

*The Frankenstein Prophecies:  
Victor Frankenstein, the Monster and the Shadows of Technology in the Modern World.*

In the turbulent times in which we live, Mary Shelley's story is a cautionary parable for our time. It is also a beacon of hope when her story is read from the Monster's point of view.

Using a format of questions, this book explores eight ways in which the Monster's tale carries the prophetic implications of Victor Frankenstein's dream to be a new God who would reverse the fall from paradise and erase the stain of death from the human condition. Each of the eight questions is a seed incubated in Frankenstein's abandonment of the creature he has made and the denial of his obligations to him, and each one is connected with a specific theme in Mary Shelley's story.

Questions 1 through 6 focus on how the Monster's tale reveals the darker side of Frankenstein's noble but flawed quest to create a new species that would bless him as its creator. Questions 7 and 8 discuss four seeds of hope that are latent in Mary Shelley's novel.

Question 1: Resurrecting the Dead: *Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of the Dangers of Acting as Gods?*

In this question we follow Victor Frankenstein as he progresses from re-animating dead tissue to infusing life into a corpse composed of multiple body parts. Feeling his excitement in that first moment when he believes he has finally succeeded in creating life, we sense his horror and despair, when, shocked by the ugly, disfigured and monstrous thing that stares back at him, he flees from the hideous creature he has made.

Conceived in the convoluted caverns of his mind, the creature is an abomination of nature, a motherless monster who, when abandoned by his maker, is an orphan condemned to wander alone on the edges of the human community. The tragic plot of Mary Shelley's story unwinds when the Monster promises to seek his revenge. The death that Victor would erase from life now haunts not only his life, but also our lives as death has mushroomed in its reach and intensity. From the slaughter of millions in the trenches of WW I through the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the contemporary genocides of today, the increasingly destructive power of our technological god like abilities is realizing a prophetic aspect of Frankenstein's dream to become a new creator god.

Question 2: The Melting Polar Ice: *Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of the Dying of Nature?*

There are two aspects of the Monster's tale that I explore in this question. First, I discuss how Frankenstein's destruction of the mate he promised to make for the Monster betrays his dismissive attitude toward the feminine. Focusing on the powerful scene when, in the light of the moon, the Monster sees the completed but still lifeless form of his mate, I describe how this moonlight vision inspires for the first time the Monster's sense of hope that his own tortured and lonely existence will be over. But this same moonlight drives Victor mad. This darker, softer light of the moon, which has been associated with feminine qualities of mind, is too great a contrast for the solar light of Victor's mind. In his rage and fury Victor Frankenstein rips the body of the mate to pieces and proceeds to throw her into the cold waters of a Scottish lake where she lies forgotten and un-mourned.

But who she is remains for us a mystery and the only thing we do know is that she was to be the Monster's companion. This clue suggests, however, that Frankenstein's story is re-telling the story of Eve. Tempted by the devil, which is a term that Victor Frankenstein applies to the Monster, Eve eats the forbidden fruit and from that first bite forward she has carried the blame for spoiling God's creation. The Monster's mate, then, is an emblem of the condemned, discarded and silenced feminine that runs through the underground waters of Mary Shelley's story.

Second, I examine Frankenstein's materialistic and utilitarian attitudes toward nature. For him the sacred ground of churchyard cemeteries where the dead are buried and mourned has become only a profane place where he can dig up the material he needs for his work. But the final scenes of Mary Shelley's story dramatically depict the dire prophetic consequences of these attitudes that regard nature as a resource for our use and abuse.

The vast frozen landscape of the Arctic ice is the setting of a final encounter between the Monster and his maker. As Mary Shelley's novel draws to its close, we hear the Monster's promise to set fire to himself so that his form would never give an opportunity for others to duplicate Frankenstein's work. The ending of her story is, however, ambiguous. The last we see of the Monster is as he is being carried by the waves into darkness and distance, leaving us to wonder if he has died.

This ambiguity is a portal through which the Monster approaches us today. Whether or not he has died in the story, the imagined fire lives on in the climate crises we face today. From the melting polar ice to the disrupted weather patterns around the globe,

he calls our attention to the dying of nature prophetically foreseen in Frankenstein's practical disregard for the living, animated spirit of the natural world.

Question 3: *The Monster's Body: Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of the Monster's Descendants?*

The third question illustrates with various examples how, despite his disfigured flesh, the Monster is like us and we like him. In this unexpected and generally unwelcomed kinship with what is regarded as a monster, Frankenstein's Monster forces us to look again at the issue of what constitutes personhood. Amplifying this theme, I explore two lines of the Monster's descendants, which, as his prophetic progeny, show the different criteria we adopt in judging what is like and what is unlike us.

