Scientificism and Knowledge Acquisition Leading to Annihilation and Death in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Frankenstein

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UFRJ/FERLAGOS/UNIGRANRIO History has always provided us with numerous examples of great men who managed to reach an outstanding position due to their admirable achievements in the scope of science. Among many of these "natural philosophers" (the title by which scientists were commonly referred to from the Renaissance on), some worth mentioning are: Copernicus (1473-1543); Paracelsus (1493-1541); Galilee (1564-1642); Luigi Galvani (1737-1798); Charles Darwin (1809-1882); and William Crookes(1832-1919). Curiously, the majority of them had to face a great deal of opposition to their ideas and theories. Galilee, for instance, despite having invented the first thermometer, and the first telescope, witnessed his reputation (and even his own life) be threatened by the Inquisition, due to the simple fact that he supported Copernicus's De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium. In such a work, Copernicus had denied the old classical principle that the Earth was the fixed center of the universe, around which the Sun and the planets known at the time were believed to move. To escape death, Galilee had to deny that it is the Earth that moves around the Sun before the inquisitors. But it is said that immediately after doing so, he whispered to himself: "But in fact it moves".

As to Charles Darwin and William Crookes, they also had their share of problems facing the ideological limitations of individuals and institutions of their time. It was no wonder then that Darwin's Theory of the Evolution of Species clashed with the traditional biblical explanations of the origin of life on the planet.

William Crookes, a respectable member of the Royal College of Chemistry, gained a solid reputation due to his researches on the cathodic rays and the radioactive phenomena. Among other important features, he also invented the radiometer (1874), and discovered the chemical element "talium", in 1861, as referred by Paul Gibier (1976, p.23). However, as long as William Crookes decided to research some ectoplasm phenomena of ghostly apparitions, then "in vogue" in London, concluding that at least the ones he had researched were not fake, he put himself in serious problem. To make things worse, he stated that there was no plausible scientific explanation to those phenomena and then he was taken as mad. No sooner had Crookes stated such ideas than he witnessed the scientific community together with the Catholic Church rage a fierce attack against his career and himself. Nonetheless, Crookes's observation of the so-called ghostly apparitions gave origin to what is presently called modern psychic research.

Thus, what seemed to characterize all these natural philosophers was an unrestrained thirst for knowledge, which is undoubtedly present in Victor Frankenstein's behavior. Indeed, this kind of behavior on the part of the natural philosophers had its starting point with the medieval alchemists and their legendary search for the philosopher's stone (which would turn into gold everything it touched) and the elixir of life, two idealized means to reach perfection. Therefore, it was quite natural for Victor Frankenstein to idolize such figures from the past, due principally to the magic atmosphere of power involving all of them. In this respect, Crosbie Smith tells us about Victor's obsession with science, which had its origin when inclement weather disrupted a "party of pleasure to the baths near Thonon", confining the Frankenstein family to the inn:

(…) Victor, then thirteen, chanced to find a volume of Cornelius Agrippa. Agrippa (1486-1535) was a natural magician whose activities inspired famous tales of the sorcerer's apprentice. Fired with enthusiasm, and undaunted by his father's dismissal of the work as 'sad trash', Victor returned home to devour still more of Agrippa's work, complemented by those of the alchemist Paracelsus (1493-1541) and the Aristotelian natural magician Albertus Magnus (1192-1280) (SMITH, 1994, p.45).

Likewise, if Frankenstein's ambition was then to play God and create life out of death, Mary Shelley, as an author, had also been having the same sort of experience. To illustrate such a fact, it is proper to recall the conversations held by Percy Shelley and Lord Byron, witnessed and then commented by Mary Shelley herself (during those memorable summer rainy days they had spent together in Geneva, prior to Mary Shelley's writing of Frankenstein), as Abrams brings up:

Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any possibility of its ever being discovered and communicated. They talked of the experiments of Dr. Erasmus Darwin [physician and natural scientist, Charles Darwin's grandfather], (…) who preserved a piece of vermicelli in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion. Not thus, after all, would life be given. Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together and endued with vital warmth (ABRAMS, 1993, p.849-850).

