Frankenstein Literary Elements

**Plot:**
Plot: The plot of a novel encompasses all the events that make up the story and serve as the foundation of the story on which the characters and setting are built. There are five elements that make up the plot including introduction (where the characters and setting are developed), rising action (events leading up to the crisis), the climax, the denouement, and the resolution.

The plot of the story is quite simple. First, we meet Victor Frankenstein and he tells the story of his life to Robert Walton. He grew up in Geneva, he had two very close friends, and he loved chemistry and alchemy. In an attempt to advance his knowledge on life and death, he creates a monster by putting together dead animal parts, but then becomes disgusted by it and abandons it. The abandonment causes “Pieces” to go mad and he becomes violent. He kills Frankenstein’s brother but, unknowingly, the public accuses and executes Justine Moritz for the murder. “Pieces” comes back to Frankenstein saying that he is lonely and asking him to make him a companion. Victor agrees but only one condition: that “Pieces” leave Europe forever. So, he makes “Pieces” a companion, but soon realizes that two of these monsters could be dangerous and he destroys the companion right in front of “Pieces”. The monster vows to return on the day of Victor’s wedding and does in fact do so. He returns on the day of the wedding and kills Victor’s fiancee. Frankenstein then vows to kill “Pieces” but dies before he is able to and soon after so does “Pieces”.

Climax: The climax of the novel occurs when the conflict is at its highest point of tension, when the crisis is at its acme. The climax of *Frankenstein* occurs when “Pieces” kills Elizabeth. Although “Pieces” had warned Victor that he would be present at Victor’s wedding, but he never took heed to this threat or even took precautions. In fact, Victor brushed it off as it was nothing and even forgot about it on his wedding night. Even us as readers, did not think that “Pieces” would carry out this threat so, when the time came, and “Pieces” killed Elizabeth, even the readers were in shock. The suspense began when Victor realized “Pieces” had returned and was in the building. The readers did not know what would happen as we were following Victor who was frantically looking for “Pieces”. The readers learned of Elizabeth's death when Victor did and this served as the climax. This was not the first death of one of Victor's loved ones but it was the most suspenseful and unexpected.

Crisis & Denouement: There is one very obvious crisis in *Frankenstein* and that is “Pieces” himself. Victor did not realize what a bloodthirsty monster he created until “Pieces” killed many of his loved ones. The resolution to this very large problem became apparent in the denouement (the part of the novel when the resolution of the crisis is apparent) which was only when “Pieces” was actually killed. And though this solved the problem of this big
monster killing all of his family, it doesn't really solve the problem of all his family already being dead...

Complications: Of course every story has a few **complications** (any events that cause ripples in the plot) and within *Frankenstein* there are a few. Notably, every encounter between Victor and his creation and each death caused by “Pieces”. Beginning with the abandonment of his creation, every encounter with “Pieces” furthered the play and added ripples to the plot. Destroying the companion caused “Pieces” to have a growing hatred for Victor and planning his revenge and the same occurred for Victor when “Pieces” killed his fiance.

Invocations: An **invocation** is the action of summoning or calling to a higher power for assistance. There are two notable ways that Shelley uses invocation in *Frankenstein*, both through Victor. First, she introduces Victor as one who is interested in alchemy. Alchemy itself is a more medieval form of chemistry that employs magic and religion. He uses this untraditional form of chemistry to create “Pieces”. The other way that Mary Shelley uses invocation is actually more direct and this is when Victor actually calls upon the gods to bring him happiness or to just take his life. "Wandering spirits, if ye wander, and do not rest in your harrow-beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life."

**Setting:**
Mood: While tone conveys the author’s feelings towards a subject through word choice, mood evokes feelings in the reader through word choice. Throughout Frankenstein, Mary Shelley uses different types of moods throughout the novel ranging from apathy for example when Victor’s mother died:

"*She died calmly, and her countenance expressed affection even in death*"

This makes it seem like he was not very sad and coped with her death very easily.

The following, however, invokes a different type of mood. It tries to evoke fear in the reader.

"*How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.*"
Frankenstein Literary Elements

Tone: Tone is the author’s attitude towards a subject, generally conveyed through his or her’s choice of words. Of course, there are multiple tones that Shelley uses throughout the work. Beginning with a the use of an eerie tone in the beginning, she transfers to use of an unpleasant serious tone. Take for example:

"Devil,' I exclaimed, 'do you dare approach me? And do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! Or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! And, oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!"

She also uses a soft and gentle tone for Victor at times for example:

“I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge. Oh, that I had forever remained in my native wood, nor known nor felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst, and heat!”

