

## Glory and Companionship: Motivators of Life That Lead to Demise

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As with most classic and well-regarded works of literature, *Paradise Lost* (1674) by English poet John Milton (1608-1674) and *Frankenstein* (1818) by English novelist Mary Shelley (1797-1851) both elaborate on numerous themes of the human experience. One such theme that is shared by both works is the search for life satisfaction and meaning. Specifically, both writers focus on two potential sources of such satisfaction that motivate the actions of characters in each work. The first of these two motivators is glory, the attainment of recognition through influence or power comparable to that of a god. The second is companionship or the formation of a meaningful, significant interpersonal relationship that extinguishes loneliness. These two goals lead to some level of conflict in which a character chooses or must choose one motivator over the other, thereby causing the character's destruction and haplessness. Here, I will analyze a pair of characters from each work in considering the motivators of glory and companionship, specifically analyzing Eve and Adam from *Paradise Lost* and Frankenstein and the monster from *Frankenstein*. I will conclude with a discussion of the possible moral that the two writers wish to propose concerning the longing for glory and companionship.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton's Eve stands as an example of the shunning of companionship for the attainment of glory. From her initial creation, she is presented with a very obvious companion, Adam. The voice that leads her to Adam, presumably God, notes specifically that Adam, "he / Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy / Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear / Multitudes like thyself" (4.471-474). Nevertheless, she is more enamored by her own image,

reflected in a pool, than by his (4.478). Seeing him as being “less fair, / Less winning soft, less amiably mild,” Eve turns her back on Adam and attempts to flee before being convinced to submit to Adam’s loving care (4.471-491). Though she does submit in the end, her initial reactions do not indicate any special appreciation of what Adam has to offer, specifically love and company. She is interested instead in herself; her vanity is revealed to be inherent in her first interactions with the world. A certain exaltation of self is further revealed in later developments of Eve’s character.

When Adam and Eve first appear in Milton’s work, they have already built a relationship of substance. Eve is seen to marry Adam and to consummate their marriage amidst divine congratulations (8.510-20), tend the garden with him (4.438-9), offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God with him (4.610-33), and communicate to him such inner thoughts and feelings as those incited by troublesome dreams (5.28-94). However, Eve still seems unsatisfied, desirous of something more. In the dream implanted into the mind of Eve by Satan, an angelic figure describes to her the power of the forbidden fruit and its ability “to make gods of men” (5.70). In this dream, Eve is bestowed with the ability to fly, the first sign of her attaining the status of a goddess promised by her dream-guide through consumption of the fruit (5.87). When tempted directly by Satan, Eve is moved by the idea that eating the fruit will give her “life / To knowledge... life more perfect... than fate / Meant” (9.686-90), a life in which she would “be as [the] gods, / Knowing both good and evil as they know” (9.708-9), a life of glory.

After eating the fruit, Eve considers withholding the fruit from Adam, not out of sympathy towards her husband but rather to uphold herself:

But to Adam in what sort

Shall I appear? Shall I to him make known  
 As yet my change and give him to partake  
 Full happiness with me? Or rather not,  
 But keep the odds of knowledge in my power,  
 Without copartner, so to add what wants  
 In female sex, the more to draw his love  
 And render me more equal and, perhaps,  
 A thing not undesirable, sometime  
 Superior, for inferior who is free? (9.816-8825)

She desires to usurp the superiority of the male sex and thus gain freedom through attainment of knowledge that surpasses that of Adam. She is even willing to withhold full happiness from him in order to improve herself, even to exist without her partner. While she says that she desires greater power in order to make Adam love her more, it does not seem genuine, as Adam's love for her has yet to be shown lacking in any way, and until now Eve has not taken advantage of opportunities to express her love towards him. Her fall, her sin, the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, all results from Eve seeking high regard, the status of a goddess.

Adam, on the other hand, seems to be more concerned with the happiness he gains from his relationship with Eve than with gaining personal recognition, influence or benefit. Despite having direct contact with God (8.313-4) and having the honor of naming all the animals of creation (8.352-3), Adam still longs for an equal with whom to commune, asking God specifically how one could ever find contentment in solitude (8.363-5). God agrees that it is "not good for man to be alone" and thus creates Eve (8.445, 449-77). Upon seeing her, Adam

instantly falls in love, finding in her looks “Sweetness... unfelt before” and calls her “Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” (8.475, 495). Adam loves Eve and, though love “Leads up to Heaven, is both the way and the guide,” love, it would seem, is also the cause of his downfall (8.613).

When Eve tells him of her offense, Adam also agrees to consume the forbidden fruit, claiming the resolution to risk death so as to never part from her (9.906-7, 916). Even the prospect of another Eve cannot dissuade him from disobeying God, as his love for Eve would never leave his heart (9.911-913). The company of Eve is worth more than keeping God’s commandments or even life itself, so Adam wreaks suffering on all humanity in the name of love for a partner in life. He sacrifices the glory he possesses as the first man – creation and treasure of God, sinless and eternal – for continued relationship with one who does not seem to fully reciprocate his feelings.

