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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

The Power of Nature: An Ecocritical Analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Síla přírody: Ekokritická analýza románu Mary Shelleyové *Frankenstein*

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá román Mary Shelleyové Frankensteinovou optikou ekologické kritiky, přičemž se zaměřuje především na přírodu a počasí, a jakým způsobem ovlivňují děj. Historické pozadí románu, zejména rok jeho vzniku – 1816, „rok bez léta“ – poskytuje cenný kontext pro analýzu environmentálních témat v díle Shelleyové. Těžké klimatické podmínky, temná, bouřlivá atmosféra a bezútěšné prostředí různými způsoby formovaly vyprávění a vytvořily ekologický rámec pro čtení a interpretaci tohoto románu. Frankenstein nejen odráží složitost a mnohotvárnost vztahu mezi člověkem a přírodou, ale slouží také jako komentář k environmentálním otázkám a problémům, které jsou aktuální i po dvou stoletích. Frankenstein zkoumá, jak lidské zásahy do přírody mohou vést k následkům pro životní prostředí i k individuálním tragédiím. Kromě toho román nastoluje důležité otázky týkající se odpovědnosti člověka vůči přírodě, obhajuje vyšší ekologické cítění a kritizuje antropocentrický pohled na svět. Mary Shelleyová, dcera známé feministické spisovatelky a aktivistky, se navíc zabývá patriarchálními strukturami, jejichž obětí se stávají marginalizované skupiny, konkrétně ženy.

Frankensteina jako varovný příběh o převratném vědeckém vývoji a jeho destruktivním dopadu na svět přírody lze proto interpretovat jako ranou literární reakci na obavy z degradace životního prostředí, klimatických změn a problémů, které se týkají i dnešní společnosti.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

ekologická kritika, příroda, počasí, romantismus, vznešenost, životní prostředí, věda

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* through the lens of ecocriticism, with a primary focus on nature and weather as narrative influences. The historical backdrop of the novel, notably the year of its creation – 1816, the "Year Without a Summer" – offers valuable context for analysing environmental themes in Shelley's work. Severe climate conditions, a dark, stormy atmosphere, and a bleak environment shaped the narrative in various ways, establishing an ecological framework for reading and interpreting this novel. *Frankenstein* not only reflects the complexity and multifaceted nature of the relationship between human beings and the natural world but also serves as a commentary on the environmental issues and concerns that remain relevant two centuries later. *Frankenstein* explores how human intervention in nature can lead to environmental consequences as well as cause individual tragedies. Furthermore, the novel raises important questions concerning humans' responsibility towards the natural world, advocating a higher ecological sensibility and criticising anthropocentric worldviews. In addition, Mary Shelley, the daughter of a known feminist writer and activist, addresses patriarchal structures to which marginalised groups, specifically women, fall victim.

As a cautionary tale about disruptive scientific developments and their destructive impact on the natural world, *Frankenstein* can therefore be interpreted as an early literary response to concerns about environmental degradation, climate change and issues that continue to affect society today.

KEYWORDS

ecocriticism, nature, weather, romanticism, sublime, environment, science

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Introduction

Two hundred years ago, on a stormy summer night, a group of writers gathered in a remote villa on the shores of Lake Geneva. What could be a better time and setting to tell each other ghostly tales during the dark hour of the night while summer rain lashes against the window panes? It was Mary Shelley who laid the foundations of one of the world's most famous novels that night.

Frankenstein, which is considered to be the first science fiction novel, is undeniably a milestone in literary history. As a timeless classic, it has lost none of its fascination and relevance to this day. Several film adaptations, as well as graphic novels and musicals, depict Frankenstein as the tale of an ambitious scientist meddling with nature. Shelley's monster, assembled by body parts and brought to life in a secluded laboratory, became an iconic figure of pop culture. *Frankenstein* is perceived as a gripping, profound, and thought-provoking work that appeals to fans of the horror and science fiction genres as well as lovers of classic literature and has, according to Brackett, "never gone out of print" (xiii). Many literary critics and experts delve into the mysteries that this work provides and make Frankenstein the subject of a wide variety of interpretations and analyses. The dangers of knowledge, isolation, human ambition, and vengeance are frequent keywords one might come across in various essays and articles. But when reading Frankenstein, another aspect stands out with its beauty, sublimity, and majesty: nature. Descriptions of mountains, glaciers, and lakes immerse the reader in a setting where nature can be both breathtaking and merciless. The vivid thunderstorms and wild landscapes that accompany Victor's travels encourage a deeper discussion of ecological themes.

In his essay *Frankenstein and Ecocriticism*, Timothy Morton recognises the lack of papers that examine *Frankenstein* through an ecocritical lens (143). Emerging in the early 1990s and thus being a relatively new literary discipline, ecocriticism encompasses a variety of questions, yet is still accompanied by disagreement about what exactly its object of study should be (Glotfelty xviii).

By applying an ecocritical lens, this thesis investigates the ecological dimensions of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the themes they evoke. The theoretical part focuses on ecocriticism as a literary discipline, its emergence and basic fields of interest, followed by

taking a closer look at the years of *Frankenstein's* creation: Romanticism. This paper intends to consider how Romanticism anticipates several concerns of ecocriticism by focusing on the sublime aspect of nature and the rise of ecological awareness of the time, in addition to addressing various other Romantic writers. Moreover, the biographical and historical context of the novel is crucial for an understanding of the social, political, and cultural environment in which the work was created.

The practical part of this thesis examines the portrayal of nature and the various ways in which nature is presented and characterised. Furthermore, a connection is drawn between the year of Frankenstein's creation, the year of the volcanic eruption at Mount Tambora in present-day Indonesia, and the climate and weather descriptions of the narrative. Another central aspect of ecocriticism is the exploration of the relationship between humans and the natural world, namely Viktor Frankenstein and his desire to unravel the secrets of life. In addition, this paper aims to shed light on the creature's relationship with nature by touching upon themes such as environmental justice and vegetarianism. Finally, ecofeminism is another area that can be applied to Frankenstein when investigating issues including the marginalisation of women and patriarchal dominance.

