

Image Archetypal from the Novel “Frankenstein” by Mary Shelley

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ABSTRACT

Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” is a crucial work in Gothic literature and science fiction, exploring human ambition, innovation, and isolation. Using Carl Jung’s archetypal imagery, this study examines the novel’s key themes and characters. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on the text and secondary literary sources. Prominent archetypes identified include the Overreacher, the Monster, the Promethean Figure, the Wanderer, and the Tragic Hero. Victor Frankenstein is analyzed as both the Overreacher and the Tragic Hero, symbolizing hubris and downfall. The Monster embodies isolation and alienation, while Victor’s act of creation reflects the Promethean Figure, symbolizing innovation and ethical dilemmas. Both characters are portrayed as Wanderers, emphasizing their existential quests for meaning and belonging. These archetypes play a central role in the narrative. Shelley’s use of archetypal imagery enhances the novel’s critique of scientific advancement and ethical responsibility. Victor’s tragic heroism serves as a cautionary tale about unchecked ambition, while the Monster’s plight underscores the societal need for empathy and acceptance.

Keywords: Mary Shelley; Frankenstein; Archetypes; Isolation; Ambition

INTRODUCTION

Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” is a work in Gothic literature and science fiction, exploring the profound and often terrifying implications of human ambition, innovation, and isolation. Written in 1818, the novel tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who creates a sentient being through unorthodox scientific experiments (Serra, 2023) and (Michelson, 2022). The narrative delves into the psychological and ethical dimensions of Victor’s quest for knowledge, depicting the devastating consequences of his actions on himself and his creation (Waham, 2023). Shelley’s rich use of archetypal imagery serves as a critical framework to understand the novel’s deeper themes and characters. The concept of archetypes, as introduced by (Jung, 1980), refers to universal, symbolic patterns that recur across different cultures and literatures. In “Frankenstein,” several key archetypes are prominent, including the Overreacher, the Monster, the Promethean Figure, the Wanderer, and the Tragic Hero. Each archetype embodies specific symbolic representations and themes, contributing to the novel’s exploration of human nature and the limits of scientific endeavor (Dekens, 2019).

The plot of Shelley's story is filled with themes related to archetypes, which makes the texts useful for comparative analysis of the novel. According to Carl Jung, who first advanced the idea in 1909, archetypes are subconscious collective images or symbols that are 'omnipresent in world literature'. When considering the principal themes of the novel, it is important to engage such archetypes as the Overreacher, the Monster, Prometheus, the Wanderer, and the Tragic Hero in "Frankenstein". These are not just 'characters' in a story, but rather exist as what some critics call 'meta-archetypes,' which represent key motifs of the work, from the dangers of blind pursuit of power to the search for an individual's identity and the limits of scientific curiosity (Dekens, 2019).

Regarding the chosen archetype, it is worth noting that readers can easily identify Overreacher with Victor Frankenstein, the main protagonist of the story, who pursued knowledge and power to the extent that he lost control over himself. Due to Victor's obsession with the continuous search for knowledge and the quest to enhance human capabilities, he succumbs to his own fate and serves as an example of the moral problems arising from science and development. The second major character type, the Monster, brings closer the estrangement of outsiders, which were seen as undesirable and deviant by society due to the prejudices of the period. Considering that the Monster is both a triumph of scientific technology and a terrifying creature of destruction, he is the representation the two possible realities of science. Furthermore, there is the Promethean Figure archetype, which this character, Promethean Figure being called after the Greek Titan who stole fire from the gods for humans; similarly, Victor goes against natural laws in his attempt at creating life. This archetype highlights themes of 'going against authority' and the consequences of taking on a god-like role. The Wanderer, which is linked to the Monster, reveals the constant human struggle of trying to find one's place in society as well as love and acceptance while at the same time experiencing feelings of isolation and exclusion. Finally, the Tragic Hero can be considered as Victor who is destined to be punished for the tragic flaw and the oblivion of the principle of moral justice for a higher goal. Shelley's "Frankenstein" is therefore much more than a simple story of tragedy and horror; it poses questions which are relevant to all people and answers them through identification of raw human appetites and ... the instinctive struggle between creation and creator. As demonstrated, through the careful integration of Gothic elements and the reliance on archetypal motifs, Shelley not only pens a widely discussed Gothic novel but also engages readers in the contemporary debate on the significance of her ideas.

