21L.012, Frankenstein

(8 November)

(student presentation on Romanticists)

student exercise: sketch Frankenstein on board
- Who drew monster?
- Who drew Victor?
- What surprised you about the story?
- Many differences between popular conception and actual story
- What information does the title page present and not present?
  - Who was Prometheus?
    - myth: Titan, between gods and humans; stole fire from gods, gave to humans
    - myth: formed humans from mud
    - suggests that Frankenstein title refers to Victor
  - Is story about creature or creator?

recall what Victor tells of childhood:
- coddled by parents, in contrast to his care of monster
- title page: author’s name omitted, because of gender

Why does story begin with a series of letters between other characters?
- explorer wants to:
  - discover something new
  - achieve glory
  - benefit humans

(13 November)

(student presentation on Sir Humphrey Davy)

Frankenstein
- note Davy quote in intro
- in beginning of 1800’s, science was an amateur activity because only the wealthy could pursue it
- in the days of amateur science, normal educated people knew of science, counter to later specialization

previous works
- Odyssey: significant in paying homage to Poseidon
  - Athene prays to him
  - Odysseus must go on final voyage
• Don Quixote: note vision of comic acceptance: tied to worse side of nature regardless of efforts: our ability to improve things is limited

recall beginning of Frankenstein
• letters
• Walton adds to credibility of story
• Walton observed monster

narrative
Mrs. Saville ← Walton ← Frankenstein ← monster
• progressive steps away from social solidarity
• Walton can provide pathway to isolation
• opening and closing landscapes: barren

What constitutes beautiful and sublime?
• Burke: beautiful an experience of happiness; calm and peaceful
• sublime: parts of nature that seem indifferent to humans; can make us feel insignificant, unimportant (e.g., stormy sea)
• beautiful: world we’re at home in
• sublime: monster’s experience; world hostile, indifferent
• Poseidon: sublime force
• Don Quixote’s lower side of human nature

Frankenstein suggests that some part of our soul could be alien to us

Shelley’s perspective
• women keep men in touch with social world

the night Frankenstein succeeded
• Frankenstein exhausted
• has dream
  o divided between his love of Elizabeth, respect for father and pursuit of monster
  o Elizabeth morphs into dead mother; before mother died, she said to Elizabeth, “Elizabeth my love, you must supply my place,” undone in dream; mother died after helping Elizabeth
  o Frankenstein may be motivated subconsciously to render women obsolete
monster embodies Frankenstein’s side that he does not understand

(15 November)

Alone, alone, all all alone,
Alone on the wide wide sea
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.
-S. T. Coleridge
“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

(student presentation on film versions of Frankenstein)

Coleridge’s work influenced Shelley’s writing
- The passage above expresses despair—beyond the redemptive power of God
- a recurring theme in Frankenstein

recall the trial of Justine
- consider the role of Victor during trial
- vol. 1 ch. 8, pg. 86

What is the book’s attitude toward Victor?
- vol. 1, ch. 4: if everyone stays within the bounds of the familiar, progress is slowed
- admiration for striving for something new, but needs tradition to balance
- tension between 2 forces

Start of vol. 2: Victor exalts himself in perverse way
- exempts himself from advice
- monster challenges the primacy of Victor’s misery
- competition of who’s most miserable
- consider Oedipus the King
  - goes from best to worst
  - tragic hero
  - retains grandeur during fall
  - contest between Victor and the monster to be tragic hero of story
  - vol. 2, ch. 2

Why can Victor in the book Frankenstein inspire sympathy but not Victor in the film versions?
- in 1st person narrative (book), tendency to slide from explanation to justification
- vol. 2, ch. 1
  “qui s’accuse, s’excuse” he who accuses himself excuses himself