Other times, Mary Shelley employs a depressing tone. For example:

"Nothing is more painful to the human mind than, after the feelings have been worked up by a quick succession of events, the dead calmness of inaction and certainty which follows and deprives the soul both of hope and fear."

But the overall tone of the novel is of loneliness and sorrow as is exemplified by the following quote:

"But I was doomed to live and in two months found myself as awaking from a dream, in a prison, stretched on a wretched bed, surrounded by jailers, turnkeys, bolts, and all the miserable apparatus of a dungeon."

Characters:

Protagonist: A protagonist is the leading character in a novel. The protagonist in Frankenstein is Victor Frankenstein himself. The story basically follows Victor, beginning with describing his life and his interest in alchemy, specially an interest in life and death. This uncanny curiosity led to the creation of “Pieces” who is actually the antagonist of the novel. We see a change in Victor’s character from beginning to end. He begins as a person with morals but after the abandonment of “Pieces”, his character becomes more and more immoral. He lets an innocent man die for a crime he didn't commit, he knowingly creates another dangerous monster but then has to kill it, and he lets “Pieces” commit multiple murders before taking an action against him.
Frankenstein Literary Elements

Antagonist: In general, the antagonist of the story is the opposing force in a piece of literature that brings conflict against the protagonist. The protagonist must overcome this character. In this case the antagonist is the monster that the protagonist created. A monster of his own creation. After creating “Pieces”, Frankenstein abandons him, beginning the chain of murderous and vengeful events that then befall him. “Pieces” proceeds on committing a series of murders, killing several of Victor’s loved ones. When he finally kills Victor’s fiancee, Victor decides that he must kill, or “overcome”, “Pieces”.

Characterization: Characterization is a literary device that is used to explain and reveal the personality of a character including the behavior, thought-process, and opinions of the character. There are two types of characterization: direct and indirect characterization. Direct characterization requires the author to introduce one character who then encounters all other characters whereas indirect characterization involves the audience to interpret and be able to figure out each character’s personality from being thrown into the middle of a story. The first half of the novel utilizes direct characterization because we are directly introduced to characters. They describe themselves in their own words. But, because the narrator is in first person, we technically meet many of the characters through indirect characterization because the narrator describes them.

Epic characteristics: The four characteristics of an epic are the inclusion of: supernatural forces interacting with humans; acts of courage or valor; a tone and voice that make everything sound important, even if it’s not; and a setting that is regional, national or global in nature. The primary use of supernatural forces in Frankenstein is the use of alchemy (a more supernatural version of chemistry which relies on bringing life to the dead). He interacts with different parts of dead humans and pieces them together to create well, “Pieces”. The acts of courage and valor do not prevail throughout the entire book but become prevalent at the end of the novel when Victor finally decides to avenge the deaths of his loved ones and try to kill the monster. Obviously we know just how dangerous “Pieces” is because he was able to kill so many people without thinking twice, so Victor deciding he was going to take on this dangerous beast is an act of courage and valor. The tone and voice used throughout Frankenstein varies. The tone and voice are unique in that Mary Shelley uses a combination of letters and chapters changing points of views and narrators throughout the novel. She also uses different styles of writing switching between upper class writing style to middle-class vocabulary.

Hamartia: A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine.
Frankenstein Literary Elements

Victor Frankenstein's hamartia is his tendency to act without considering the consequences of his actions. For example, his interest in alchemy leads to his creation, “Pieces”. And if that wasn't enough, he finds his creation ugly so ugly that he abandons it, without thinking of the consequences of abandoning the monster. Another hamartia is that he cannot read between the lines or take hints. If he has just heeded the warnings of “Pieces” that he was going to come to his wedding to seek vengeance then he could have saved his fiance’s life. “Pieces” hamartia is his inability to deal with his abandonment and to instead turn it into violence. This violence lead to the deaths of multiple individuals throughout the novel.

Archetype: a very typical example of a certain person or thing
Common archetypes in movies and novels are the attractive and physically fit protagonists and the ugly and abnormal antagonists. “Pieces” is an archetype, while Victor Frankenstein is not. “Pieces” fits the normale for an ugly villain who has a backstory in which society or someone shuns him and turns him evil. “Pieces” then serves as the antagonist in the novel, opposing Victor and making life hard for him by killing all of his loved ones. Victor is not an archetype because normally the hero is courageous and attractive whereas Frankenstein is a mad scientist and not exactly society’s definition of handsome, in any of the films or as described in the novel.