Theoretical Part

1 Ecocriticism

As already mentioned in the introduction, ecocriticism can be viewed as a relatively new literary discipline that was established as a "recognizable critical school" by 1993 (Glotfelty xviii). Since then, a wide range of books, essays, and articles, including discussions on the studies of literature and environment, have been published and provide enough insight into what ecocriticism deals with at its core.

1.1 Defining Ecocriticism

There is disagreement about the term ecocriticism itself: while ecocriticism is a widely used term, "ecopoetics, environmental literary criticism, and green cultural studies" are other terms one frequently encounters when researching this literary discipline (Glotfelty xx).

Probably the most cited and commonly used definition of ecocriticism can be found in the introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader,* which speaks of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii). The EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and Environment) further refers to ecocriticism as an "interdisciplinary enterprise, which seeks to engage with environmental history, philosophy, sociology and science studies, and not least with ecology and the life sciences" (Bergthaller).

Yet, despite the wide variety of approaches, "all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty xix).

Ecocriticism attempts to answer a number of questions, which are specified by Glotfelty and Fromm in their *Ecocriticism Reader*. Ecocriticism examines how nature is portrayed in literature, how literary efforts affect humanity's relationship to the natural world, and how ecological ethics and values are expressed in literary texts. Moreover, most works in ecocritical studies share a common preoccupation with the "consequences of human actions" that "are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (xix-xx).

1.2 The Emergence of Ecocriticism

The origins of ecocriticism can be found "[i]n *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology (1972)* [where] Joseph W. Meeker introduced the term *literary ecology*" (Glotfelty xix). Buell states that his work is considered nowadays "as the first significant ecocritical study" (90). According to Glotfelty, "[t]he term ecocriticism was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism'" (Glotfelty xix-xx).

To understand different ecocritical approaches to literary analysis, it can be helpful to take a closer look at the history of this movement, whose development was divided into two waves by Lawrence Buell. The first wave, which emerged around 1990, refers to environmental criticism particularly associated with British Romanticism and U.S. nature writing. Nevertheless, these genres were not the only fields of interest: ecocritical work could encompass various forms of media, extending beyond art and literature and including practical materials like scientific research, laws, and treaties. The first wave focuses on the reorientation of literary critical perspectives with the aim of paying greater attention to non-human nature. Early ecocriticism responded to the alienation from nature caused by industrialisation and urbanisation. It emphasised the emotional and philosophical connection between humans and the environment, drawing on theories such as deep ecology and thinkers such as Jonathan Bate, as well as attempting to expand literary criticism by incorporating scientific concepts from ecology and biology (Buell 88-89).

The beginning of the twenty-first century saw a "geographical expansion in ecocritical practice" (Buell 92), when the second wave shifted the focus to the incorporation of interdisciplinary approaches. Ecocritics are now more deeply concerned with the human-centred science of ecology, challenging distinctions between the human and the non-human. This wave considers urban landscapes as equally important as natural ones and examines environmental crimes that particularly affect marginalised groups. It also asks how literature about nature can be used to understand how societal norms influence our relationship with the environment and criticises how "our culture devalues and degrades the natural world" (Paswan 28-29).

In their introduction to a special issue of MELUS, *The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism*, Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic speak of new trends in ecocriticism, namely a third wave which strives for a more global understanding of ecocriticism. This third wave "recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint" (Adamson and Slovic 6-7).

Both the second and the third wave offer a more contemporary approach that seeks to broaden the horizon of environmental literary criticism.

1.3 Different Perspectives and Approaches

As the field of ecocriticism expanded over the last decades, a wide range of different types and branches were established as ecological methodological approaches. The following subchapters will delve into just a few of them, particularly those areas that will be examined in more detail within the context of Shelley's *Frankenstein* in the practical part.

1.3.1 Pastoral

When one encounters the term *pastoral*, one usually thinks of pastoral literature, such as the work of Shakespeare or Renaissance pastoral poetry. However, it is important to note that the pastoral tradition encompasses more than just a literary genre that deals with idyllic representations of nature. Pastoral, which is "deeply entrenched in Western culture", describes literature that deals with idealistic escapism, namely the countryside as a place of refuge. While ecocriticism used to support this pastoral tradition in the past, praising the preference for rural life, ecocriticism today takes a more nuanced approach, criticizing a clear divide between urban and rural life and pointing out that harmony is of greater importance than a seemingly simple demonization of civilization (Garrard 33). Garrard concludes that "[a]t the root of pastoral is the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies" (56).

Frankenstein was written during the Romantic period, when concerns about the negative impacts of industrialisation and the resulting mass population grew. Consequently, writers responded to that by depicting nature as a place of solace and emphasising the restorative power of nature, which is a key aspect of the pastoral tradition.

1.3.2 Wilderness

Another branch of ecocriticism is the concept of wilderness. The focus of this approach is wilderness itself: untouched, free of human impact, and separated from human civilisation. Garrard defines wilderness as "nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation" and "a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city" (59). However, he points out that although this idea might seem closely related to the pastoral tradition, they are not identical concepts, as pastoral refers to the domesticated country and wilderness to an untamed state of nature (Garrard 59-60). DeLancy critiques this approach to wilderness as "clearly not sufficient", highlighting "the relative richness of these ecosystems" (27) rather than human absence. Wilderness can be perceived as a place of exile and discomfort, as well as a place of refuge, where humans can reconnect with nature and build a meaningful relationship. Consequently, wilderness remains difficult to define, yet scholars like Cronon and DeLancy attempt to approach this concept in nuanced and innovative ways, providing insight into the complex relationship between humans and the natural world.

In her novel, Mary Shelley provides descriptions of various wild landscapes, including deep forests and majestic mountains, which invite a deeper discussion of nature's intrinsic value and humans' perception of their natural surroundings.