Thus, as can be seen, the most important contribution science gave to Mary Shelley's weaving of Frankenstein's story was furnished by galvanism, the use of eletric current to induce muscle twitches in dead tissue. In this respect, Victor Civita enlightens us on the matter, as follows:

Em 1786, o medico italiano Luigi Galvani (1737-1798) fazia experiências com uma rã morta, a cujo nervo espinal havia amarrado um fio de cobre. Toda vez que o fio e os pés do animal tocavam um disco de ferro, as pernas sem vida contraíam-se. Galvani explicou o fenômeno como resultado de uma 'eletricidade animal' que perdurava depois da morte (CIVITA, 1977, p. 548).

Hence, if we face Mary Shelley and her character, Victor Frankenstein, as individuals bewildered by so much freshness and novelty brought about by the scientific advancements of the time, we can easily understand why they become so much interested in science. Furthermore, since the stagnancy of old biased ideas had prevailed up to then, it was a natural consequence that the scientific novelties ended up leading to "unnatural interest".

Given all these facts, Victor Frankenstein's inability to cope with the results of obsessed behavior towards science did not generate the practical objectives of improving the material conditions of human life, as preached by Francis Bacon (and which will be briefly approached in a further moment). Instead, the unfortunate results Mary Shelley's romantic protagonist grasped were isolation, wretchedness, annihilation, and death, all on account of both his obsession with controlling science and the ironical failure in handling the outcomes of his scientific achievements.

Taking into consideration the particular role science plays in Frankenstein, it is necessary to comment on the influence the writings of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) had on philosophers and writers both in the 18th and the 19th century. In his Novum Organum (1984), Francis Bacon inaugurates a new starting point for the science and philosophy of modern times. In it, Bacon proposes a new method for science by defending its usage as means to improve the material conditions of human life as a whole. Making interesting use of biblical language, he classifies the several obstacles to the development of science as "idols". Such "idols" were of four kinds and are meant to comprise all sorts of obstacles and barriers people and institutions have always created in order to hinder scientific development, as follows:

São de quarto gêneros os ídolos que bloqueiam a mente humana. Para melhor apresentá-los, lhes assinalamos nomes, a saber: Ídolos da Tribo (da natureza humana); Ídolos da Caverna (os dos homens enquanto indivíduos); Ídolos do Foro (da associação recíproca dos indivíduos do gênero humano entre si) e Ídolos do Teatro (das diversas doutrinas filosóficas, representantes de mundos fictícios e

irreais)(BACON, Novum Organum, 1984, p.21-22).

As to New Atlantis (1984), Bacon's unfinished posthumous work, it depicts the utopian imaginary state of New Atlantis (in opposition to Atlantis, as referred by Plato), in which the welfare of human beings is based on scientific control over nature and in its consequent benefits for all.

Thus, as far as Victor Frankenstein is concerned, if on the one hand some of his motivations were really imbued with these lofty aspirations, on the other hand, ambitious thirst for knowledge and power led him to irrevocable obsessions, of which he has been a fatal victim. A passage in Chapter 3 in which Victor's Professor Waldman praises the modern scientists' achievements, while lecturing in Ingolstadt, serves as a perfect preamble to Victor's own expressions of his ambitions in relation to knowledge and power. Besides, such a quotation is undoubtedly emblematic of the generalized assumptions that the conditions of human beings' life on earth could be perfected by man's control of both nature and the universe. There follow Waldman's enthusiastic words on his contemporary scientists' achievements:

(…) They penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows (SHELLEY, 1994, p.46).

Victor Frankenstein's seemingly mesmerized condition is a natural unfolding of this process as he immediately comments on Professor Waldman's lecture:

Such were the Professor's words- rather let me say such words of fate- enounced to destroy me. (…) So much had been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein- more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation. (SHELLEY, 1994, p.46)

In addition, Victor exposes in such a passage the root of his obsession, which constitutes a transgression scientist should never commit, as Bacon puts forth when he states that: "O dedicar-se a uma ciência ou a uma especulação em particular pode conformar de tal modo o pensamento do homem, que este tudo interpreta à luz daquela" (Novum Organum, 1984, p.xiv).

