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The Moon, the Creature and the Creator

Throughout history the story of the werewolf has been iconic and represented by the full moon. When the phase of the moon is full, typically normal people grow fangs and hair similar to a dog. Thus the symbol of the full moon has been associated with insanity. In most stories the full moon means that people turn into monsters that roam around and instill terror in people. This symbol has been a part of society for a long time and can even be seen in older works, not just modern ones. Because of this association of being crazy the term lunatic was coined. This term meaning, “originally, affected with the kind of insanity that was supposed to have recurring periods dependent on the changes of the moon” (OED). In *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley the moon is used to help make the creature into a monster. The creature’s violence increases whenever the moon is out, and this violence leads to Victor’s downfall. Whenever the creature does something evil the moon is described depicting the insanity that is slowly consuming Victor. There is the relationship of the moon which affects the monster who then affects Victor, so the moon is indirectly causing Victor to be consumed by insanity. There is a close association of Victor and the moon because nature is showing the violence of something unnatural like the monster. The moon is showing Victor the unnatural horror of the creature he has created as his punishment for being the creator. The notorious symbol of the moon illustrating insanity is used

throughout the novel to show how the creature is slowly making Victor insane and the moon is very much demotic in character because it reveals the creature to Victor.

While Victor is creating his creature the moon is described as he works over the body parts and begins to assemble them. He is creating a being in a very unnatural way, not the way that nature intends it to happen. While he is making the creature, Victor is not at ease. He says, "The moon gazed on my midnight labors, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding-places" (Shelley 33) He even uses the words *unrelaxed* and *breathless* to convey that forming this creature is a task of concentration and uncertainty. Victor seems to almost know that by creating this being, he will ultimately cause his own downfall. While creating it he starts to show the beginning signs of his own insanity because he is so engrossed in his work. He says, "My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless and almost frantic impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (Shelley 33). When he describes making the monster he uses the word *tremble* which illustrates fear as well as insanity because Victor can no longer control his own actions. Victor also uses *frantic* as the word that keeps him moving. This gives us an image of someone who is unstable and is so engrossed within his own work that it will be as unpredictable as him. Being a lunatic "in the 16th century, Paracelsus wrote that "mania has the following symptoms: frantic behavior, unreasonableness, constant recklessness and mischievousness. Some patients suffer from it depending on the phases of the moon" (Losif and Ballon 2). This is what people during the time that Frankenstein was written define as madness associated with the moon. Victor is exhibiting these symptoms within the above passage while the moon is above him because he is described as *frantic*. Shelley is showing the

reader that Victor is slowly becoming insane during the formation of his creature, which is not following the natural order of the life cycle.

When Victor first makes his creature he feels a great sense of horror and quickly runs to his room in order to clear his thoughts. In his second viewing of the creature, he sees the creature in the light of the moon. The moon is shedding light on the creature that has brought unrest and horror into Victor's life. Shelley says, "When, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I created" (36). The moon is *forced* through the windows which gives the light of the moon a slightly violent meaning and personifies it. It is described as if it is coming through the shutters so that Victor can perceive the monster. Without the light of the moon, Victor would have been unable to see the horrible creature that he has created. This passage is the beginning of Victor's insanity. The moon has been claimed to have "a demonic origin" which is illustrated when it illuminates the monster to Victor (Riva et al. 69). In this passage it shows that the creature is indeed a demon to Victor. The sight of this ugly creature in the light of the moon makes Victor see his own creature like a devil that he abhors. Nature is showing the creature to Victor in its true light, something unnatural that never should have occurred.

The creature is connected to the moon through what he reads as he gains intelligence. There are specific works in which Shelley explains the creature reading one of the works is *Paradise Lost*. This work in particular is what the creature cites as his main source for understanding who he is and what he relates to the most. The creature says, "But 'Paradise Lost' excited and far deeper emotions" (Shelley 90). This book in particular is important to how the monster illustrates lunacy. Riva et al. says, "Reflecting the popular association between the moon and the irrational primitive and dark side of the human mind the adjective 'moonstruck' makes

its first appearance in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (69). "Moonstruck" was a term used instead of lunacy at the time and started to become more popular after Milton used it in his work. It is important to note that *Paradise Lost* also uses the symbol of the moon and how it creates lunacy in people. Since the creature connects to the work so much, it shows how he is strongly connected to the moon and the process that it produces. The creature is not connected to the moon in a positive way since it is an unnatural being and defies the natural cycle of life.