1.3.3 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism or ecological feminism associates "the treatment of women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of nonhuman nature on the other" (Warren 3). In her essay, *Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective*, Warren continues to explain what she calls the "women-nature connections", describing "nature and naturism" as "feminist issues" (3). The empirical data that she lists suggest that women are particularly affected by the consequences of environmental destruction (3-14). Consequently, certain parallels can be drawn between the degradation of the environment and the domination of women, stemming from patriarchal exploitation and oppression (Garrard 23).

Shelley's Frankenstein offers fruitful ground to explore this issue. In the practical part of this paper, marginalisation of female characters, patriarchal dominance, and the unnatural birth of the creature will be discussed through an ecofeminist lens.

1.4 The Portrayal of Nature in Literature

Before delving into various representations of nature in literature, it is worth noting that nature itself is a term difficult to define. The term encompasses several related concepts that occupy a central role in both Romantic literature and modern texts today. Soper describes nature as "everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity" (15). In addition to that, human nature is a term often used when referring to fundamental human traits, tendencies, and characteristics.

In literature, nature can appear in various forms, often mirroring how humans understand and value their relationship to the natural world. As a healing place of retreat, a threatening force, or a victim of human agency, in literature, nature functions as a mirror of cultural values, human concerns, and hopes. Thus, the portrayal of nature not only offers aesthetic supplementation but also ethical and societal prompts for reflecting on human engagement with the natural world.

1.5 The Distinction between the Human and the Non-human, the Natural and the Unnatural

Soper suggests that nature can be used to describe the non-human, which refers to aspects of the environment that are independent of human influence and not altered in any way by human activity. Consequently, nature "ceases to be fully natural once we have mixed our labour with it, or which we have destroyed by our interventions" (Soper 16). A closer look, however, reveals that barely any environmental areas fit this description of nature. Most parts of nature are influenced and altered by humans, either intentionally, such as the creation of parks and resorts, etc., or unintentionally, such as the gradual destruction of natural areas through climate change, in which humans are a leading force and cause (Soper 17-18). Timothy Morton recognises the need to move beyond this sharp distinction between the human and nonhuman for ecocriticism to truly critique anthropocentrism. He explains that the term *nature* is used in early ecocriticism as a philosophical idea to distinguish between

the "natural" and the "unnatural," implying a normative separation between what is recognised as "normal" and what is deemed "abnormal." In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, these boundaries are blurred by the creation of a creature that is made by human hands yet still violates the conventional understanding of nature and thus can be perceived as both "natural" and "unnatural" (Morton 145-146). Morton views Frankenstein as a "deconstructive work of art" that questions the categories between the human and the non-human, the natural and the unnatural, without completely dissolving them (147).

1.6 The Relationship between the Human and the Natural World: Anthropocentrism vs. Biocentrism

Anthropocentrism places humans at the very centre of the Earth or the universe, implying that humans are superior to all other living beings. Deep ecology, established by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and described as one "[o]f the four radical forms of environmentalism" (Garrard 20), opposes anthropocentrism and shows how humans exploit, dominate, and destroy the environment. Instead of a human-centred approach, deep ecology calls for a shift in the relationship between humans and nature. In this system, humans are not seen as superior to nature, but considered to be an intrinsic part of it. In other words, biocentrism suggests that "humans are neither better nor worse than other creatures (animals, plants, bacteria, rocks, rivers) but simply equal to everything else in the natural world", as Campbell explains in the *Ecocriticism Reader* (128).

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley delves into the intricate dynamics between humans and nature, highlighting both reverence and exploitation. The work focuses on illustrating nature and its value both in itself and to humans in various ways, offering fruitful grounds for investigating the consequences of the Anthropocene for humans, as well as for the natural world.

1.7 Environmental Justice, Ethics, and Human Responsibility

Environmental justice is concerned with the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens regardless of ethnicity, gender, and social class. In ecocriticism, the ethical dimension further encompasses humanity's moral responsibility towards nature. According to Dower, environmental ethics are defined as "a set of principles, values or norms relating

to the ways in which we interact with our environment" (11). Exploitation of resources, deforestation, and climate change are just a few examples of the frightening environmental issues that concern and affect humanity nowadays more than ever. Ecocriticism promotes the integration of such environmental issues into literary works and raises awareness of the anthropogenic impact on the environment and "moral systems" that guide society's view on the natural world (Paswan 29). The *Environmental Justice Reader* positions environmental justice as "the least considered, least developed approach" and draws attention to the necessity of further development of this field as an integral part of the scope of ecocriticism (Adamson 149).

Frankenstein also engages with the question of the extent to which humans bear responsibility toward nature. Can Victor be accused of having selfishly and recklessly abandoned the creature and thus shirked his responsibility? Is his act of breathing life into a monster a crime against nature itself and an irresponsible violation of natural laws? These conflicts will be explored in more detail in the practical part of this work.

2 Green Romanticism

In the early 1990s, scholar Jonathan Bate, author of *The Song of the Earth* and *Romantic Ecology*, drew a connection between ecocritical work and British Romantic Studies. The Romantic literary era is essentially characterised by a primary focus on nature, perceived as an aesthetic motif but also as a place of spiritual retreat and self-discovery. In Romantic literature, natural scenery often functions as a sanctuary, providing a place of refuge and reflection. However, Romanticism also laments the loss of human connection to the natural world in an alienated modernity due to technological progress, industrialisation, and urbanisation.

2.1 The Romantic Notion of the Sublime

Romantics strived for the "picturesque aesthetics" of natural settings, which involves experiencing and being immersed in the grandeur and sublimity of nature, "using optic devices like the Claude glass to frame views or 'prospects' for maximum aesthetic effect" (Hutchings 179). Romanticism perceives natural settings as places that evoke awe as well as fear, reminding humans of nature's superiority. Romantic wilderness, as a sublime place

worthy of protection, combines poetic experience with early ecological sensibility. However, it can be claimed that the apparent Romantic appreciation for nature hides the focus on superficial aesthetics for personal purposes, which devalues actual concern about environmental issues (Hutchings 180). Hutchings suggests that "[b]y advocating the protection of wilderness in distant parklands, people could feel more comfortable about exploiting, destroying, or disregarding urban and suburban ecosystems" (180). This dualistic approach to nature is mirrored in the behaviour of *Frankenstein's* main character, Viktor, whose selective reverence for nature blinds him to actual moral and ecological responsibilities. The ambivalence of Romantic ecology will be further discussed in chapter 4.3. Nature and the Sublime.

