

“Frankenstein is a novel about science out of control.” Discuss this view with additional reference to Philip K Dick’s, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Frankenstein is a piece of gothic literature which embodies the evil of mankind and the anxieties of Shelley’s day in reaction to the Age of Enlightenment. Andrew Graham-Dixon said “...the novel expresses a deep-seated nineteenth century terror of science that might run out of control.”¹ I agree with this interpretation as Shelley writes in a dramatic tone and fails to offer a resolution to the novel. However, there are also other thought-provoking themes which Shelley attacks in her writing, for example: the role of women, humanity and monstrosity and patriarchal society. I wish to explore Frankenstein’s early life and relationship with science, his creation of the creature and lack of responsibility towards it and creature showing how science can go out of control.

As Frankenstein retells his childhood, he speaks in a prelapsarian tone. His recount shows that he felt this was destiny, Frankenstein describes the misfortune entering into his life as “...swelling as it proceeded, it became the torrent which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys.”² By using nature, Frankenstein allows us to see how he felt it was Mother Nature’s will that he suffer; his situation was vastly out of his control. The continued use of nature throughout the novel shows how Shelley regards it as something connected to human emotion and shows how romanticism influenced her work.

During his early life; Frankenstein shows little interest in conventional, unequivocal sciences. His first encounter with science was with Cornelius Agrippa, a noted magician whose scientific outlook was not “real and practical”³ but rather mystical and imaginary. It is possible this influenced his ideas on science and forced him to think beyond the expectations of the modern, systematic science. However, Frankenstein refuses to take responsibility and subtly blames his father for not explaining how “...the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded...”⁴ Frankenstein shows from an early age, a particular interest in the workings of electricity. He eagerly watches the destructive nature of thunder with misplaced “curiosity and delight”⁵ and even describes the noise of the thunder arriving from “various quarters of the heavens.”⁶ This imagery works on one level, showing the extreme power and noise of the thunder, but also on a more interesting level. The use of “heaven s” may suggest Frankenstein’s destiny was to take the creation of life into his own hands, not God. This imagery expresses Shelley’s distaste towards immoral scientific discovery. Anne K. Mellor said “Indeed, Victor’s quest is precisely to usurp from nature the female power of reproduction to become

¹ Andrew Graham-Dixon, *The Art of The Gothic: Britain’s Midnight Hour*, (BBC iPlayer: Accessed 27.10.2014) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04n1mrb>

² Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (London, W.W Norton & Company, 2012) 21

³ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (London, W.W Norton & Company, 2012) 22

⁴ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (London, W.W Norton & Company, 2012) 22

⁵ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (London, W.W Norton & Company, 2012) 23

⁶ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (London, W.W Norton & Company, 2012) 23