Inward Isolation: The Creature as a Reflection for personal Self-Destruction in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein

Introduction

The contrast of Good and Evil in Mary Shelley’s novel Frankenstein is probably the major motif, discussed by the described development of characters like Walton, Frankenstein and mainly his creature. The course of its personal, social and quite human education is in this context the basis of all evil thoughts of revenge and murders. And it is even obvious that is seems to be only that one moment that tuns the creature from softly emotional to hatred of his creator Frankenstein: “Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed? I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me; my feelings were those of rage and revenge.” (121) But in fact, there are much more reasons that make it turn to this inward isolation, full of feelings of hate that itself can hardly cope with. The consequence of this missing ability to control suddenly starting feelings, that were previously unknown, is the outcome of fear, loneliness and mental isolation, later developing to violence, hate and murder. How exactly this development starts, increases and finally ends is going to be examined in the following paragraphs. Furthermore, a parallel should be drawn to the personal development of the characters of Walton and
Victor Frankenstein, showing that the idea of inward isolation plays a major part in Shelley’s novel.

**Reasons for the Creature’s emotional turnaround**

Listening to or reading the Creature’s story about becoming part of this world and being educated only by the observation of some poor cottagers makes you feel a kind of deep sympathy - and, knowing the very end of the whole novel, even pity. Considering the world as an ideal place, full of love, justice and unprejudiced people, the Creature even becomes a perfect target for emotional and mental disappointment. And exactly this aspect is the obvious reason for its later turn to evil and crime, it originally considered as a distant evil, as said in Chapter 15 (112). Besides the Creature adds: “[…] benevolence and generosity were ever present before me, inciting within me a desire to become an actor in the busy scene where so many admirable qualities were called forth and displayed." (112) But finally admiration and desire become part of the emotional disaster, which is also strongly supported by different literary items, the Creature finds in the woods. Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch’s *Lives* and Goethe’s *Sorrows of Werter* give an additional impression to him how people are able to feel and to think. Especially Goethe’s novel, being still one of the most important works of the German literary period of Storm and Stress, provide a bunch of personal insights and highly emotional descriptions:

“I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books. They produced in me an infinity of new images and feelings, that sometimes raised me to ecstasy, but more
frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection. In the Sorrows of Werter, besides the interest of its simple and affecting story, so many opinions are canvassed and so many lights thrown upon what had hitherto been to me obscure subjects that I found in it a never-ending source of speculation and astonishment.” (112/113)

By these and the other literary items, the Creature finally decides to force his own fate. After a lot of considerations about what would be right and what not, he tries to become part of all that he has merely visually, but not personally experienced to that point. Nevertheless, fears of being rejected and hopes of being loved are connected to his decision. And the Creature even feels nervous just before knocking on the cottagers’ door. “My heart beat quickly; this was the hour and moment of trial which would decide my hopes or realize my fears” (117), as it is written by Mary Shelley. And even in this situation the idealistic view is confirmed at first, because the Creature is welcomed warmly by the old, blind De Lacey. In this moment the hope of being loved and accepted in human society improves, but the return of the other cottagers destroys all those hopes in a short moment - too much for the Creature’s sensitive mind. Facing the violence of people he had judged as being lovely and unprejudiced the Creature obviously stops to believe in justice and his idealistic view of the world. Those people in the cottage had been that world for him, they had given him the opportunity to learn how to get along. And then, finally, the Creature instead gets to know how far away from reality his views and ideals are. Love turns into hate, peace into war and good into evil. The burst out hate is now directed to the world. All human beings become his enemies, but especially Victor Frankenstein whom he blamed to be responsible for his situation: “There was none
among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No; from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and more than all, against him who had formed me and sent me forth to this insupportable misery.” (121)

**Inward Isolation as consequence of emotional disappointment**

Running away from civilization the Creature more and more turns inward, inward to his own feelings and emotions, and without caring about other people. Only revenge counts. And for that revenge he begins to murder those people playing an important role in Victor Frankenstein’s life: his relatives, his friends and his lover. Victor’s mental pain provides satisfaction to the Creature. To have the power of making Victor depending on his own, the Creature’s will, violence, force and demands is a kind of control of his hatred emotions, because as soon as this control is lost - maybe by rejections from Victor - the Creature’s hate turns into brute force. This aspect of his mental isolation, becoming really inward isolation by the fact, that he feels to be the only one being isolated and not socialized in the whole world, is well shown after Victor has destroyed his the advanced work of a second, female creature, earlier demanded by the Creature itself: “Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have the power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master; obey!” (152) Just the vocabulary the Creature uses, provides evidence for his mental situation. He is not wanting to make any compromises concerning his desires and
his life. The emotional disappointment has changed him extremely - but what really
feels while committing all those crimes and murders is not revealed until his arch-enemy
Victor finally dies. Only then the Creature realizes what his own emotions and his
inwardness had made of him: A monster that accused his creator for all his miseries, but
finally himself is not better than Victor. But Victor in the end becomes one of his
numerous victims - his last victim indeed is he himself, announcing his suicide in
presence of Walton, but first asking the dead Frankenstein for forgiveness: “Oh,
Frankenstein! Generous and self-devoted being! What does it avail that I now ask thee to
pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst.” (201)
As he will not be forgiven, because Victor is dead, the Creature decides to share his
creator’s fate disappears in the eternal ice to destroy himself.

**Conclusion: Creature as Reflection of Inward Isolation**

Considering the Creature’s development you can draw parallels to other main characters
of Shelley’s novel. It is in fact a quality of all three narrators of *Frankenstein* - Walton,
Victor and the Creature - that they turn to inward isolation by facing all these miseries in
their lives. There is only one, but very important distinction to make: Victor and Creature
turn into this isolation caused by the deeds of each other, but they both do not know about
the other one’s mental situation. In contrast to them, Walton has the chance to learn from
Victor’s and the Creature’s failures and therefore to influence his fate and not to fall into
the same self-destructive feelings. When Walton meets the already mentally destroyed
Victor Frankenstein, Walton himself is on his way to isolation. By not regarding the
opinions and feelings of his team, only for the sake of glory and history, he drifts away from reality and humanity. That he finally realizes to return to England without having reached his aim is only a consequence of Victor’s life story. On the one hand impressed of his scientific skills and determination, he first intends to finish his expedition by all means. But on the other hands, the human and emotional failures of Victor force him to pay more attention to those people who could get into danger by his hand. And that is, what finally makes him abandon. But Victor realized much too late that his invention and scientific determination only cause pain and misery, instead of providing him glory. Nevertheless, he is able - even though while already being dead - to save at least the life of his last friend Walton. Maybe a Happy End?