2.2 The Rise of Ecological Awareness

The Romantic era is characterised by profound socioeconomic upheavals, including "a sharp rise in urban populations" and "an increasingly industrialized economy" (Hutchings 175). However, Phillips assumes that Frankenstein is rather concerned with nature than with the horrors of the Industrial Revolution, as "[t]here is no evidence to suggest that Mary Shelley was concerned with industrialisation at all" (60). He points out that it is the extraordinary climate conditions that are "of great assistance to our understanding of the work" (62). The Industrial Revolution had a profound impact on the natural environment during the Romantic Period, setting the stage for today's ongoing climate change. The reorganisation of the economy towards industrial machinery led to the exploitation of fossil fuels, which caused a dramatic rise in greenhouse gas emissions. As a result of these developments, environmental issues became "much more severe and noticeable", which was reflected in contemporary literature and philosophy (Hutchings 175). Environmental issues are increasingly addressed in literature, including extensive deforestation, urban air pollution, and chemical water contamination, just to name a few. But it was Thomas Malthus and his renowned *Essay on the Principle of Population*, where he discussed species extinction and humanity's vulnerability and endangerment due to mass population and starvation, that draw wide-spread attention to the rise of environmental issues during the Romantic period and encouraged a new awareness of "nature's fragility" (Hutchings 175-176). Even though ecology itself was established after the Romantic period, people were aware of the

interconnectedness of natural organisms, which was reflected in the works of Romantic poets, such as Coleridge and Blake. Enlightenment science, which attributed humans with the dominance over nature, as well as Enlightenment dualism, was critiqued by Romantics, yet scientific methods were not entirely rejected (Hutchings 176-179).

2.3 Key Figures of Romantic Ecocriticism

According to Dr. Kanupriya, Romantic poets and writers who play a key role in shaping an environmental understanding of one's natural surroundings and encouraging an increased awareness of environmental issues are William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Clare (27). Other notable writers who are known for their exploration and celebration of nature in their works include Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, William Blake, John Keats, and Ann Radcliffe. These Romantic poets explore the sublime and promote a deep respect for the environment while "offering valuable perspectives that resonate with contemporary ecological thought and environmental concerns" (Kanupriya 32). Worth highlighting is Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley's husband, and his contributions to the ecological debate, including his progressive views on diet, the body, as well as the relationship between humans and the natural world.

A connection can be drawn between environmentally conscious nutrition, advocated by Percy Shelley, and the novel *Frankenstein*, where the creature is depicted as a vegetarian. In the practical part, the creature's special connection to nature will be further discussed.

3 Biographical and Historical Background

3.1 Mary Shelley

On August 30, 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was born as the daughter of the famous feminist writer and activist Mary Wollstonecraft and the radical political philosopher William Godwin. Having experienced the tragic loss of her mother, Mary was brought up by her father, who introduced her to the world of literature and encouraged her to engage in her own writing. At the age of 15, Mary met Percy Bysshe Shelley, a poet in William Godwin's circle of intellectuals. Despite her father's disapproval, the couple soon eloped to France, accompanied by Mary's half-sister Jane Clairmont. The travel book *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* records their following journey around Europe, including the famous summer

of 1816, which they spent near Geneva in Switzerland. The Villa Diodati, where Mary, Percy, and Jane frequently visited Lord Byron and Dr. John Polidori to engage in literary discussions, was the place where Mary Shelley conceived the idea for her novel *Frankenstein*.

As an English Romantic novelist, Mary Shelley devotes her work to nature, exploring its aesthetic and symbolic dimensions as a source of inspiration as well as a reflection of inner worlds and unconscious longings. Representations of the natural world surrounding her during her travels are reflected in most of her writing (Mellor 1-37). Mellor states that "they record the 'enthusiasm' of youth and are the responses of travellers who looked upon nature and humanity with particular 'sympathy'" (24). It is undeniable that nature had a significant impact on Mary's imagination and fiction. Illustrating the picturesque, beautiful and sublime nature, her writings reflect the peace, tranquillity, and harmony of the natural scenery, which is described by Braida as "pastoral" (28).

Mary Shelley's early writing emphasises peaceful harmony with nature as the ultimate goal for human happiness – meaning a balanced and respectful relationship between the individual and the natural environment. In her following works, Shelley repeatedly portrays nature as benevolent and life-giving, providing protection and vitality to those who treat the natural world with respect. This ecologically and ethically grounded understanding of nature is influenced, among other things, by her reading of the works of William Wordsworth, particularly his conception of a "maternally nurturant Nature" (Mellor 26-27).

3.2 1816: A Year Without a Summer

For people living in the 19th century, like Mary Shelley, the climate and weather during the summer of 1816 appeared highly unusual.

The reason was a volcano named Tambora, which erupted in 1815 on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa, an event described in *The Palgrave Handbook of Climate History* as "the most pronounced climate anomaly of the period, and one of the largest [eruptions] of the past two millennia in Europe and North America" (Brönnimann 313). The eruption covered Sumbawa itself as well as neighbouring areas in ash, causing more than 70000 deaths due to the "effects of the eruption or from ensuing famine and epidemics" (Pfister and White 551).

3.2.1 Weather and Climate during the Years of Frankenstein's Creation

The climatic effects of the volcanic eruption were noticeable all over the world: chaotic weather patterns, including decreased temperatures, gloomy rain, and thunderstorms. 1816, the year without a summer, suffered devastating, far-reaching consequences that affected agriculture, economies, and society at the time. Harvests were sparse or failed completely, prices rose, and widespread famine and malnutrition led to increased mortality.

