

BIRTH AND CREATION

The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

Diane Zuber

"What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, nor woman neither" (Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2).

This quote from Shakespeare's Hamlet could suggest the initial motivations for, and ultimate reactions to, the creating of life in the Genesis account and in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Whereas God was capable of creating life and continually sustaining and having control over his creations, Victor Frankenstein was a creator that abandoned his calling and lived a miserable and pathetic life on the run from his creation.

The creators in these two accounts have little in

common except for their ability to bring life out of otherwise inanimate material. The creator in the second Genesis account is the God of all humanity--formed out of the dust of the earth, and breathed into life by God himself. "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). The creator in Frankenstein is the title character, a man himself who creates another man or monster made of assorted body parts, with life created by mysterious means. Our only clue to the particulars of this reanimation of dead tissue is that he "infuse[d] a spark of being" (57). This creator was unwilling to share more details for fear he would be copied by other obsessive scientists.

The motivation to create in these two accounts appear to be somewhat different. In the Genesis creation narrative, God does not relate a specific reason for this task, although with every act of creation he regards it as good. "The purpose of every creation is good and for the benefit of all" (HarperCollins Study Bible, p. 6,

note 1.4). Victor Frankenstein reveals motives which are partly altruistic and partly selfish. He states, "I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death" (40). He is also compelled to create this being for personal gain explaining, "a new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me . . . I could renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (54). Victor Frankenstein himself is a created being, according to the Genesis account created in the image of God. Since God himself made a task of creating, then man desired to emulate God in this way. Man, unfortunately, is not equipped with the temperament and tools to fully realize this complicated process.

The creations themselves are vastly different—though both man. God's giving of life to humanity followed the creation of the physical world filled with plants, insects, birds and animals. His creation of a man and a woman was the culmination of his work that was described as

“very good.” Victor Frankenstein made one single man from various body parts and was horrified to look upon his creation, describing it as “this catastrophe” (57). Whereas God was pleased with his work and immediately began providing for his creatures, Victor Frankenstein shrank from the responsibility and threw off his magnificent obsession for cruel negligence.

There is a vast difference between the two creators in regard to the responsibility shown to each of their creations. After God created the first man he proceeded to feed him by providing “every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit,” (Gen 1:29). He also fed and cared for every other living thing. He provided a home for his creature by planting a garden in Eden--“there he put the man that he had formed” (Gen 2:8, 15). Furthermore, a helper was made for him as a partner (2:18) so he would not be alone and would be able to flourish in the garden. Of no small importance is God’s naming of Adam (5:1), a personal and intimate act. By sharp contrast,

Victor Frankenstein put life into his creation and proceeded to ignore and even abhor it. There was no thought nor consideration of providing food, shelter or education for his being. Not only was companionship not offered, Frankenstein made a point of distancing himself from his creation. He was unwilling to accept responsibility for this being he had molded. Not providing a name for his creation reveals his alienation.

Communication between creator and creation differed greatly in these two accounts. Communication was extensive in the Garden of Eden. God walked and talked with Adam and Eve, allowing Adam to name all of the other created things. God established rules for their protection. After Adam and Eve break the only rule God strictly enforced, he still has compassion on them and provides clothing. Even as he banishes them from the Garden of Eden and curses the ground and the serpent for its disobedience, he is still willing to provide for their welfare. Victor Frankenstein immediately cuts off communication with the creature he has formed,

and proceeds to live the rest of his life in utter terror that he will stand face to face with this monster again. Not only is Frankenstein not a nurturing creator, he vows to kill the thing he has created. For an instant, compassion could be found in Frankenstein when the creature begged a measure of his creator's time. Frankenstein said, "for the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness" (102). These duties although recognized were never realized. The monster himself says "You, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us" (99). "I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel" (100). The creature has enough wit and intelligence to know the reception he receives from his creator is wrong.

Adam and the Frankenstein's creature inhabit vastly different worlds. Adam is brought into a world of paradise provided for him by God. He is not alone. God has made a helper of Eve

and children are forthcoming. Even after their disobedience, they are provided with ground with which to till the earth and fulfill their daily needs. They are encouraged to subdue the earth “and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:29). Frankenstein creates a man and does not provide clothing for him to wear, food for him to eat, or a place for him to sleep. The creature is thrust into a terrifying world, which in turn finds him terrifying. All of the monster’s acts of kindness are read as threatening acts of hostility.

As these two stories progress, we find the most stark contrast. God remains a God to Adam and Eve, a God in control, always intimately involved in the lives of his people. In the account of Babel in Genesis chapter 11, God scatters the people who want to build a “tower with its top in the heavens” (Gen 11:4). He confuses their language and disperses them abroad to all corners of the earth. He remains in control at all times. Frankenstein, on the other hand, becomes the

victim of the monster. The monster begins killing those closest to Frankenstein, then demands a female and declares, "I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede" (144).

After Frankenstein destroys his work on the monster's female companion, the monster is enraged and says "Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension . . . 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!" (167). Frankenstein spends the rest of his life fearing, avoiding, then chasing his creation, never fulfilling what he believes to be his final destiny—to kill the monster. Even this task, the ending of the monster's life, must ultimately be performed by the monster and not Victor.

The God of Genesis was equipped to create and control any situation. Frankenstein was equipped to create, but at the moment of the giving of life he aborted his responsibilities and became subject to his terrible creation. As in Hamlet's observation, man is an incredible,

admirable being, but without the nurturing,
sustaining power of God, man is a threat even to
himself.

I have neither given or received
nor have I tolerated others' use
of unauthorized aid.

WORKS CITED

The HarperCollins Study Bible. New York:

HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993.

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. New York: Oxford
University Press, 1998.

Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. 2nd ed. Ed. Cyrus Hoy.
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962.