

Frankenstein

Old and New Science

Review

Robert Walton is an adventurer and he is in Russia to fulfill his dream of sailing to the North Pole. He waits for clear weather to sail when he writes the first letter. He is pleased when Victor Frankenstein is brought on board ship because he is a man of his own class who will serve as a companion. Victor claims to have a story to tell. Walton decides to write down Victor's story for his sister because it is so unusual and difficult to believe that he feels it is the only way she might really believe it.



Victor Frankenstein is now the main narrator of the story from this point on to Chapter 24. He begins his story just slightly before his birth. His father, although as of yet unnamed, is Alphonse Frankenstein, who was involved heavily in the affairs of his country and thus delayed marriage until late in life. Alphonse quits public life to become a father and husband. Victor's father and Mr. Beaufort, his mother Caroline's father, had a congenial relationship. Mr. Beaufort and his daughter move from Geneva to Lucerne, Switzerland to seek refuge from poverty and a damaged reputation. Alphonse sets out to aid his lost friend to "begin the world again through his credit and assistance."

Chap. II.
 Day after day, each after each, passed
 my return to Geneva and I had not the
 courage to commence my work. I found the
 necessity of the disappointed friend
 I had to overcome my repugnance.
 My health, which had hitherto declined
 was now much restored; I was about then
 uncheered by the memory of my unhappy
 miseries, more proportionally. My father
 was this with pleasure and he turned his
 thoughts towards the best method of
 eradicating the remains of my melancholy.
 Which every now and then would return
 by fits & with a depressing gloom over
 cast the approaching dawn of these
 moments. I took refuge in the most
 perfect solitude. I was alone, I was alone
 in a little boat. I sailed whole days on
 the lake watching the clouds & the sky
 with a melancholy but happy heart.

First page of Frankenstein, Vol. II, in Mary Shelley's own hand

While in Lucerne, Beaufort had saved a small amount of money and had recovered his reputation somewhat, but he became ill and within a few months had died. When Alphonse finds the Beaufort home, he discovers an impoverished Caroline grieving at her father's coffin. Alphonse gives his friend a decent burial and sends Caroline to his family in Geneva to recover. During a two-year period, Alphonse visits Caroline and they eventually became husband and wife. Seeking a better climate, the couple moves to Italy for a short period. During this time, Victor was born and lavished with attention. He was their only child for five years until Caroline comes across an impoverished family in need of help. She falls for a beautiful little girl who is Victor's age and asks the family if she could adopt her. The little girl, Elizabeth, becomes Victor's adopted cousin and playmate.

(Cliffsnotes)



Around the age of seven, Victor's younger brother is born. Up to this point, he and Elizabeth have been the primary receivers of their parents' love. Their parents decide to settle down in Geneva to concentrate on raising their family.

Victor introduces his life-long friend Henry Clerval, a creative child who studies literature and folklore.

(Cliffsnotes)



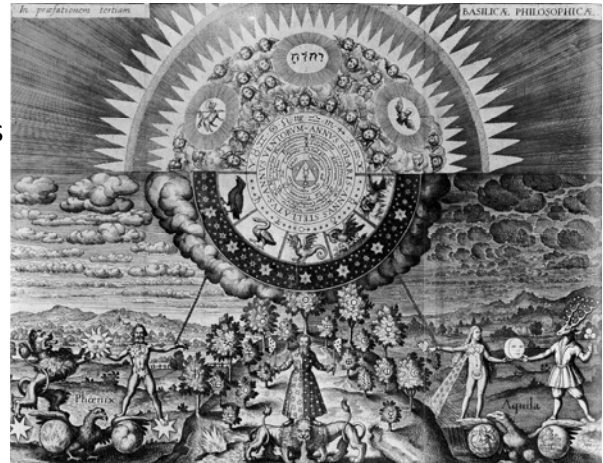
At the age of 13, Victor discovers the works of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, all alchemists from an earlier age. His voracious appetite for knowledge thus begins, and eventually leads him to study science and alchemy. At age 15, Victor witnesses an electrical storm that peaks his interest in electricity and possible applications for its use.

(Cliffsnotes)



Cornelius Agrippa

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, 1486-1535, was a German mystic and alchemist. His most important work is the three-volume *De occulta philosophiae* (written c. 1510, published 1531), a defense of "hidden philosophy" or magic, which draws on diverse mystical traditions -- alchemy, astrology, Kabbalah. A later work, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (Of the Uncertainty and Vanity of the Sciences), attacks contemporary scientific theory and practice. Many of his opinions were controversial. His early lectures on theology angered the Church, and his defense of a woman accused of witchcraft in 1520 led to his being hounded out of Cologne by the Inquisition. In his own day, Agrippa was widely attacked as a charlatan. After his death, legends about him were plentiful. Some believed him to be not only an alchemist but a demonic magician, even a vampire. (<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/agrippa.html>)



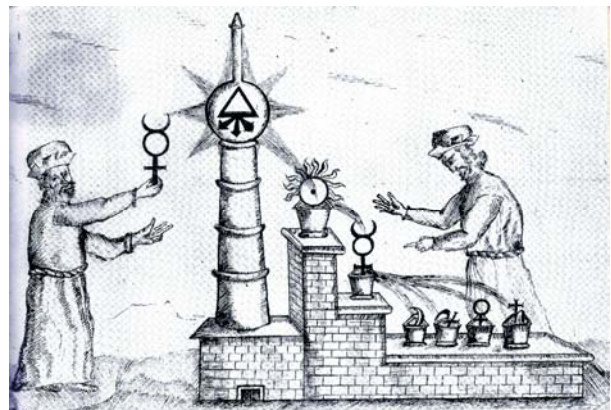
Why is alchemy?

Alchemy

The medieval forerunner of chemistry, based on the supposed transformation of matter. It was concerned particularly with attempts to convert base metals into gold or to find a universal elixir.

"What they all shared was a belief that one natural substance could be transmuted into another. An ancient theory of nature held that all matter was in a process of slow but constant change, and the mission of alchemy was to nudge that process along. The highest and purest state of matter was gold, and gold is what alchemists prized most. But even a partial success could yield a valuable material like tin, copper, or silver." ("Good as Gold: What Alchemists Got Right")

(http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2009/03/15/good_as_gold/?page=full)



Frankenstein lists several prominent alchemists among his boyhood reading material, Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus. The dismissals by Victor's father and Professor Krempe serve to point up the distance the late eighteenth century saw between these mystics and the modern experimental chemistry as practiced by such scientists as Boyle, Priestley, and Davy.

(<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Contexts/alchemy.html>)



From a young age, Victor was fascinated by science and was influenced by alchemy and what was known as the "old science." Authors such as Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus represented Victor's perceptions of science especially in regards to the Renaissance and Middle Ages.

(<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist257s02/students/Stacy/Frankenstein.htm>)

But something happens to cause Victor to take a different outlook of the studies of science. What is it?



After studying at the University of Ingolstadt as a student of chemistry, Victor went on to perform his own projects from the knowledge he received: the secret of life. In particular, he used his talent to create his creation of life from death - The monster.

Victor did intense research in trying to create his new life form. He even visited cemeteries late at night to gather body parts to aid in the construction of his creation.

This is the point at which Mary Shelley begins to portray Victor in a stereotypical manner.

(<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hist257s02/students/Stacy/Frankenstein.htm>)