Alpine regions, including Switzerland, where Mary Shelley spent the summer of 1816, accompanied by her lover and other writers, "were especially hard hit by the extraordinary cold and rains" (Pfister and White 553). In his article *Frankenstein and Mary Shelley's "Wet Ungenial Summer"*, Phillips examines several letters that Mary wrote to her sister Fanny, as well as her Geneva journal, which reflect the alternating weather conditions experienced by the Byron-Shelley circle (62-63). Pfister and White conclude that "climate has been more than a mere background to human history" and that "[c]limate, weather, and their variations have reached deep into human culture and psychology – a topic of academic research that has only just begun" (558).

Practical Part

4 The Portrayal of Nature

Nature proves to be a key aspect of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and is at times even treated as a distinct character of the novel. Nature isn't assigned the role of a passive backdrop, but given agency, a voice and meaning, which from an ecocritical viewpoint encourages a decentring of the human in a world shaped by anthropocentrism.

4.1 The Treatment of Nature

4.1.1 Nature as a Sanctuary

In *Frankenstein*, nature is portrayed as a place where troubled characters, including both Viktor Frankenstein and the creature, are able to take sanctuary when tragic events determine their lives. During these moments, when characters seek the solitude of natural scenery, nature acts benevolently towards them, offering shelter and soothing the characters in their suffering and emotional turmoil.

After having created his monster while being secluded from nature in a laboratory, Viktor is able to reconnect with the natural world around him. He recognises that "the fallen leaves had disappeared and that the young buds were shooting forth from the trees", pointing out that this "season contributed greatly to [his] convalescence" (Shelley 49-50). Spring, a time during which new life emerges, offers Viktor strength, and thus embodies a return of hope, vitality and inner stability.

In the natural scenery surrounding his home town, Geneva, Viktor continues to seek relief during solitary walks. Viktor mentions how "[t]he weight upon [his] spirit was sensibly lightened", and "[a] tingling long-lost sense of pleasure often came across [him] during this journey" (Shelley 81). This refuge follows a pastoral pattern: nature distracts him from his troubling thoughts and sorrows and lets him escape from his guilt, even if only momentarily. Viktor is able to linger, shifting his attention from his own thoughts and sorrows to observing his surroundings. Here, Mary Shelley paints a vivid picture of the transformative powers of nature, which offer a sense of security and safety during times of hardship. From an ecocritical perspective, the literary portrayal of reconnecting to nature is welcomed to

promote a deeper, sensual relationship with the natural world, fostering mindfulness and awareness of one's surroundings. However, ecocriticism highlights the importance of viewing nature not only as a resource to satisfy human needs, including using nature as a place for emotional and physical regulation, but also as a place worth respecting and protecting.

4.1.2 Nature as a Source of Isolation

After having experienced the tragic murder of his brother William and the execution of Justine, Viktor repeatedly rows out onto the lake near their house in Belrive. The calm, natural scenery encourages reflections on past actions and enables access to his own feelings. However, Viktor, "the only unquiet thing that wandered restless in a scene so beautiful and heavenly", is suddenly "tempted" to take his own life in this serene natural setting (Shelley 78). The isolation is accompanied by danger, as nature turns to a stage of possible self-destruction, acting in a passive and indifferent way towards Viktor's inner torment.

Another example that illustrates nature as a place of isolation is Viktor's new laboratory, which serves as a place for creating a female creature. It is an island, "hardly more than a rock", and described by Viktor as a "desolate and appalling landscape" (Shelley 146-147). To Viktor, "the beach of the sea" seems to be "an insurmountable barrier between [him] and [his] fellow-creatures" (Shelley 152). The choice of a sterile, lifeless place might offer Viktor the feeling of greater control over nature and his surroundings, making nature the scenery of his hubris. Consciously distancing himself from the vibrant, diverse nature suggests that he tries to escape nature as a constant reminder of his creature's unnatural birth. Moreover, the barren landscape serves as a reflection of his loss of joy in life, his inner loneliness, and his moral decay.

These scenes portray that isolation in nature does not automatically offer refuge and harmony, but can lead to alienation from oneself as well as from one's surroundings. Ecocriticism views isolation in nature not only as a possibility for self-reflection, but also recognises the problematic escape of humans from social and ecological responsibilities.

4.1.3 Nature as a Destructive Force

Throughout the novel, nature serves not only as a healing and peaceful retreat but also shows itself as a merciless, destructive and untameable force. The rugged wilderness that is depicted at the very beginning of the novel immerses the reader in a setting which seems to warn both the reader and Walton himself about the dangers of ambition and the pursuit of knowledge. "[T]he floating sheets of ice" (Shelley 11) and "the rawness of the atmosphere" (Shelley 16) offer a subtle foreshadowing of nature tolerating neither domination nor control. Nature as the "seat of frost and desolation" (Shelley 3) and wilderness "never before imprinted by the foot of man" (Shelley 4) eludes, in its most radical form, all human order. This central aspect, which is woven into the narrative, functions not only as an exposure of the illusion of progress but also as a reminder of the fragile construct of human civilisation. Furthermore, nature repeatedly presents itself to Viktor as an obstacle, complicating his journey and reminding him that nature cannot be easily conquered. Nature in her full "superior wildness and ruggedness" (Shelley 185) is portrayed again at the end of the novel, when Viktor is determined to hunt down the monster in the icy north.

Ecocriticism highlights the portrayal of nature as a destructive, mighty force in order to emphasise the autonomy and agency that nature possesses. Depictions like these serve to remind that nature is never passive and needs to be considered in ethical reflections.

4.1.4 Nature as a Reflection of Human Psyche and Emotions

The depiction of the natural world both as a sanctuary as well as a destructive force often corresponds to the characters' inner lives. In *Frankenstein*, nature can be perceived as a mirror, reflecting the psychological and emotional states of the characters. Especially the depiction of nature as a dangerous and threatening force, connects and reflects the situations, emotions and obstacles that the characters encounter throughout the novel.

Reducing nature to a projection of human emotions can be viewed critically from an ecocritical perspective since it reinforces anthropocentric perspectives. However, mirroring inner states in nature can also lead to an improved connection and emotional openness towards the environment – a possible way of promoting ecological sensibility.