Even though Victor Frankenstein was not a simple experimentalist, as expressed in Professor Waldman's words to Victor himself in Chapter 3: "I should advise you to apply to every branch of natural philosophy, including Mathematics" (SHELLEY, 1984, p.47), Victor's obsession with creating life out of death dominated him so much that all the knowledge he had accumulated could not produce any other sort of benefit to mankind. In addition, when his work was finally achieved, and his own Creature gained life, he was not even able to acknowledge his own merit of having gone as farther by far as no other scientist had ever gone. Instead, he did not keep a scientific pattern of behavior, for he had not prepared himself to that situation. That was the turning point which determined the beginning of Victor's gradual fall and annihilation.

Therefore, if one attempts at approaching the meanings and functions of science in Frankenstein, he must also take into consideration some aspects playing an important role in the novel's possible characterization as science fiction. In fact, the reading of Frankenstein as science fiction leads to relevant points that will also have some prominence in Victor's behavior and eventful tragic destiny. Terrence Holt objectively tackles some of those points while approaching Frankenstein as science fiction, as he points out: "I concentrate on illuminating the ways in which science fiction uses a false front of scientific thinking as disguise within which unscientific motives- essentially the same as one would find in any narrative - drive the plot" (HOLT, 1990, p.112).

Similarly, he continues highlighting the issue by stating that many students and readers approach science in Mary Shelley's text hoping to find a form of science with all the assumed comforting certainties that the term suggests and none of the disturbing uncertainty of literature.

Nevertheless, not even galvanism and its electrical movements in tissues of dead animals succeeded in providing a satisfactory and comprehensive explanation to the marvelous achievements of generation of life out of death. This fact then implies that "this mystification of the status of science fiction probably reflects the mystique of science itself" (HOLT, 1990, p.113).

Some of the points already referred to in a subtle way here then start to denounce their presence more emphatically: since our customary relation to science is of ignorance: we ourselves perform a willed suspension of disbelief in relation to the science fiction/scientific text. As when a doctor prescribes us a certain medicine, and we simply take it without questioning whether it will be effective or not, the author tells us that the application of a spark to dead tissues will produce a living creature, and we read on, because at this point we cannot distinguish a valid explanation from a fraudulent one.

However, all this intricate puzzle may find a simple explanation, as Holt tells us that: "The way science functions in Frankenstein, and in science fiction generally, is analogous to what engineers term a black box" (HOLT, 1990, p.113). Yet, recent scholarship has demonstrated that Mary Shelley's scientific knowledge was more than adequate to the task of making Victor bestow life on a dead Creature, both because of galvanism itself and because of Sir Humphry Davy's prediction of the triumph of human intellect, through chemistry, over the circumstances of existence. (Holt explains that Davy was one of the most influential scientists of England at the time.)

The ways through which Victor Frankenstein deals with the "black box" of science and science fiction involves strategies such as the use of secrecy, trances, and magic revelations, obviously mixing science and the chimeras of former alchemists, as is clearly expressed in his own word:

As a child I had not been content with the results promised by the modem professors of natural science. With a confusion of ideas only to be accounted for by my extreme youth and my want of a guide on such matters, I had retroded the steps of knowledge along the paths of time and exchanged the discoveries of recent enquirers for the dreams of forgotten alchemists (SHELLEY, 1994, p. 40).

Such a passage enhances Victor's extremely romantic attitude of looking for alternatives by taking untrodden ways whose results would be uncertain. Besides, such an attitude goes far beyond the characteristics of a true scientist, which, despite being related to the world of experience, are based on a certain scientific methodology rather than on the dreams of forgotten alchemists.

The next step tried by Victor is the use of secrecy, expressed in the following passage, in which Victor addresses the reader:

I see by the eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be; listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject (SHELLEY, 1994, p.50-51).

Crosbie Smith expands the topic and enlightens us with some explanations to Victor's using of secrecy as follows:

Brought up in an enlightened family whose hallmarks were stability and happiness, Victor himself slipped inexorably into a very different state, one characterized by instability, misery and, above all secrecy. No longer a wholly rational creature, Victor's confessions revealed a dangerous and even demonic side to

man in which natural philosophy, that supposed triumph of the Age of Reason, was recruited for secret and sinister ends (SMITH, 1994, p.39-40).

Following such a stream of thoughts and considerations we could contrast Victor's and his father's achievements, and characterize Victor as a typical romantic hero whose main fault was not to be capable of profiting from the wondrous possibilities his own science had produced. Had he looked at his Creature with other eyes (scientific eyes), maybe his destiny could have been different from the one annihilation and death ended up imposing on him.