Analysis:
Social Impact section showing how Frankenstein has shaped the world, the culture, the literature of today

There is a lot of ways that Frankenstein has shaped the world, the culture, and the literature of today. It has first shaped the modern world by teaching us a few things. First, that you shouldn't judge people based on their looks as Victor Frankenstein did which greatly affected the plot of the novel. And second, that advancements in science and technology could be dangerous. You must always take heed to the morality of technology and the negative implications it may have. Bringing the dead back to life is just one example of a negative advancement in science. Another example would be nuclear and chemical weaponry.

Frankenstein shaped the culture of today by creating a monster that lives on today. As one of the first novels with genetic modification, this provides a monster that children continue to dress up as for fun. If that’s not enough, Hollywood has adapted this novel into multiple movies including (but not limited to) the following:

- [Frankenstein](#)
- [The Ghost of Frankenstein](#)
**Frankenstein Literary Elements**

- **Bride of Frankenstein**
- **House of Frankenstein**
- **Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein**
- **Son of Frankenstein**
- **Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man**

Frankenstein has also shaped literature today by creating this vision of a “mad scientist”. Many novels today include a “mad scientist” (a scientist so consumed by his own work that it drives him to go crazy until he accomplishes what he set out to do) as do many movies (Hulk, for example).

**Irony:**
Irony: **Irony** can be defined in two ways: 1) it is a figure of speech in which the actual meaning of a phrase is not the intended meaning of the phrase (verbal irony or dramatic irony) and 2) the textbook definition, a strange twist ending. In *Frankenstein*, the latter definition is prevalent. Frankenstein ends with the death of both the main characters which was not expected at all. This strange, twist ending serves as the irony in *Frankenstein*.

Dramatic & Tragic Irony: **Dramatic irony** is unlike situational irony in that the characters are oblivious of the ironic situation while the audience understands the irony. **Tragic** irony is a type of dramatic irony. However, in tragic irony the words and actions of the characters, contradict the the actual situation and only the readers understand the contradiction. One example of irony is the execution of Justine Moritz. This is an example of irony because the audience knows that he wasn’t guilty but the characters are not aware of this. Another example of this type of irony is “Pieces’” warning that he would return on Victor’s wedding day. Although Victor did not take heed to this threat, the readers knew that something might transpire.

Satire: Satire is a technique used by writers to expose and ridicule an individual or society and often involves the use of irony. It is regularly used to bring to light dishonesty, corruption, or the weakness of individuals. In this case, Shelley uses this technique to ridicule arranged marriage. She creates a peculiar situation where Frankenstein is arranged to be married to his adopted sister, which in any modern society is considered quite odd. This could be satirical in trying to say that arranged marriage can be unhealthy.

**Themes and Symbols:**
Themes: The main idea or underlying meaning of a work is known as the theme of a literary work. There are a few prevalent themes that are apparent throughout
Frankenstein including those of revenge, negative sides of science, and secrecy. It is apparent from the moment “Pieces” makes his first kill that he is out for revenge for Victor abandoning him. And when “Pieces” kills Victor’s brother William, his plot for revenge becomes even more clear. This plot for revenge stems from Victor’s abandonment of his child. The creation of a creature from parts of dead creatures is an anomaly in and of itself. As readers, we know that such thing is impossible and that bringing things back to life from the dead cannot result in anything good. Though this advances science greatly, this is just one example of a negative side of science. If you want to look at more modern day examples of the negative advances of science, you find nuclear bombs, chemical warfare, and other types of advanced weaponry. Another theme that is carried out throughout Frankenstein is that of secrecy. One of the prime examples of the effects of secrecy is the execution of Justine Moritz for a crime that “Pieces” committed. Though Frankenstein knows that Justine is innocent, though Frankenstein knows that it was “Pieces” who actually committed the crime, though Frankenstein knows that it is time to take action against “Pieces”, he keeps his secret and this ultimately leads to the execution of an innocent individual.

Symbols: A symbol is an object that stands for another. This is generally used in literary works to give the object a deeper, more significant meaning. There are a few prevalent symbols used throughout Frankenstein including thunder and lightening, light, and nature.

Shelley uses thunder and lightening as warnings. Light travels faster than sound so lightening usually serves as a warning for thunder. In this case, however, Shelley uses the striking of lightning or description of the ice cracking like thunder as warnings:

Mary Shelley provides clear examples of usage of light as a symbol for good and bad:

- Walton says he is leaving to a "country of eternal light" where the "sun is forever visible"
- Frankenstein says that he experienced "a sudden light ... so brilliant and wondrous"
- Frankenstein also feels "light pressed upon [his] nerves"

And finally, Victor cures himself when he is sick using nature. Mary Shelley employs nature as a symbol as peaceful but equally dangerous is exploited.

Nature in general represents peace and healing. It heals Victor when he is sick in the story on multiple occasions and offers a spiritual oasis for him to relax. Nature is peaceful, but is not to be messed with because it can just as easily be dangerous.