4.2 Analysing the Weather in Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's vivid and colourful descriptions immerse the reader in a narrative where sunshine and rain assume a far more important role than simply serving as a mere atmospheric background. Similar to the motive of nature, weather is not only used as a narrative tool in order to foreshadow events, but also to convey and intensify characters' emotional states, inner conflicts and morals. Weather descriptions accompany Shelley's tale of Viktor Frankenstein, the weather itself seeming to be an ambivalent force, as it frequently switches from a comforting, joy-bringing source to a merciless, harsh judge.

4.2.1 Weather Motifs

The thunderstorm can be viewed as the most prominent and recurring weather motif in *Frankenstein*, frequently accompanying moments of revelation and confrontation. While reflecting on his childhood, Viktor recalls an incident that can be perceived as a subtle foreshadowing of the destructive path his ambitions will later take. During a stay with his family at their house near Belrive, he "witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm". Its "frightful loudness" didn't seem to frighten him at all; on the contrary, he "remained…watching its progress with curiosity and delight" (Shelley 30). Viktor observed an oak tree, burned and "utterly destroyed" by lightning, leaving nothing but a "blasted stump". His inability to perceive this event as a warning marks the beginning of his disconnected attitude toward nature. Later in the novel, the motif of a tree struck by lightning is revisited. Viktor now describes himself as a "blasted tree; the bolt [having] entered [his] soul" (Shelley 144). He realises that his fearful prediction came to pass: his ambition and thirst for knowledge and control led to immense suffering and his ultimate ruin. The cost of objectifying the natural world serves as a critique of a worldview that ignores the interconnectedness of human life and the natural order. Another thunderstorm appears when Viktor visits the place of his brother William's murder. On "the lake in a boat", he observes the "lightnings playing on the summit of Mont Blanc in the most beautiful figures" and hears "the thunder burst with a terrific crash over [his] head" (Shelley 63). Viktor regards the storm as "beautiful yet terrific", a mixture of beauty and grandeur, recognising the overwhelming force of this intense natural phenomenon. However, the mood shifts abruptly when "a flash of lightning illuminate[s]" the creature, reminding Viktor of his transgression and violation

against the natural laws. Furthermore, Shelley draws a connection between the creature and the untamed force of nature, making the weather conditions at Elizabeth's murder scene a symbolic response to Viktor's moral failings. The thunderstorm acts as an image of destruction, reinforcing the damage that was created by Viktor's dangerous obsession and reckless ambition. Additionally, the violent weather reflects the intense emotional turmoil that Viktor has to endure, including his inner conflicts and overwhelming guilt.

In his article *Frankenstein and Mary Shelley's "Wet Ungenial Summer"*, Phillips mentions the thunderstorm motive, drawing a connection between letters that Mary wrote to her sister Fanny describing thunderstorms she experienced during her travels and the reoccurring storms in the novel, suggesting it as a source of inspiration for the climate conditions in Frankenstein (62-63).

Although not directly connected to meteorological phenomena, the recurring presence of the moon symbolically and atmospherically complements the novel's weather motifs. "[O]n a dreary night of November", while "the rain pattered dismally against the panes", Viktor's creature comes to life (Shelley 45). "[T]he dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters", illuminates his creation (Shelley 46). Even earlier, during Viktor's studies, "the moon gazed on [his] midnight labours" (Shelley 43), seemingly foreshadowing the creature's "dull yellow eye[s]" (Shelley 45), whose gaze will frighten Viktor on every encounter. Furthermore, the creature itself beholds his grotesque reflection as a "shadow in the moonshine" (Shelley 114). The moon seems to act as a witness to his suffering and loneliness, while also confronting him with his otherness. The presence of moonlight often signals the creature's arrival, enhancing the novel's mysterious atmosphere. At the night of Elizabeth's murder, "the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate[s] the chamber" (Shelley 176) and while Viktor visits the cemetery, "the broad disk of the moon arose, and shone full upon [the creature's] ghastly and distorted shape" (Shelley 182). The moon not only illuminates the creature but also serves as a painful reminder of Viktor's failed responsibility and buried guilt.

Another noteworthy element of the novel is the frequent use of cloud metaphors, the cloud usually symbolising negative emotions, such as guilt, despair, and fear. Viktor describes "the dark cloud which brooded over (him)" (p.74), as well as hinting at extremely intense

emotional states, the feeling of being "encompassed by a cloud which no beneficial influence could penetrate" (p.80). A few pages later, Viktor's inner conflict is emphasised as he states that "dark melancholy clouded every thought" (p.83). Clouds, the foreshadowers of rain and storm, indicate a subtle connection to the creature himself – the root of Viktor's emotional suffering.

4.2.2 The Weather and the Creature

Moving on to the creature and his perception of the weather, it is crucial to emphasise that, after his unnatural birth and the abandonment of his creator, he is forced to discover the world and its natural laws by himself, which led to him approaching, experiencing, and valuing weather differently. Initially, the weather seems to be benevolent and a source of strength and vitality, for instance when "[t]he fresh air revived [the creature]", encouraging him to approach the old blind man DeLacey (Shelley 116). The weather, particularly "[t]he pleasant sunshine, and the pure air of day" that offers him peace and "tranquillity" (Shelley 120), is reflecting the creature's innocence, hope and faith in gaining the trust of human beings, particularly the cottagers, his "protectors" (Shelley 121). Marking the turning point in the creature's tale, the painful realisation of repeated abandonment and his fate as an outcast is reflected by the changed relationship to the weather. Increasingly, he finds himself as "far too unhappy to enjoy the gentle breezes of evening, or the prospect of the sun setting behind the stupendous mountains of Jura" (Shelley 124). "[R]ain and snow poured around [him]; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface of the earth was hard and chill, and bare, and [the creature] found no shelter" (Shelley 122). The weather not only reflects his emotions, hatred, and thirst for vengeance, but while being ruthless and merciless, the weather also mirrors the people who reject and abandon the creature. This parallel between weather and social rejection furthermore highlights the intense loneliness of the creature and his wish and search for warmth, not only in a physical but also in an emotional sense. The story culminates in the hunt to the North Pole, "the everlasting ices of the north" (Shelley 184), where the creature ultimately meets his end. The setting reinforces the feeling of abandonment and rejection, representing emotional cold and final alienation.