Getting back to the issue of secrecy, and reinforcing the ideas that have just been stated, Crosbie Smith still defends that Victor does not conform to the image of orthodox practitioners of science in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth, still less to that of the modern scientist. Instead, Frankenstein's obsessions, isolation, and egoism, are strongly suggestive of Romantic imageries of the mad genius, the creative artist "and the natural philosopher qua natural magician" (SMITH, 1990, p.41). Thus, secrecy acted to preserve that indispensable sense of wonder and mystery that Enlightenment seemed to threaten and destroy.

As far as the use of trance is concerned, Victor provides at least one instance in which his unnatural activity seems to have been undertaken under a trance, as the following passage in Chapter 3 proves:

It was indeed but a passing trance, that only made me feel with renewed acuteness as soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame (SHELLEY, 1994, p.52).

Such a fact led Holt to establish a parallel between author and character, as long as he focuses Shelley's own words on the dreamlike manner through which she came up with the story:

Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. 'I have found it! What terrified others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow'. On the others morrow announced that I had thought of a story. I began that day with the words "It was on a dreary night of November", making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream (HOLT, 1990, p. 118).

To Holt, "I have found it" is a translation to the conventional "Eureka", approximating then author and character in their processes of creation. Ironically, however, if once Mary Shelley had "bid her hideous progeny to go forth and prosper" (in an obvious reference to her successful Frankenstein), not much the same could Victor Frankenstein utter in relation to his future scientific career, for secrecy, magic, and alchemy did not prevent him from facing a hard destiny.

Paracelsus, in the 16th century, managed to foresee that the search for the philosopher's stone and the elixir of the life were very limited achievements for an alchemist, even though it had been the precedent of the modern scientific curiosity. Therefore, he took profit from his alchemical experiences and started researching the use of his substances in the cure of diseases, collecting numerous successful results, whereas Victor did not manage to see a useful application to his incipient discovery, which could have brought many benefits to mankind, instead of bringing destruction to himself and to the most beloved ones around him.

Since our main concern here is to analyze the ultimate effects of science on the catastrophic results of its unskillful handling, the question of education in Frankenstein is of vital importance, because it pervades another central issue: the acquisition and control of knowledge and power, with all their corresponding underlying implications in the scope of science.

To begin with, the model of education directed to Elizabeth in Frankenstein is the one that preaches that the sphere of domestic life is the object at which women's education should aim at. Conversely, the model of education that fits a man should be the encouraging academic career. Therefore, Elizabeth is responsible for maintaining the atmosphere of continual sunshine under which Victor alleges to have spent his best years.

The male model of education aspiring brilliant careers was then in severe opposition to the female role of domestic duties. While Elizabeth is shown to spend her entire time shining "like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home" according to Victor's words, Clerval's and Victor's role was of a very different nature:

It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of a man that occupied me, still my enquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world. Meanwhile, Clerval occupied himself, so to speak, with the moral relations of things. The busy stage of life, the virtues of heroes, and the actions of men his theme; and his hope and his dream was to become one among those whose names are recorded in story as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of species (SHELLEY, 1994, p.36).

Thus, even though both Clerval's and Victor's education pointed to an active performance in the academic world, they had some significant differences. Indeed, Clerval's model (although also aspiring at great achievements) was imbued with more humanistic aims: his actions would bring benefits to humanity, while such an objective did not seem to be Victor's priority, but his strong desire to discover "the metaphysical secrets of the world". In a word, Victor's unrestrained obsession with marvelous scientific discoveries, besides blinding him in many ways also made him neglect possible humanitarian benefits his science could have generated, had he at least followed Clerval's model.

Getting back to the issue of female education, we can surely state that Elizabeth's education brings about her complete ineffectuality, something that Victor is also unable to see. In addition, Elizabeth's marvelous domestic talents did not have any force to make Victor give up his obstinate search for knowledge and power. In a word, George Levine summarizes the question by saving that, "What is not evident to Victor is certainly evident to the reader, however. Elizabeth is not a real force in the novel: she is too superficial and monotonous" (LEVINE, 1979, p. 135).

In view of all that, the issue of female education assumes an even more serious concern if we take into consideration that the Creature also received a model of education which was aimed at Safie. Besides being a woman, Safie was also a Turkish girl, a real outcast in the Western world.