As Victor begins making the creature a mate, his labors are difficult and tenuous for him. When night falls, the moon does not give enough light for Victor to work. The moon is not shedding light on Victor's work because it is unnatural and goes against the cycle of life. He feels unsure of his actions and makes the creature leisurely, reflecting on what he is doing the whole time. He says, "I sat one evening in my laboratory; the sun has set, and the moon was just rising from the sea; I had not sufficient light for my employment, and I remained idle, in a pause of consideration of whether I should leave me labour for the night, or hasten its conclusion by an unremitting attention to it" (Shelley 118). As he describes himself making the creature it is while the moon begins to rise. There is no longer the light of the sun to guide his labors, but only the dim light of the moon. The moon is not shedding light on Victor's work because it is unnatural. Victor then decides to quite his work for the night and retires outside after mangling the body of his newest creation. When he looks up he sees the monster and says, "I trembled, and my heart failed within me; when, on looking up, I saw, by the light of the moon, the daemon at the casement" (Shelley 119). Victor starts to tremble when he walks outside, sees the monster and knows that he has just seen him destroy his mate. He also says that his heart is giving out, showing his fear and how he is slowly losing irrationality. While the moon is illuminating the creature it illustrates that there is evil surrounding the creature and that Victor's future is going to

be grim. The creature represents a devious creature that will bring Victor to his downfall. It has been said, “The Moon, a nocturnal and mysterious entity opposed to the Sun, was connected to the occult and evil forces of the demonic world. For this reason, people afflicted with madness, considered as an expression of a demonic possession, began to be named as ‘lunatics’” (Riva et al. 69). This illustrates that since the moon is the opposite of the life-giving bright sun, it depicts an evil spirit with it. Since the monster is standing in the light of the moon, it is showing that the creature is a demonic creature, unlike natural life. The moon is illustrating that the creature is unnatural and therefore evil. By seeing his own creation under the moon, it makes Victor feel helpless and agitated which contribute to him becoming insane, his ultimate punishment.

When Victor’s new wife, Elizabeth is murdered by the creature he sees the light of the moon through the window which makes him look out the window and see the creature. The moon is what makes Victor look out the window; it has an unsettling color about it. The moon’s light leads Victor to behold its creature and its violence and horror. He explains, “While I still hung over her in the agony of despair, I happened to look up. The windows of the room had before been darkened, and I felt a kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber. The shutters had been thrown back; and, with a sensation of horror not to be described, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred” (Shelley 141). He explains being in *agony* and *despair* over the death of his new wife, two feelings that have been prevalent within Victor since he created his creature. He describes the moon as *pale* and *yellow* which catch his attention and brings it to the monster. This is one of the last actions that causes Victor to chase his creation to gain revenge. In this chase, Victor has most definitely lost his sanity and becomes a lunatic because of his creature and how he depicts it under the light of the moon. There is said to be “an increase in violent behavior in psychiatric setting has been

attributed to the presence of the full moon” (Owen et al. 496). This research shows that the monster’s violence becomes more problematic when there is a full moon. The monster kills during the night under the light of the moon. The killings attribute to Victor slowly becoming insane because the creature he created is killing his friends and family. Overall the slew of violent crimes that the monster commits leads to Victor becoming a lunatic. Without the moon the violent acts would have no way to be illuminated and Victor would have been unable to see the true horror of his own, unnatural creation. The moon is connected to the creature because it purposefully causes Victor’s downfall, due to him creating his own unnatural being.