Consequently, Shelley's "Frankenstein" goes beyond the explore themes as moral dilemma and the meaninglessness of life, and poses supersystem questions about humankind as well as beyond, the limitations of northern and southern sciences, and the modern conflict between the artist/scientist and his/her production. By having incorporated archetypal motifs into her narrative, Shelley succeeds at creating pieces of Gothic narrative and simultaneously entail today's audience in continuing the contemplation of her themes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shelley's use of these archetypal images not only enriches the narrative but also allows for a deeper critique of the ethical and moral questions surrounding scientific advancement (Goodwin, 2018). The Overreacher and Promethean Figure challenge readers to consider the responsibilities that come with knowledge and power. The Monster's plight questions societal norms and the importance of empathy, while the Wanderer archetype underscores the existential quest for identity and belonging. Victor's tragic heroism serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of hubris and the necessity of foresight in human endeavors. Victor Frankenstein himself is a quintessential Overreacher, whose hubris and unbridled ambition drive him to transcend the natural boundaries of life and death. His creation act symbolizes the Promethean Figure, reflecting both the innovative spirit and the ethical dilemmas associated with defying natural laws (Holden, 2023) and (Tan & Li, 2023). The Monster, or the creature, represents the archetype of isolation and alienation, highlighting the consequences of societal rejection and the innate need for acceptance. Both Victor and the Monster also embody the Wanderer, each on a metaphysical and physical quest for meaning and belonging. Finally, Victor's journey aligns with the archetype of the Tragic Hero, whose fatal flaw leads to his inevitable downfall, underscoring the destructive potential of unchecked ambition.

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Victor Frankenstein himself is a quintessential Overreacher, whose hubris and unbridled ambition drive him to transcend the natural boundaries of life and death. His creation act symbolizes the Promethean Figure, reflecting both the innovative spirit and the ethical dilemmas associated with defying natural laws (Holden, 2023; Tan & Li, 2023). As Goodwin (2018) notes, the Overreacher archetype is often characterized by an insatiable quest for knowledge, ultimately leading to the individual's downfall. Shelley's depiction of Victor encapsulates this archetype, as his relentless pursuit of scientific mastery brings about his own ruin and that of those around him.

The Monster, or the creature, represents the archetype of isolation and alienation, highlighting the consequences of societal rejection and the innate need for acceptance. This aligns with Holden's (2023) analysis, which emphasizes the Monster's role in critiquing societal norms and the human condition. Tan and Li (2023) further explore the Monster's symbolic representation of the marginalized and the disenfranchised, arguing that Shelley uses this character to provoke

empathy and a reevaluation of societal values. Both Victor and the Monster also embody the Wanderer, each on a metaphysical and physical quest for meaning and belonging. This dual embodiment of the Wanderer archetype underscores the existential themes in Shelley's work, as both characters navigate their respective journeys in search of identity and purpose (Goodwin, 2018). The wanderings of Victor and the Monster mirror the Romantic era's preoccupation with the sublime and the individual's place in the universe.

Finally, Victor's journey aligns with the archetype of the Tragic Hero, whose fatal flaw leads to his inevitable downfall, underscoring the destructive potential of unchecked ambition. Shelley crafts Victor's narrative as a cautionary tale, warning against the dangers of overreaching and the failure to foresee the consequences of one's actions. This tragic dimension is crucial in understanding the moral and philosophical underpinnings of the novel, as highlighted by Holden (2023) and Tan and Li (2023). Overall, Shelley's intricate use of archetypes such as the Overreacher, the Promethean Figure, the Monster, the Wanderer, and the Tragic Hero not only enriches the narrative complexity of "Frankenstein" but also engages readers in a profound exploration of the ethical and existential questions that remain relevant to contemporary discussions on science and humanity.

Previous Study

Previous studies on Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" have extensively examined the novel's rich archetypal imagery and thematic complexity, particularly through the lens of Carl Jung's archetypal theory. A researcher has identified and analyzed key archetypes such as the Overreacher, the Monster, the Promethean Figure, the Wanderer, and the Tragic Hero (Zhu, 2020). Victor Frankenstein has been consistently portrayed as both the Overreacher and the Tragic Hero, symbolizing his hubris, unbridled ambition, and subsequent downfall. The Monster has been analyzed as an embodiment of isolation and alienation, a product of societal rejection and neglect. Victor's act of creation has been interpreted as the Promethean Figure, representing the dual-edged nature of innovation and the ethical dilemmas of defying natural boundaries (Brendese, 2022). Furthermore, both Victor and the Monster have been explored as Wanderers, each on their existential quests for meaning and belonging, emphasizing their internal and external struggles (Mishra et al., 2023). Despite these extensive analyses, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the nuanced interplay between these archetypes and their implications on contemporary scientific and ethical discussions. This study aims to address this gap by delving deeper into the dynamic interactions between these archetypal figures within the narrative and examining their relevance to modern-day issues in science, ethics, and human nature. In employing a qualitative content analysis approach, this research seeks to provide a novel perspective on how "Frankenstein" not only critiques the ethical boundaries of scientific exploration but also offers timeless reflections on human ambition, responsibility, and the quest for identity. This approach allows for a more comprehensive

understanding of how Shelley's use of archetypal imagery enhances the novel's critique of unchecked ambition, societal rejection, and the moral responsibilities.