The kind of education that both the Arabian girl and the Creature received came from Volney's Ruins of Empires, a title already highlighting the suggestive ideas of decay and wretchedness, from which they heard not only about man's admirable deeds but also the fact that man could be vicious and base; that man could be godlike, but also a representative of evil.

Therefore, to the Creature, this gradual process of learning made him engage in a process of loss of innocence which brought him growth but also pain. The Creature then started to face acquisition of knowledge as a real curse imposed on him. The following quotation of the Creature's words gives a perfect account of his impressions about knowledge, and of his own disowned situation:

I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge. Oh that I had Forever remained in my native wood, nor known nor felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst, and heat! (SHELLEY, 1994, p.116).

Furthermore, it becomes undeniable then that the Creature started to mirror its creator, because a

similar process of deceit caused by knowledge started to affect both of them. This mirroring of each other is so remarkable that some passages from the Creature's speeches could well be taken as Victor's, as the one that follows: "Oh what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind, when it has once seized it." (SHELLEY, 1994, p.116). A little ahead, the Creature still states that he wished sometimes to shake off all thoughts and feelings, but he soon acknowledges that it is ordinarily impossible, unless it is reached by means of death:"(…) but I learned that there was but one means to overcome the sensations of pain, and that was death – a state which I feared yet did not understand" (1994, p.116).

All these factors put together allow us to conclude that the Creature shared with Frankenstein the same incapacity of dealing with knowledge and mastering it to their own benefits. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge seen under this perspective in Frankenstein irrevocably means isolation, annihilation, and death.

Victor Frankenstein's relations with knowledge, so to speak, reproduce both biblical and classical mythological accounts. Thus, knowledge has always been polemic, for it involves the possibility of one's exerting power, domination, and control over other individuals and communities. Both the Hebrew and the Christian traditions, for instance, have a piece of their common mythology concerning knowledge registered in the Bible, in Chapter 3 of Genesis: After the Serpent has tempted Eve to eat the so-called "forbidden fruit", and given it to Adam, we have the following excerpt from Eve's conversation with the Serpent: "Mas do fruto da árvore que está no meio do jardim, disse Deus: Dele não comereis, nem tocareis nele, para que não morrais" (ALMEIDA, 1969, p.9). To which the Serpent says: "Porque Deus sabe que no dia em dele comerdes se vos abrirão os olhos e, como Deus, sereis conhecedores do bem e do mal" (ALMEIDA, 1969, p.9).

So, Victor's obsession with science can also be metaphorically identified with the biblical Serpent that tempted Eve and Adam to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, which would supposedly make them be like God and then acquire the knowledge of good and evil. In this daring new condition, they would quit the previous position of inferiority, subjugation and obedience to God. In victor Frankenstein's case, because of his obsession with mastering the creation of life out of death, he would thus be playing God. Interestingly, Victor's actions could also be paralleled with some other attributed to Jesus Christ, who similarly is reported in the Bible to have created life out of death through the resurrection of Lazarus. Nevertehless, just as Adam and Eve, who were duly punished with a series of sanctions besides becoming mortals, Victor was punished with destruction and death, which then started haunting not only his life but also the lives of all his beloved relatives.

On the other hand, if Victor is compared to God, his attitudes were completely catastrophic in relation to the control of knowledge he had in his hand. The Biblical God, the Knowledge Controller, inflicted some sorts of harsh punishment on his creatures. Adam and Eve became mortals, nevertheless God preserved the continuation of mankind on earth, by allowing them to have offspring. Conversely, Victor not only plays God but also exceeds God's harshness by not allowing his Creature either to have a female companion or a child. Besides, the situation gets even worse if we take into consideration that Victor's Creature had been at first an innocent and sweet being, whose character and personality could have been modeled by the hands of a skillful and tactful creator, a role which Victor Frankenstein failed to perform.

As to the Greek mythology, the most obvious correlation between them and Shelley's story is represented by the tragic saga of the Titan Prometheus. It is not by chance then that the alternative title to Frankenstein is The Modern Prometheus. The "thief" Prometheus, just like Adam and Eve, committed a transgression and tried to fool the Gods so as to conquer knowledge. Prometheus's intentions, however, were imbued with humanitarian and altruistic objectives: he had stolen fire from the Olympus in order to bring it to humanity. Such a fact would bring progress, development and knowledge to mankind on earth. Because of his daring behavior, he was condemned to be fastened to a cliff in which an eagle would devour his liver gradually for approximately thirty thousand years.

