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How Does Frankenstein Show Nature vs. Nurture?

In Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein," the debate over nature versus nurture is central to understanding the characters of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature. This age-old question asks whether our traits and behaviors are more influenced by our inherent biology (nature) or by the environment and experiences we encounter (nurture). Throughout the novel, Shelley presents compelling examples that showcase the interplay between these factors, shaping the destinies of both creator and creation.

Victor Frankenstein: Nature's Ambitious Son

Victor Frankenstein, from a young age, displays an innate curiosity and ambition that drives him to explore the mysteries of life and death. His upbringing in a loving and supportive family in Geneva provides him with a solid foundation of moral values and education. However, it is Victor's relentless pursuit of scientific knowledge and his desire to conquer death that ultimately define his character. His natural intellect and curiosity push him to delve into the forbidden realms of science, ultimately leading him to create the Creature.

Victor's nature as a driven and ambitious scientist becomes evident in his own words: "Learn from me... how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge." Here, Shelley suggests that Victor's unyielding pursuit of knowledge, inherent in his nature, blinds him to the ethical implications of



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his actions. His neglect of the Creature after its creation stems from his preoccupation with his scientific goals rather than a lack of compassion.

The Creature: A Product of Neglect and Rejection

Contrasting Victor's ambition-driven nature is the Creature, who emerges as a blank slate upon its creation. Initially innocent and curious, the Creature's nature is shaped by its early experiences of abandonment and rejection. Left to fend for itself, the Creature learns about human society through observation and suffers profound loneliness and isolation.

An example of the Creature's nurture-driven development is seen in its learning from the De Lacey family. Witnessing their kindness and compassion, the Creature yearns for acceptance and strives to emulate their virtues. However, its hopes are dashed when it is violently rejected by them due to its monstrous appearance. This pivotal moment highlights how the Creature's behavior and outlook are molded by its interactions with society, demonstrating the powerful influence of nurture over its inherent nature.

Nature vs. Nurture in Action: The Creature's Moral Evolution

As the Creature's journey unfolds, Shelley explores the complexities of its character, showing how both nature and nurture shape its moral evolution. Despite its initial innocence, the Creature's nature is tested and distorted by the harsh realities of society's prejudice and rejection. Its acts of vengeance against Victor and his loved ones, while driven by a sense of injustice and loneliness, underscore the devastating consequences of societal neglect.

A poignant example of the Creature's inner conflict is its plea to Victor: "I am malicious because I am miserable." Here, Shelley encapsulates the Creature's realization that its actions are a direct result of its miserable existence and the lack of nurture it has received. The Creature's moral development throughout the novel challenges simplistic notions of good and evil, emphasizing the intricate interplay between its inherent nature and the nurturing—or lack thereof—it experiences from society.

Victor's Reflections and Responsibilities

Victor Frankenstein's reflections on his creation further illuminate the novel's exploration of nature versus nurture. His remorse and guilt over abandoning the Creature reflect a belated recognition of his responsibility as a creator. Victor acknowledges the role of nurture in the Creature's development, lamenting, "I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel."



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Here, he acknowledges his failure to provide the nurturing guidance that could have steered the Creature away from its path of vengeance.

Nature and Nurture: Their Impact on Society

Beyond the individual characters, Shelley's exploration of nature versus nurture extends to a broader critique of societal norms and prejudices. The novel challenges readers to consider how societal perceptions and biases shape individuals' identities and destinies. The Creature's experiences of rejection and isolation highlight the destructive consequences of societal neglect and the importance of empathy and acceptance in fostering positive human development.

Conclusion

In "Frankenstein," Mary Shelley deftly explores the complex interplay between nature and nurture through the characters of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature. By examining their respective journeys and moral dilemmas, Shelley prompts readers to ponder the profound implications of both biological inheritance and environmental influences on human behavior. Ultimately, the novel suggests that while our inherent nature provides a foundation, it is our nurturing and societal interactions that shape our identities and determine our actions. As we navigate the ethical and moral questions posed by "Frankenstein," we are reminded of the enduring relevance of Shelley's exploration of human nature and the timeless debate of nature versus nurture.