Similar to nature, in *Frankenstein*, the weather itself is used as a mirror for the human psyche, which might be interpreted as an emotional reconnection with the natural world. The

harsh weather conditions, particularly the thunderstorms, which convey feelings of uneasiness as well as grandeur, highlight humanity's vulnerability. The weather thus becomes a reminder of boundaries, regarding human hubris and control, which is a central ecocritical concern. Consequently, Mary Shelley establishes a connection between human agency and climatic reactions – an issue that remains relevant to this day.

4.3 Nature and the Sublime

Nature and weather, as previously explored, are central themes woven into the narrative. In short, they act as mirrors of the soul, offering moments of peace while simultaneously serving as reminders of guilt and consequence. This chapter primarily focuses on descriptions of the sublime, a concept frequently encountered in Romantic literature, describing "[t]he sight of the awful and majestic in nature" (Shelley 84). By illustrating beautiful and majestic natural scenery, Mary Shelley captivates readers of *Frankenstein* with her vibrant imagery and evocative language. Evoking wonder and inspiring awe, nature lets the characters in the novel feel small and powerless, compared to the size and force of the natural scenery surrounding them. The word "sublime" itself is mentioned a total of seven times throughout the novel, describing the "shapes of the mountains" (Shelley 26) or "the mighty Alps, whose white and shining pyramids and domes towered above all" (Shelley 81). Viktor emphasises "the solitary grandeur of the scene", which evokes a kind of "sublime ecstasy" in him, offering "wings to the soul" and "causing [him] to forget the passing cares of life" (Shelley 84). Viktor realises the insignificance of his problems as well as his own, compared to the vast force of nature. The paths that Viktor takes are "dangerous," and Viktor becomes aware of his vulnerability when being exposed to nature's power (Shelley 84). The sublime experience shifts the focus to nature's autonomy, aiming to decentre humans. An ecocritical approach, however, exposes an underlying ambivalence in this shift, criticising the tendency to regard wilderness merely as a source of emotional experiences. Defining wilderness solely through its impact on human emotion rather than recognising wilderness as an ecological, autonomous entity ultimately neglects the intrinsic value of nature itself. The ambivalent aspect of Romantic ecology, that "turn[s] natural settings…into aesthetic commodities or art objects" (Hutchings 179) is embodied by Frankenstein's main character,

Viktor, who seeks out the picturesque, calming experience in the wilderness, yet simultaneously engages in actions that manipulate and devalue the natural world.

5 Analysing the Relationship between the Human and the Natural World

Prometheus's myth tells the tale of a Greek titan who stole the fire of the gods and bestowed it upon humans, granting them knowledge and progress. The punishment for this act of rebellion that he received from Zeus included an endless circle of suffering while being chained to a rock and having his constantly regenerating liver eaten by an eagle, before being released by Hercules, Zeus's son. The central concept of hybris or hubris, whose origin can be found in Greek mythology, is defined in the Merriam–Webster dictionary as "exaggerated pride or self-confidence" and is explored in *Frankenstein*, whose alternative title is *The Modern Prometheus.* Hubris, often leading to fatal transgressions, such as crossing natural and moral boundaries, can be explored in the novel, which acts as a cautionary tale, warning of mankind's estrangement from nature and highlighting the importance of humility, respect, and harmony.

5.1 Frankenstein's Creation as a Violation of Natural Laws

Viktor, as the modern Prometheus, takes on a godly role by ignoring natural boundaries and breathing life into his creature, which is the product of scientific power and can be viewed as a symbol of humanity's ethical and ecological failure. Natural processes of birth and death are disregarded by treating the body as an object, not a living organism. The creature is not born as a child, but a completed product, yet without any connection to social or biological origin. Because of his transgression, Viktor suffers great losses, concerning not only the decline of his health but also the deaths of his closest family and friends. Nature's response to his crimes can be interpreted as an act of revenge, reminding mankind of the consequences of ignoring natural boundaries.

The months during which Viktor worked on the creation of new life, secluded in a laboratory and cut off from the outside world, are characterised by a loss of connection to the natural world. "It was a most beautiful season…but [his] eyes were insensible to the charms of nature" (Shelley 43). Viktor is determined to follow his unnatural obsession with defying

natural laws, which is reflected in his growing indifference to and distance from the nature around him. Cut off from both nature and human contact, Viktor becomes gradually emotionally numb while being fully immersed in a task that will ultimately lead to his downfall. Mary Shelley repeatedly describes his inner tension and nervousness, as well as his discomfort and alienation from the natural world.

In this transgression, ecocriticism recognises and criticises the abuse of natural resources: dead body parts, chemical processes, and knowledge about nature are being analysed, restructured, and used in humans' favour. Reducing nature as a resource to satisfy human needs and desires is critically viewed as a dangerous justification for environmental destruction. An ecocritical approach furthermore suggests a connection to environmental anxieties in today's world. The creation of the monster can be read as an early form of artificial intelligence or biotechnology – a creation that stems from nature but has lost its connection to it.

5.2 Anthropocentrism vs. Biocentrism

By creating life in a laboratory, Viktor positions himself above natural processes – a typical act of anthropocentric transgression. Nature is manipulated and instrumentalised: a violation that deprives nature of its intrinsic value. In her work, Mary Shelley criticises anthropocentric blindness – Viktor's ignorance and refusal to take responsibility for the life that he has created. The portrayal of nature as an autonomous, responding force corresponds, on the other hand, to biocentric values, constantly reminding Viktor of his alienation and transgression. The creature, in establishing a deeper connection to nature than to human society, becomes a voice of nature itself. By highlighting his own value and need for appreciation and protection, the creature shifts the focus to non-human life, a biocentric concern. In the novel, these two worldviews, anthropocentrism and biocentrism, meet and establish the ground for important ecological debates. As an early critique of anthropocentric values, *Frankenstein* invites the idea of critically engaging with one's relationship to nature and considering the ecological consequences of human interference in nature.