Victor starts to lose it when the monster torments him with his actions. The monster’s violence increases due to the moon and this slowly starts to put Victor on the edge of insanity. When hearing the monster on a night illuminated by the moon, Victor becomes frantic and goes into a manic state. The creature kills his loved ones and while Victor goes to the graves of his family members he is greeted by the monster’s laugh, “I was answered through the stillness of night by a loud and fiendish laugh. It rung on my ears long and heavily; the mountains re-echoed it, and I felt as if all hell surrounded me with mockery and laughter” (Shelley 146). The laughter *rung* through Victor’s ears illustrating how he didn’t just hear it, but experienced the laughter. It is described as *fiendish* because to Victor the monster represents a devilish creature that haunts him. This is where Victor decides to get vengeance by pursuing the monster and this makes his insanity inevitable. Insanity is his punishment for defying nature by making the creature. Being insane is described as “one who has had lucid intervals, sometimes enjoying his sense, and sometime snot, and that frequently depending upon the changes of the moon” (Raison, Klein and Steckler 104). Victor is still well spoken and can participate in society but whenever he sees the monster in the moonlight he goes into fits of rage and does not act like himself. Every time he

sees the monster under the light of the moon he hates the creature he has generated and feels that he has truly created a devilish fiend.

As Victor begins pursuing the monster from where he heard his laughter, he suddenly sees the monster in the light of the moon. It is the moon that sheds light on the creature who has committed violent and heinous acts. The moon is showcasing this awful creature to Victor, which induces him to an insane frenzy. The monster is being illuminated by the moon so that Victor can see his whole figure fleeing from the scene. He says, "Suddenly the broad disk of the moon arose, and shone full upon his ghastly and distorted shape, as he fled with more than mortal speed" (Shelley 146). In this passage the moon is described as a *broad disk* illustrating that it is big and has made the darkness much lighter. It says *shone full* which shows the whole moon was directly illuminating Victor's creature so that he could see his ugly features. As Victor sees the creature that has killed his family and has now followed him, he is angered and he changes after he sees the monster. How Victor reacts is similar to how mental patients have been recorded acting when there is a full moon. It has been said, "The ancient conception that the full moon produces agitation, excitement and even maniacal outburst in mental patients" (Raison, Klein and Steckler 104). All of these symptoms are things that Victor exhibits after he hears the monster laugh and see him under the full moon. He is excited and pursues the monster because he feels that he needs to seek revenge. At the same time Victor is agitated and upset over the loss of his loved ones. This passage continues to show how Victor is showing symptoms of going insane. This insanity is coming through due to the indirect influence that the moon has on Victor. Nature is indirectly punishing Victor through illuminating the monster because he created something unnatural. There would be no lunacy apparent in Victor without the imagery and symbolism of the moon throughout the novel.

Shelley was not the first, nor is she the last to use the moon as a symbol of lunacy. She illustrates how Victor is slowly becoming a lunatic as the monster's violent acts grow due to the cycles of the moon. Stories like this have led many to believe that people do become crazier when there is a full moon. Though there is some falsity in these beliefs, the moon does play an important role in mental patients still today. These types of works helped spark research on the moon and its affects. They gave people ideas to research so that they could find facts between the moon and its connection to lunacy. The research that is now most popular for this association is that insanity and connection to the moon is due to less sleep (Raison, Klein and Steckler 104). Before modern lighting, the moon prevented people from sleeping because it was so bright (Raison, Klein and Steckler 104). This lack of sleep could cause mania in people and therefore cause this association between the moon and lunacy (Raison, Klein and Steckler 104). Now with modern lighting, the moon does not have this type of effect on people (Raison, Klein and Steckler 104). There have also been studies on whether patients in a psychiatric setting become more violent when there is a full moon (Owen et al 499). The results found that there is no support for the belief that the patients are more violent due to the phases of the moon (Owen et al. 499). Overall modern research has explained why there has been a strong association between the moon and insanity for many years. Though this association has been proven to no longer exist in our society, the question to answer would be to see whether it ever did. As we advance more scientifically, there will be more answers as to why insanity and the moon have been so strongly connected throughout history.

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