Allegory: Unlike a symbol which is an object that stands for another object, an allegory is a complete narrative which uses a combination of characters, figures, and events to stand for
Frankenstein Literary Elements

an idea or event; a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another.

Frankenstein is an allegory for the story of creation (Genesis). Many of the characters in the novel are compared and contrasted with those in Genesis. Frankenstein can be compared with Adam created by God or Victor Frankenstein. The comparison here is that because Victor created “Pieces” from nothing, he is “God” and because Frankenstein is Victor’s first creation, he is Adam. Frankenstein, like Adam, felt isolated and alone so he asked for a companion. Victor’s second creation can be compared to Eve, as God’s second creation.

Allusions: An **allusion** is a reference to an idea, place, thing, or person with historical or cultural significance. An allusion usually does not need an explanation because readers in that time period should understand these type of references. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley alludes to all of the following:

  - "I am going to unexplored regions, to “the land of mist and snow.” but I shall kill no albatross; therefore do not be alarmed for my safety or if I should come back to you as worn and woeful as the "Ancient Mariner." (Letter II)"

- Adam, the first man in the Bible
  - "Oh Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel.” (94).
  - "But it was all a dream; no Eve soothed my sorrows nor shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam’s supplication to his Creator. But where was mine?” (127).
  - "Sweet and beloved Elizabeth! I read and re-read her letter, and some softened feelings stole into my heart and dared to whisper paradisiacal dreams of love and joy; but the apple was already eaten" (186).

- Prometheus
  - The entire story of Victor Frankenstein and “Pieces” alludes the story of Prometheus. Just as Prometheus created man, Frankenstein created “Pieces” and just as Prometheus suffered punishment for his actions, Frankenstein suffered his own consequences too, with all of the deaths of people close to him.

**Literary Elements:**

Foreshadowing: **Foreshadowing** is a literary device in which a reader is able to develop their own expectations as to what will occur in the story using hints strategically given by
Frankenstein Literary Elements

the author. Though we cannot quote specific quotes that serve as foreshadowing because it usually a few lines or a scene that will cause readers to foreshadow, we can cite some examples. For example, we were able to foreshadow Henry Clerval’s death because Mary Shelley was overdoing and overstating the fact that Henry is pleased with his adventurous life. We can also foreshadow Elizabeth’s death very easily because “Pieces” promises to be with her on her wedding night. These are just a few examples of foreshadowing in the novel.

Catastrophe: There are two definitions for catastrophe: 1) a disaster, mishap, or misfortune in a novel or 2) the denouement of a drama or classical tragedy. Using the first definition, there are two big disasters in Frankenstein that further the plot but have major repercussions. The first is Victor’s creation of Frankenstein and subsequently the abandonment of his creation because of the hatred in left in “Pieces” and his thirst for revenge. The second catastrophe is again by Victor and this is when he creates a companion for “Pieces” but then destroys it right in front of him, causing another wave of hatred to soar through “Pieces”.

Simile: A simile is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two objects using the words “like” or “as”. Shelley uses this tool to express ideas and draw comparisons. There are many examples of Shelley’s use of similes including, but not limited to, the following similes:

- “The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home (Chapter 2).” In this quote, Elizabeth’s soul is compared to that of an innocent and peaceful lamp because of the purity she exudes.
- “Sir Isaac Newton is said to have avowed that he felt like a child picking up shells beside the great and unexplored ocean of truth (Chapter 2).” Here, Newton is compared to the innocence and ignorance of a small child, naive and close-minded to the unexplored world.
- “When I would account to myself for the birth of that passion which afterwards ruled my destiny I find it arise, like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost forgotten sources (Chapter 2).” This simile is clear in its purpose of comparing the forgotten roots of a mountain to those of his destiny.
- “No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success (Chapter 4).” Like hurricanes, his feelings bore him onwards. The power associated with a hurricane is used to compare to the power of his feelings.
Metaphor: A metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two contrasting objects that have a few common characteristics.

- The bad weather and storm near the conclusion of the novel are metaphors for Victor Frankenstein’s feelings. It is clear that the harsh and gloomy weather are connected to Victor’s depressive thoughts over the situation created by “Pieces”.
- “Pieces” himself is a metaphor for Victor Frankenstein. When we first meet Victor, we learn that he used to be something of an outcast as was the monster he created later. “Pieces” was shunned not only from society but also from Victor himself.
- “Pieces” is also a metaphor for humanity. “Pieces” was born innocent and naive, just as children are, but with time and negative experiences, children become vengeful or in the case of “Pieces” murderous.