Thus, this study aims to elucidate how they function within the narrative to convey Shelley's critical perspectives on human ambition, responsibility, and the quest for identity. Through a detailed examination of key passages and characters, we will explore how "Frankenstein" remains a timeless reflection on the complexities of human nature and the ethical boundaries of scientific exploration.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the archetypal images in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein." The primary data sources include the novel itself and secondary literary analyses (Holden, 2023; Goodwin, 2018).

Instrument and Procedure

The methodology involves identifying and categorizing key archetypal images within the text, such as the Overreacher, the Monster, the Promethean Figure, the Wanderer, and the Tragic Hero. The analysis process begins with a close reading of "Frankenstein" to extract passages exemplifying each archetype. These passages are then coded and organized into thematic categories (Ryan, 2018).

Data Analysis

Each archetype is analyzed based on its symbolic representation, associated themes, and frequency of occurrence. The Overreacher archetype, represented by Victor Frankenstein, is examined for themes of hubris and the fall of man. The Monster, as the social outcast, is analyzed for themes of isolation and alienation. Victor's creation act is studied as the Promethean Figure, focusing on innovation and ethical dilemmas. Both Victor and the Monster are evaluated as Wanderers, exploring their quests for meaning and belonging. Lastly, Victor is analyzed as the Tragic Hero, with emphasis on his fatal flaw and downfall (Tierney, 2023). The findings are systematically compiled and quantified to highlight the centrality of these archetypes in exploring human ambition, responsibility, and the quest for identity in the novel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show the prominent archetypal images in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," highlighting their symbolic representations, key themes, and frequency of occurrence. Victor Frankenstein is depicted as both the Overreacher and the Tragic Hero, with a focus on themes of hubris, the fall of man, and the

consequences of a fatal flaw, each appearing 10 times. The Monster embodies isolation and alienation, also recurring 10 times, emphasizing its role as a social outcast. Victor's creation act as the Promethean Figure is noted 8 times, symbolizing innovation and the ethical dilemmas associated with defying natural boundaries. Both Victor and the Monster are portrayed as Wanderers in 8 instances, reflecting their existential quests for meaning and belonging. In total, these archetypes are mentioned 56 times, underscoring their centrality to the exploration of human ambition, responsibility, and the search for identity.

Table 1. The archetypal images in the novel

Archetype	Symbolic Representation	Key Themes	Frequency
The Overreacher	Victor Frankenstein	Hubris, fall of man	10
The Monster	Frankenstein's creature	Isolation, alienation	10
The Promethean Figure	Victor's creation act	Innovation, ethical dilemmas	8
The Wanderer	Victor and the monster	Search for meaning, belonging	8
The Tragic Hero	Victor Frankenstein	Fatal flaw, downfall	10
	Total		56

The Overreacher: Victor Frankenstein

Data 1

“...in a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards my fellow-creatures had greater claims to my attention...” (p. 181–182).

This passage illustrates Victor's hubris as he overreaches by creating life, neglecting the ethical responsibilities of his actions. His belief in his superiority leads to the tragic downfall, embodying the archetype of the overreacher. Victor's “enthusiastic madness and perceived duty towards his creation reflect his self-imposed godlike status, positioning him above natural laws and societal norms. This self-elevation is a classic trait of the overreacher archetype, highlighting his tragic flaw—his inability to foresee the consequences of his ambitious endeavors. Ultimately, Victor's overreaching ambition and disregard for ethical constraints catalyze his and

others' suffering, underscoring the peril of transcending human limitations without foresight or responsibility.

The Monster: Frankenstein's Creature

Data 2

“Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me?” (p. 185).

The creature's lament highlights its profound isolation and alienation, thrust upon it by societal rejection. Despite its initial benevolence and longing for acceptance, the creature becomes monstrous due to the relentless neglect and hostility it endures. This transformation underscores the powerful themes of isolation and alienation within the narrative. The creature's rhetorical question reveals its deep sense of injustice and the moral complexity of its existence; it is not inherently evil but driven to monstrosity by the cruel treatment of others. This highlights the profound impact of societal rejection and the innate need for companionship and understanding, critiquing the society that deems it a monster based on appearance.