Both the Christian and the Greek mythologies state that knowledge was monopolized by the Gods, who had then the prerogative of inflicting severe types of punishment on those who dared to transgress their

commandments. Such was the essence of the taboo internalized by Victor: he dared to have the knowledge and power of creation and death, thus playing God's role, but failing in the control of the results and consequences of his conquest of knowledge. Therefore, in many parts of the novel he acknowledges himself an inescapable condemnation for all his blunders, as illustrated by the following passage: "Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction." (SHELLEY, 1994, p.40)

Victor's achievements were in fact very much audacious. Nevertheless, Marilyn Gaull points out that while many scientists behaved similarly to Victor, there was another current treading on another far different way: "(…)other scientists inadvertently discovered that the unknown may also be unknowable, that the complexity of the universe may well be greater than the capacity of human beings to know and master it" (GAULL, 1988, p.372)

Such a passage brings up the question that Victor was so blind that he could not discover a way out of the puzzling trap he was setting up for himself. Maybe if his spirit had been imbued with at least a little bit of the wisdom demonstrated by Father De Lacey, Victor would have behaved more coherently. Moreover, mythologically speaking, blindness seems to be an indispensable condition for wisdom. In Mary Shelley's novel, it is Father De Lacey who, despite being blind, can see the truth beyond appearance, whereas in the Greek mythology, it is he old and blind soothsayer Tiresias who can see reality more clearly than those who have perfect eyes, as P. Commelin tells us: "Tirésias era cego, e os mitólogos dão várias causas a essa enfermidade. Segundo uns, os deuses tinham-no tornado cego como castigo de revelar aos mortais os segredos que eles queriam guardar" (COMMELIN, 1985, p.209).

It is interesting that the pursuit and transmission of knowledge were the alleged causes for Tiresias's punishment, besides reasserting then that the question of knowledge involves conditions of transgression and power. Nevertheless, getting back to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the fact was that, unfortunately, Victor was not physically blind. Consequently, he was not as spiritually gifted as Tiresias and Father De Lacey are, but a wretch, as he defines himself so frequently.

As a consequence of Victor's blunders, a tragic atmosphere of annihilation and death pervades the novel thoroughly up to its end, to which Victor's previous recurrent allusions to his inescapable cruel fate were a strong foreshadowing. Several sorts of speculation come across the reader's mind, such as: Is Victor to be punished for having played God? Is there, in fact, a limit for knowledge? How should human beings behave before the unknown – keep an audacious attitude towards it or conform to the old biased ideas preached by the narrow-sighted rhetoric of religion? Which appeal is more convincing, the Creature's or 'Victor's? Actually, the novel points to multiple meanings, as Fred Botting points out:

Monstrosity has left the novel open, its frames broken: all boundaries are left in question, divided between the positions of Frankenstein and the monster. The creator dies, the monster disappears in darkness and distance, while Walton, having agreed to return home, still gazes towards the Pole (…) (BOTTING (1996, p.105).

Nevertheless, it is the permanence of a sense of instruction, a sense that a lesson is left to be learned not only by Walton but also by every man too that seems to pervade the novel from beginning to end, as well expressed by Victor's addressing of the reader in Chapter 4: "Learn from me, if not by my precepts at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (SHELLEY, 1994, p.51).

Thus, the ways to engulfment, annihilation and death are wide open. However, this has only been so on account of Victor's blunders. Anyway, despite his unrestrained obsession with science, Victor really managed to infuse life on lifeless matter, and the product of such experiments was a Creature that could endure a number of some harsh conditions that ordinary human beings could not even think of. Furthermore, even being unpleasant to sight, the Creature was capable of lofty sentiments. Consequently, it can ultimately be argued that death and destruction haunt the trajectory of the Romantic

Hero Victor Frankenstein. However, it can also be stated, as another “lesson”, that the romantic spirit can generate good results, if the threats represented by unrestrained obsession with science and the consequent dangers of annihilation are wisely manipulated.

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