In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, longing for glory and companionship is even more distinctly portrayed as the respective influences are demonstrated through the lives of the fictional characters. In many ways, Victor Frankenstein parallels Eve. Born of a distinguished family in Geneva, Frankenstein lives a happy life, stating specifically, “No youth could have passed more happily than mine. My parents were indulgent, and my companions amiable” (17, 20). With a loving family and good friends, Elizabeth and Henry Clerval, one a dear cousin and future wife and the other a lifelong friend, Frankenstein seems in no way lacking for adequate company (19-20). Like Eve, he is born into a life that, from appearances if not in reality, seems quite sufficient to fulfill him, idyllic and serene, free from needling cares.

Frankenstein's greatest enjoyment is his studies (20). Most specifically, through study of the works of Agrippa, Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus, Frankenstein becomes enthralled with discovery of the elixir of life:

My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality; and I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life. But the latter obtained my most undivided attention: wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death! (22)

From his youth, the attainment of near godlikeness, something beyond the lovely life he is given, tempts him and seems to offer a sense of fulfillment he does not yet possess. The idea that Frankenstein wishes to be like a god is demonstrated again when he later states, "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (32). This preoccupation with the source of life separates him from his friends, as such study of life does not interest Elizabeth and is forbidden to Clerval due to his father's belief that "learning was superfluous in the commerce of ordinary life" (22, 25). It creates an additional divide between him and his family, his father criticizing and disregarding the subjects he chooses to study (21). Frankenstein is thus "left... to pursue [his] studies alone" (22). This isolation due to differing individual interests is comparable to Eve's previously noted separation from Adam, and perhaps also God, due to her inordinate self-absorption. Eve and Frankenstein both have companionship but do not necessarily feel contented with their relationships. Something is still missing, and both intend to find it through other venues, specifically attainment of godlike status through the acquisition of knowledge.

Like Eve separating from Adam after convincing him of the advantages of dividing their labors (Milton 9.214-403), Frankenstein leaves his family and friends for a time in order to complete his education “at the university of Ingolstadt” (Shelley 24). While Frankenstein adores those he loves, he is willing to sacrifice their connection for further studies:

I, who had ever been surrounded by amiable companions, continually engaged in endeavouring to bestow mutual pleasure, I was now alone.... I love my brothers, Elizabeth, and Clerval, these were “old familiar faces;” but I believed myself totally unfitted for the company of strangers. Such were my reflections as I commenced my journey; but as I proceeded, my spirits and hopes rose. I ardently desired the acquisition of knowledge. (26)

Frankenstein’s longing for greatness allows him to be inspired and filled with enthusiasm and expectation even in his sadness at having to separate from his companions. He chooses glory over companionship in this instance, though companionship is not lost forever but simply put aside for the time being. Even when Frankenstein is presented with a likeminded individual, one M. Waldman, a professor of chemistry in whom Frankenstein finds “a true friend,” “natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry, in the most comprehensive sense of the term, [still] bec[omes] nearly [his] sole occupation” (29).

Through his diligence and hard work, born of intrinsic curiosity and longing for discovery, Frankenstein at last discovers the spark of life and becomes “capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter” (30). Like Eve eating the forbidden fruit, Frankenstein gains knowledge of a universal riddle of life and attains power through such knowledge, a knowledge

that he later finds to be a poison to him and to his happiness, as seen when he later warns of the dangers of modeling his life:

Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow. (31)

Eve and Frankenstein both wish to transcend the limits of their humanity, the one finding a nature beyond what fate intended, and the other extending beyond what his nature will allow.

Attainment of knowledge in hopes of accessing godlike stature, in both cases leads to destruction. Eve causes the expulsion of the human race from Eden when she offers the fruit to Adam instead of letting herself die and being replaced by another Eve. Frankenstein causes the deaths of all those he cares about and the loss of his sanity and potential when he uses his knowledge to create a monster without considering the consequences of his actions (34). While Frankenstein attempts to right his wrong by working to appease the monster (100), he then decides simply to ignore the monster and to regain the companionship he left behind by marrying the love of his life, Elizabeth (132). After her death, he labors to kill the monster (139). In the end, he is only able to find relief in death, bereft of both the companionship he once had and the glory he so dearly desired (148).