On one line, I describe how the powers of genetic manipulation and computer technologies are engineering enhanced human bodies whose flesh re-fashioned in multiple ways are transforming the dream of a life without death by framing it in terms of remaining forever young. Consumers in shopping malls and in tourist sites are two examples of a disguised progeny of the Monster with whom we are pleasantly and comfortably distracted from the fear of death.

On the other line, the progeny of the Monster haunt us today as dispensable, throw-away people who, lingering on the margins of our technologically fashioned version of paradise, remain invisible. The bag lady on the street, the disabled person asking for some change and many other variants are monstrous figures we often avoid as being not like us at all.

Questions 4: Out of Africa to the Moon: *Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of Creating a New Species of Humankind?*

Question 5: From Astronauts to Angels in Clouds: *Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of the Last Generations of Humankind?*

These two questions examine how the Monster's tale uncovers Mary Shelley's story to be a prophecy of our god-like technological powers creating new species of our genus *Homo sapiens*. In Question 4 I describe how our leap into space is an initial step toward becoming a species whose body is re-designed to be at home on the moon. The blueprint for that body is the Monster's body composed of anatomical parts. In space and on the moon, the human activities of the astronaut's body are defined as technical functions of our biological anatomy. Thus, while the image of Earth from space can be for a member of *Homo sapiens* an inspiration that will take his or her breath away, that is not a biological problem of respiration for *Homo astronauticus*.

Question 5 considers two other steps in our transformation. With computer technology, smart phones and other devices that eclipse the local boundaries of space and time, we are becoming a species who suffers from terminal identity. At the computer terminal our sense of self is as a disembodied image with no haptic sense of the other, a species who, while seemingly in touch with others, is literally out of touch. On the world-wide-web we are ironically alone.

Wondering if our terminal identity might be a harbinger of our becoming one of the last generations of our kind, I turn to the work of the futurist Ray Kurzweil who presents a very convincing argument that the rate of our computer and genetic advances are well on the way toward transcending the biological body. Confidentially predicting

that in the next 50 years or so who we are as bits and bytes of data will be downloaded into the cyber cloud, he brings Frankenstein's dream to a disturbingly possible conclusion. As disembodied minds dwelling in the cloud we will, he says, be as close to being god as anyone could ever have dared imagine.

Victor Frankenstein having imagined that possibility, Kurzweil's dream is a chilling and monstrous prophecy of the Monster's fate of being abandoned by and sacrificed to his maker's dream. For Kurzweil, those who would choose to remain as they are will be left behind as unenhanced inferior beings, amplifying the Monster's tale of abandonment.

Question 6: WWW: Adrift in the Digital World: *Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of Being Homeless in a Wired, Webbed World?*

In this question I wander with the Monster as a homeless orphan and explore the ways in which our lives on the world-wide-web are prophetic amplifications of this condition. In the digital world, we drift in a sea of information, which, having little if any context, submerges us in an everywhere that is a nowhere. Describing how an orphan resembles a refugee, I explore the increasingly world wide increase in refugees, which is challenging our political and economic structures. Made homeless by the ravages of war and climate crises, they are the lost children of the Monster, the wandering tribe of his descendants.

Without Questions 7 and 8 Mary Shelley's story would be a dystopian vision. *The Frankenstein Prophecies*, however, uncovers seeds of hope that are there in her story.

Question 7: Who is the Monster? *Is Mary Shelley's Story a Prophecy of a Radical Ethics?*

In Question 7, I propose that the Monster as a new Adam challenges his maker with the question, 'Who is the Monster?' The figure of Adolf Eichmann, who was tried for his creation of the final solution that led to the murder of millions of people, is one example of the monstrous consequences of a utilitarian ethics that denies responsibility for those consequences. Posing his question to his maker who is an emblem of an ethics of denial, the Monster's question is the seed of a radical new ethics, a needed corrective to the lethal nature of denial of responsibility that has made Mary Shelley's work a cautionary omen for our time.

Question 8: Are there Other Seeds of Hope in Mary Shelley's Story?

This question is where I uncover Mary Shelley's story as a love story when seen from the side of the Monster's hoped for relation with the mate that his maker promised to create for him. His tale contrasts vividly with Frankenstein's sacrifice of his relation with Elizabeth Lavenza, who, while waiting upon Victor's work to be completed, is eventually murdered on their wedding night. From the side of the Monster, then, Mary Shelley's story is a seed of hope about the redemptive quality of love when it is not corrupted by power. In this question I also explore another seed of hope in the Monster's relation to nature. Attending to the Monster on the margins who is initially schooled by the wondrous epiphanies of nature displayed in moonlight, opens a path that lights the way to recovering how we are a part of nature and not apart from it. Finally, insofar as the dream has such a pivotal place in Mary Shelley's story, I describe the value and

wisdom of the dream as a seed of hope that provides another perspective on our technological powers.