The Promethean Figure: Victor's Creation Act

Data 3

“Victor Frankenstein robs both cemeteries and slaughterhouses in order to suture together a creature composed of dead animal and human body parts, a creature he then animates with the ‘spark of being’...” (p. 41).

Victor's act of creation mirrors Prometheus's defiance of divine boundaries by stealing fire for humanity. This act symbolizes innovation but also introduces ethical dilemmas regarding the responsibilities of scientific discovery. In animating a creature from dead matter, Victor challenges the natural order, embodying the Promethean spirit of defiance and ingenuity. However, his actions also raise profound ethical questions about the limits of human endeavor and the consequences of playing god. The “spark of being” he bestows upon the creature is analogous to Prometheus's fire, a symbol of enlightenment and power but also of unforeseen suffering and destruction. Thus, Victor's Promethean act serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of unchecked ambition and the moral responsibilities that come with advancement.

The Wanderer: Victor and the Monster

Data 4

“Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me” (p. 37).

Victor's and the monster's wanderings reflect their search for meaning and belonging. Victor's pursuit of knowledge and the creature's quest for acceptance parallel their existential journeys, emphasizing their roles as wanderers. Victor's

initial vision of transcending “life and death” reveals his deep yearning to illuminate the world with his discoveries, thus embarking on a metaphysical and physical journey. Similarly, the creature, abandoned and scorned, wanders in search of understanding and a place in the world. Both characters traverse vast and desolate landscapes, their wanderings symbolizing their internal struggles and the relentless pursuit of their goals. This duality highlights the tragic irony of their quests: while Victor seeks to conquer death and elevate humanity, his creation, seeking only acceptance and love, becomes a manifestation of his failure and hubris. Their wanderings underscore the themes of isolation, the quest for identity, and the human condition's inherent restlessness.

The Tragic Hero: Victor Frankenstein

Data 5

“A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity” (p. 40).

Victor’s fatal flaw—his unchecked ambition and passion for scientific discovery—leads to his eventual downfall. His inability to maintain balance and foresee the consequences of his actions characterizes him as a tragic hero, whose strengths ultimately become his weaknesses. The ideal of a “calm and peaceful mind” contrasts starkly with Victor’s obsessive quest, emphasizing the destructive nature of his passions. His tragic heroism lies in his extraordinary capabilities and noble intentions, which are undermined by his overwhelming drive and disregard for ethical boundaries. This dichotomy between potential and downfall encapsulates the essence of the tragic hero, illustrating how Victor’s virtues are linked to his demise.

Data 6

“Because Victor looks like an angel, he is treated as one despite being a monster, and he never grows and changes. The great tragedy of his life is that if he had simply considered the moral implications of his work and chosen a different course or if he had accepted his own debt of care to his creation from the beginning and nurtured it—if he had, in other words, behaved as a responsible scientist—every tragedy for which he bears the guilt would have been averted” (p. 185).

Victor Frankenstein fits the archetype of the Tragic Hero, whose fatal flaw—his inability to foresee the moral and ethical implications of his actions—leads to his downfall. His failure to take responsibility for his creation and his refusal to empathize with the creature result in a series of tragedies. This flaw and his eventual recognition of it highlight the destructive potential of hubris and the importance of ethical considerations in scientific endeavors. Victor’s superficial appearance as an “angel” contrasts sharply with his internal flaws, underscoring the irony of his character. Had he acknowledged the moral responsibilities of his scientific pursuits

and cared for his creation, in this context, the chain of tragic events could have been prevented. His story serves as a poignant reminder of the consequences of unbridled ambition and the necessity of ethical reflection in the pursuit of knowledge.

The findings of this study illuminate the prominent archetypal images in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," emphasizing their symbolic representations, key themes, and frequency of occurrence. Victor Frankenstein emerges as both the Overreacher and the Tragic Hero, with themes of hubris, the fall of man, and the consequences of a fatal flaw each appearing ten times. This duality in Victor's characterization underscores the complex interplay between his boundless ambition and the inevitable downfall it precipitates. His tragic heroism is rooted in his extraordinary capabilities and noble intentions, which are ultimately undermined by his overwhelming drive and disregard for ethical boundaries. The frequent recurrence of these themes highlights the centrality of Victor's character in exploring the novel's cautionary messages about the perils of unchecked ambition and the necessity of foresight in human endeavors.

