Shelley asserts that all become, inevitably, tangled in the wretched workings of a man whose science lurches out of control, producing two literal monsters. In this very sense, Shelley sets a tone for the horrors of failed science, as she suggests that knowledge has almost miasmic implications, and that human boundaries are violated at “the price … of the existence of the whole human race”. 