

Frankenstein, the Modern Prometheus

Literary Response Journal Prompts

Each response should be thoughtful and well-developed. 2-3 pages in your LRJ per response is the proper range. Remember: Your LRJ will be collected and graded on exam day – for completeness, thoughtfulness, neatness (legibility!), and overall effort.

1. “The Misunderstood Monster” by Joseph Pearce

Read the brief article “The Misunderstood Monster” by Joseph Pearce. You will find this at the end of your “Introduction to Mary Shelley and Frankenstein” download, available from the Frankenstein page of the class website. Then respond to the following prompts:

- a. Summarize the article in your own words. In your summary identify the purpose (why did Pearce write the essay?), the thesis (what is his central claim?), and explain how he supports (or proves) his claim.
- b. What kinds of interpretations of Frankenstein does Pearce criticize – and why? Do you find his argument convincing? Why or why not?

2. Literary Gothic

How *Frankenstein* came to be written by Mary Shelley in 1816-1817 is interesting. Shelley had run away to Switzerland with the married man who would later become her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley (yes, the guy who kept seeing his doppelganger). Because the Shelleys and some friends were housebound due to incessant rain, they decided to hold a competition to see who could write the best ghost story. *Frankenstein* won. It is written in a style called “Gothic Horror” or “Gothic Science Fiction.”

Works referred to as “Gothic” have a style which has elements of gloom, the grotesque, or the supernatural, and often take place in centuries past. Other prominent features of Gothic fiction include terror (both psychological and physical), mystery, ghosts, haunted houses, Gothic architecture, castles, darkness, death, decay, doubles, madness (especially a crazy woman living in the attic), secrets and hereditary curses.

The stock characters of Gothic fiction include tyrants, villains, bandits, maniacs, Byronic heroes, persecuted maidens, femmes fatale, madwomen, magicians, monsters, perambulating skeletons, the Wandering Jew and the Devil himself.

For this LRJ entry, write a plot for a story in the Gothic style. Be sure to include when and where the story is set, details about the main character and at least three other characters, the central conflict, what the most exciting part of the story would be (the climax!), and how it ends.

3. The Doppelganger Motif

A doppelganger is a German term, literally meaning a “double-goer,” an apparition or double of a living person. As a literary device, a doppelganger is used to show two different distinct, often opposite, personalities or personality traits. This literary device is used in stories to show internal conflict and the multifaceted nature of a character. Such a figure haunts the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge’s narrative poem (yes, the one you explicated):

Like one, that on a lonesome road,
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread. (lines 445-51)

Interestingly, on July 8, 1822, the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned in the Bay of Spezia. On August 15, while staying at Pisa, Percy's wife Mary Shelley wrote a letter to Maria Gisborne in which she relayed Percy's claims to her that he had met his own doppelgänger. She writes that, in the early hours of June 23, Percy had had a nightmare about the house collapsing in a flood, and:

... talking it over the next morning he told me that he had had many visions lately — he had seen the figure of himself which met him as he walked on the terrace and said to him — "How long do you mean to be content" — No very terrific words & certainly not prophetic of what has occurred. But Shelley had often seen these figures when ill.

Obviously, Mary Shelley was interested in the idea of a doppelganger and used it as a literary motif in *Frankenstein*. This idea of the literary doppelganger can be interpreted in a number of ways:

- It can be seen simply as a double, an alternative version of the individual concerned;
- It can be seen as a complement, a version of the individual that possesses different qualities and thus completes the personality;
- It can be seen as an opposite, a being that possesses all the qualities that the individual lacks and most abhors.

By the way: An important literary form employing the Doppelganger motif is the psychomachia (think: Dr. Faustus), originated by the Greek poet Prudentius to depict "conflict within the soul" or the struggle between virtue and vice within an individual. The psychomachia was particularly important in medieval art and drama, where separate characters were perceived as representing different aspects of a single human personality, so that conflict within the drama depicted the struggle of conscience or the need for integration of the personality.

Now, for your Doppelganger LRJ entry you may choose one of the following, either A, B, or C:

LRJ Choice A

Shelley uses the doppelganger motif in *Frankenstein*. In your LRJ response, explain how the monster becomes a kind of external embodiment of Victor Frankenstein's increasingly divided and conflicted personality. Use specific examples from the story to support the assertion that Frankenstein's monster is Victor's doppelganger. Consider this quotation from the novel:

LRJ Choice B

Read one of the following short stories, give a brief synopsis of the story, and explain how the author uses the doppelganger motif:

- "Markheim" by Robert Louis Stevenson
- "William Wilson" by Edgar Allan Poe

LRJ Choice C

Watch one of the following movies directed by Alfred Hitchcock, give a brief synopsis of the story, and explain how the author uses the doppelganger motif:

- *Shadow of a Doubt*
- *Strangers on a Train*
- *Frenzy*
- *Vertigo*

4. Criminal Profile: The Daemon

Many of you will be familiar with “Criminal Minds,” the highly popular TV series that follows the adventures of a profiling team from the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) from Quantico, Virginia. Unlike other crime shows, which focus on the crime, “Criminal Minds” focuses on the criminal.

You are going to take on the role of a FBI profiler and analyze Frankenstein’s creature based on the crimes he has committed thus far in the novel. Your profiles should include answers to the following questions.

- What does this character look like? How does he carry himself? How does he dress?
- How does this character speak? Does he have any identifiable speech patterns?
- Where was this character born? How was he raised?
- Describe the time period in which this character lives. How do the times affect this character’s thinking and actions?
- What is this character’s main motivation? Why?
- Describe any redeeming qualities this character may have.
- Analyze the character’s personality flaws. From what do they stem? How do they affect the choices he makes?
- Choose an object this character holds or would hold dear. Explain the connection.
- Does this character have any secrets? If so, explain.
- Who would be this character’s contemporary counterpart? Explain your choice.