The Monster, representing themes of isolation and alienation, appears ten times, emphasizing its role as a social outcast. This archetype critiques societal norms by highlighting the profound impact of societal rejection and the innate need for companionship and understanding. The creature's lament, "Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me?" (p. 185), encapsulates its profound sense of injustice and moral complexity. This rhetorical question reveals that the creature is not inherently evil but is driven to monstrosity by relentless neglect and hostility. This perspective compels readers to empathize with the creature, critiquing the society that deems it monstrous based on appearance alone, and underscores the themes of isolation and alienation as central to the narrative.

Victor's act of creation, symbolizing the Promethean Figure, is noted eight times and underscores themes of innovation and ethical dilemmas. By animating a creature from dead matter, Victor embodies the Promethean spirit of defiance and ingenuity. His actions raise profound ethical questions about the limits of human endeavor and the consequences of playing god. Victor's theft of life mirrors Prometheus's defiance of divine boundaries by stealing fire for humanity, introducing a parallel between enlightenment and unforeseen suffering. This archetype serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of unchecked ambition and the moral responsibilities that come with scientific advancement.

Both Victor and the Monster are portrayed as Wanderers in eight instances, reflecting their existential quests for meaning and belonging. Victor's pursuit of knowledge and the creature's quest for acceptance parallel their journeys, emphasizing their roles as wanderers. This duality highlights the tragic irony of their quests: while Victor seeks to conquer death and elevate humanity, his creation, seeking only acceptance and love, becomes a manifestation of his failure and hubris. Their wanderings symbolize their internal struggles and the relentless

pursuit of their goals, underscoring the themes of isolation, the quest for identity, and the inherent restlessness of the human condition.

Victor's characterization as a Tragic Hero, appearing ten times, emphasizes his fatal flaw—his unchecked ambition and passion for scientific discovery. This flaw leads to his eventual downfall, characterizing him as a tragic hero whose strengths become his weaknesses. His inability to maintain balance and foresee the consequences of his actions highlights the destructive nature of his passions. The ideal of a "calm and peaceful mind" (p. 40) contrast starkly with Victor's obsessive quest, underscoring the destructive potential of hubris. This dichotomy between potential and downfall encapsulates the essence of the tragic hero, illustrating how Victor's virtues are intrinsically linked to his demise. His failure to take responsibility for his creation and refusal to empathize with the creature result in a series of tragedies, highlighting the importance of ethical considerations in scientific endeavors.

CONCLUSION

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" remains a profound exploration of the ethical, psychological, and social dimensions of human ambition and scientific discovery. The study of archetypal images within the novel reveals a complex tapestry of themes that continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. The analysis highlights five key archetypes: the Overreacher, the Monster, the Promethean Figure, the Wanderer, and the Tragic Hero. Victor Frankenstein, as the Overreacher, embodies the perilous pursuit of knowledge and power. His relentless ambition drives him to transcend natural boundaries, creating life but ultimately leading to his downfall. This archetype underscores the novel's critical perspective on the hubris inherent in overreaching ambition and the ethical responsibilities that accompany scientific endeavors. In addition, The Monster, representing isolation and alienation, serves as a poignant critique of societal rejection and the innate human need for acceptance. Initially benevolent and seeking companionship, the creature's transformation into a figure of monstrosity is a direct consequence of societal hostility and neglect. This archetype challenges readers to reflect on the consequences of exclusion and the moral complexities of judging others based on appearance and difference. Victor's act of creation, analyzed as the Promethean Figure, symbolizes the innovative spirit and the ethical dilemmas of defying natural laws. This archetype reflects the double-edged nature of scientific advancement: while it holds the promise of enlightenment and progress, it also carries the risk of unforeseen consequences and ethical quandaries. Victor's creation act serves as a cautionary tale about the responsibilities that come with the power to create and innovate. Both Victor and the Monster embody the Wanderer archetype, reflecting their existential quests for meaning and belonging. Victor's pursuit of knowledge and the Monster's search for acceptance highlight their parallel journeys, emphasizing themes of isolation, identity, and the human condition's inherent restlessness. Their wanderings symbolize their internal struggles and the broader existential quest that defines much of human experience. Finally, Victor as the

Tragic Hero encapsulates the novel's critique of unchecked ambition. His fatal flaw on his inability to foresee the consequences of his actions and his obsessive pursuit of scientific discovery leads to his ultimate downfall. This archetype serves as a reminder of the importance of ethical reflection and foresight in human endeavors, illustrating how even noble intentions can lead to tragedy if not tempered by responsibility and empathy. Therefore, it can be concluded that Shelley's "Frankenstein" thus uses these archetypal images to weave a narrative that is both a reflection on the complexities of human nature and a critique of the ethical boundaries of scientific exploration.

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