

19. Frankenstein

Mary Shelley *Frankenstein* (1818)

The sublime 65

The monster has just committed his first murderous deeds by killing Victor's younger brother William and having someone else (the innocent Justine) sentenced to death for it. Yet Victor perceives who the real murderer might have been and he is all the more desperate even if he does not intervene to save the poor innocent. He feels responsible for the evil he has provoked following his 'unhallowed arts' and he is setting off for Chamounix, the place he used to visit in his childhood.

- The weather was fine; it was about the middle of the month of August, nearly two months after the death of Justine¹, that miserable epoch from which I dated all my woe. The weight upon my spirit was sensibly lightened as I plunged yet deeper in the ravine of Arve². The immense mountains and precipices that overhung me on every side, the sound of the river raging³ among the rocks, and the dashing of the waterfalls⁴ around spoke of a power mighty as Omnipotence – and I ceased to fear or to bend before any being less almighty than that which had created and ruled the elements, here displayed in their most terrific guise⁵. Still, as I ascended higher,



Inside cover art from the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*.

1. **Justine:** the girl accused of the murder of Victor's younger brother and an acquaintance of Victor's
2. **ravine of Arve:** it. *burrone del fiume Arve*
3. **raging:** the rushing river flows as if angry
4. **dashing of the waterfalls:** quick and turbulent fall of the water
5. **displayed in their most terrific guise:** shown in their most horrible appearance

the galley⁶ assumed a more magnificent and astonishing character. Ruined castles hanging on the precipices of piny mountains, the impetuous Arve, and cottages every here and there peeping⁷ forth from among the trees formed a scene of singular beauty.

20 But it was augmented and rendered sublime⁸ by the mighty Alps, whose white and shining pyramids and domes towered above all, as belonging to another earth, the habitations of another race of beings.

I passed the bridge of Pelissier, where the ravine, which the river forms, opened before me, and I began to ascend the mountain that overhangs it. Soon after, I entered the
 25 valley of Chamounix. This valley is more wonderful and sublime, but not so beautiful and picturesque as that of Servox, through which I had just passed. The high and snowy mountains were its immediate boundaries, but I saw no more ruined castles and fertile fields. Immense glaciers approached the road; I heard the rumbling thunder of the falling avalanche and marked the smoke of its passage. Mont Blanc, the supreme and
 30 magnificent Mont Blanc, raised itself from the surrounding aiguilles⁹, and its tremendous dome¹⁰ overlooked the valley.

6. **galley**: here, the landscape

7. **peeping**: it. *che sbucavano*

8. **sublime**: effect of beauty and grandeur

9. **aiguilles**: French for 'guglie'

10. **dome**: block in the shape of a church (it. *cupola*)



Mary Shelley *Frankenstein* (1818)

Confrontation 66

In the following episode, Victor and the creature face each other in a dramatic dialogue, definitely unlike the one between a father and child.

- ‘Devil,’ I exclaimed, ‘do you dare approach me? And do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! Or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! And, oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so
- 5 diabolically murdered!’
- ‘I expected this reception,’ said the daemon. ‘All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus
- 10 with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends.’
- ‘Abhorred monster! Fiend that thou art! The tortures of hell are too mild a
- 15 vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil! You reproach me with your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed.’

My rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled by all the feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another.

20 He easily eluded me, and said – ‘Be calm! I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head.

Have I not suffered enough that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy
25 creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see
30 bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good – misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.’

‘Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall.’ ‘How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature,
35 who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me.’