The monster that Frankenstein creates also has to search for purpose and meaning. Nevertheless, in consideration of the influences of companionship and glory, the monster's story more closely parallels that of Adam than that of his maker. Like Adam, the monster is the first of his species, singular and alone (87-8). He possesses greater qualities than the other

creatures of earth, being much faster (48, 141), stronger (74), and with greater resistance to the elements than any human (142). The monster is born with certain characteristics that offer him the intrinsic potential to gain recognition or some life purpose beyond companionship. This ideal is clearly revealed when in a single night he uses his power to stock several days' supply of wood for the De Lacey, much to the satisfaction of the family (74). He has the capacity to help those in need with little effort on his part; he can be a positive influence on the world, while still remaining ever alone. It is when he confronts the De Laceys, hoping to win them over with his newfound eloquence, that his woes truly begin. If he were willing to find satisfaction in his life of solitude and not entertain ideas of interpersonal relations, he perhaps could live a life of meaning, if not contentment. Instead, he instead longs for companionship, and, in revealing himself to the elder De Lacey, risks losing all that he has gained so far in order to attain one friend, much like Adam when he eats the fruit so as not to lose Eve.

Deprived of the possibility of finding friendship with any human, the monster proceeds to blackmail Frankenstein into creating a female counterpart, after he has already caused the deaths of both William and Justine (65). After Frankenstein destroys the unfinished figure promised to the monster, the monster kills Clerval and Elizabeth and causes the death of Frankenstein's father (115, 122, 135, 137). The monster then travels across the world, eluding the creator he torments in revenge and rage, the only motivators keeping him from killing himself (141, 91-2). However, at the death of Frankenstein, the monster admits his lack of satisfaction, growing self-hatred, and remorse garnered from his detestable actions, saying specifically, "he [Frankenstein] suffered not more in the consummation of the deed; – oh! not the ten-thousandth portion of the anguish that was mine during the lingering detail of its



execution. A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse” (153). He can now only hope to find peace in death, a death of his own making:

I shall no longer see the sun or stars, or feel the winds play on my cheeks. Light, feeling, and sense, will pass away; and in this condition must I find my happiness. Some years ago, when the images which this world affords first opened upon me, when I felt the cheering warmth of summer, and heard the rustling of the leaves and the chirping of the birds, and these were all to me, I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation. Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death? (155)

Much like his maker, the monster has lost the potential to know happiness and is thus left to fade to ashes, saying farewell to his sorrows, saying farewell to his life (156).

More important perhaps than simply the comparable presentations of the effects of the motivators of glory and companionship is what the authors of the works meant to convey through their portrayals of the lives of the characters. For all the characters, death seems to be the final consequence of uninhibited and immoderate pursuit of either motivator. Eve and Adam both are expelled from paradise and are cursed to die (Milton 10.207-10). Frankenstein and the monster die as well, Frankenstein dying from extreme weariness after suffering the ill-fated creation of the monster and the loss of all his loved ones, and the monster committing suicide at the loss of the rage and revenge that had previously kept him alive.

In terms of glory, both writers express the intended moral of the story with great clarity. As previously noted, Eve is seen to have extended herself “higher than [her] lot” in order to gain a life greater than fate had intended for her (9. 690). Likewise, Frankenstein attempts to

become “greater than his nature will allow” (31). Both Milton and Shelley thus seem to warn against striving for what the natural order of the world has not offered. Venturing beyond the limits demarcated by inherent law is ill-advised.

The prescriptions concerning the search for companionship are more difficult to discern. While it appears that Milton follows the traditional Christian belief that it is good for a man to have a woman to marry as God condones it in the story, Milton also implies that Eve is the source of great trouble, a “fair defect / Of nature” (Milton 10.891-2). One may then assume that had Adam been satisfied with the company of God and the angels, rather than requiring an equal of like mind, he might have averted death and suffering. As noted above, this idea is further seen through the fact that Adam determines to eat the fruit under the presumption that he will never be able to overcome his love for Eve, even if she is replaced. Striving for a single relationship, as an end in itself without regard for all the other blessings one possesses, seems to be the source of Adam’s downfall. This idea can also be seen in Shelley’s work. While Shelley invokes pity for the monster due to the presence of his unbearable solitude, once the monster begins killing, the reader’s pity dissipates. When the monster is willing to commit abominable acts to attain a chimerical companionship, his fall to ignominy begins.

Perhaps it is the enjoyment of an uncomplicated life that should be the sole object of one’s endeavors. As Elizabeth states, the ideal life is that of a laborer of the earth:

“A farmer’s is a very healthy happy life; and the least hurtful or rather the most beneficial profession of any.... [I]t is certainly more creditable to cultivate the earth for the sustenance of man, than to be the confidant, and sometimes the accomplice of his vices....” (Shelley 39)

As all four characters analyzed here could avail themselves of the opportunity to lead such a life, perhaps their fatal mistake was not striving for companionship or glory specifically, but rather venturing away from the simple life. Perhaps then both Milton and Shelley are asking their readers to appreciate and to enjoy the blessings that have already been bestowed upon them, to be satisfied with what their place in life already offers, and to “Seek happiness in tranquility” (Shelley 152).

#### Works Cited

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