6 Analysing the Creature's Relationship with Nature

The creature plays a key role in analysing *Frankenstein* from an ecocritical perspective, not only because he is considered to be one of the main characters, but also because of his unique situation and distinctive approach to the natural world around him. The following subchapters will delve into the creature's sense of self and his identity, which is shaped by the abandonment of his creator, Viktor, and the continuous rejection of society. Furthermore, the creature's rather modern approach to nutrition, vegetarianism, will be explored. Finally, the subchapters will provide insight into the obstacles that he is facing during the narrative, as well as his responses and coping mechanisms.

6.1 The Creature's Identity

In the context of popular culture, the name Frankenstein, which is in fact Viktor's surname, is frequently used to refer to the creature, who in reality suffers from his namelessness. Upon beholding the creature's frightening appearance, Viktor abandons him without ever giving him a name, which contributes greatly to the creature's uncertainty of self and reinforces his exclusion from the society of man. Viktor addresses him as the "[w]retched devil", a "vile insect", and as an "[a]bhorred monster", reflecting his rejection and despise (Shelley 86). These harsh insults seem to only confirm the creature's conclusions of being a cursed outcast, as he answers that he has "expected this reception" (Shelley 86). The creature realises early on that his hideous appearance sets him apart from humans, creating an insurmountable obstacle. Experiencing rejection and being feared by the people he encounters, the creature begins to question his identity, thinking of himself as "a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned" (Shelley 104). The creature shows an unstable sense of self; in fact, he has no clear understanding of who or what he is (Shelley 112). The more the creature learns from the cottagers, the more he realises that "[i]ncrease of knowledge" only reinforces his conviction of being a "wretched outcast" (Shelley 114). The creature's unnatural and nonhuman appearance, which defies all social norms and expectations, triggers human stereotypes, which are deeply rooted in society and prevent the creature from being treated with dignity and respect. However, apart from his appearance, the creature shows a great deal of humanity while acting benevolently and kindly towards the cottagers. The creature himself confirms that "[he] was benevolent

and good" and that "misery made [him] a fiend" (Shelley 86). The creature attempts to bridge the gap between himself and society by observing and finally approaching the cottagers, who inevitably respond with fear and disgust. Longing for friendship and love, the creature desires company and acceptance of others, which would prove his worth and give him a real identity. In demanding a female companion of his own species, the creature finds his last chance of being accepted at least by one of his kind.

6.2 Vegetarianism

Upon experiencing "hunger and thirst" (Shelley 89) for the first time, the creature's first instinct is to gather "some berries which [he] found hanging on the trees or lying on the ground" (Shelley 89) and let a "brook" (Shelley 89) quench his thirst. The creature consumes meat only once, more precisely "offals that…travellers had left" and which "had been roasted" (Shelley 91). However, this experience didn't lead him to a carnivorous diet, but served as an inspiration for his own manner of food preparation. He discovers that by roasting them, "berries were spoiled" and "nuts and roots much improved" (Shelley 91). The creature continues with his vegetarian diet, including a breakfast consisting of "bread, cheese, milk, and wine" (Shelley 92) as well as "berries, nuts, and roots, which [he] gathered from a neighbouring wood" (Shelley 97). The creature even directly addresses his choice of diet when speaking to Viktor: "My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment" (Shelley 128). The fact that he refuses to take life to provide for his nourishment emphasises the creature's special connection to nature and his wish and need for a harmonious relationship with the natural world around him. The vegetarian diet is a conscious decision, confirming the creature's inherent benevolence and innocence. By preparing plant–based foods, the creature becomes an advocate and speaker for nature itself, reminding readers until today of the necessity of acting in the planet's and nature's interest. Furthermore, traces of vegetarianism can be found in the Romantic context, specifically in Mary Shelley's circle of writers. Questioning societal norms, including the consumption of animal products, became an increasingly popular topic of discussion. Especially Percy Shelley, a committed vegetarian and advocate, promotes plant-based diets in his 1813 pamphlet *A Vindication of Natural Diet*, viewing meat consumption as unnatural, immoral, and health-damaging.

6.3 Environmental Justice and the Marginalisation of the Non-Human

The creature is a victim of social exclusion and is marginalised due to his monstrous appearance. Society ignores and denies the creature's personality and inner values, not granting him a place in society or any rights. The creature is regarded as an outcast, not as a person or even a living being that deserves dignity and protection. His voice is ignored and silenced by rejection and abandonment. In her novel, Shelley seems to directly critique anthropocentrism, a concept that values humans and degrades everything else, including animals and nature. The creature reflects marginalised groups, including nonhuman life, that suffer from environmental exploitation and the loss of habitats due to climatic catastrophes. The novel also portrays the consequences of environmental injustice: social tensions, conflicts, and even violence. The creature's portrayal and experiences mirror moral ignorance and missing responsibility on Viktor's part. The creature shows moral clarity and compassion when learning about the "discovery of the American hemisphere". He "wept with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants" (Shelley 104), recognising the injustice and suffering of Indigenous people due to colonial atrocities. Although being marginalised himself, the creature shows moral awareness of historical injustice, which links environmental degradation to the fate of marginalised groups.

6.4 Connection to Nature vs. Societal Rejection

During his short life, societal rejection and the resulting isolation emerged as the creature's main sources of suffering. The creature's unusual appearance, contrary to human expectations, cast the creature in the role of an outsider. Viktor's descriptions of the creature's "unearthly ugliness" (Shelley 85) emphasise his hateful attitude due to superficial judgment. Towards the end of the novel, the creature describes himself as "the miserable and the abandoned…an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on" (Shelley 200). This rejection mirrors an anthropocentric worldview, in which life is valued and worthy only if it corresponds to an ideal image and proves useful to human needs.

Misunderstood by society, yet longing for community and friendship, the creature turns to nature. "The desert mountains and dreary glaciers" (Shelley 87) offer him safety and sanctuary. The natural scenery not only provides joy and relief but also acts as a teacher,

supplying the creature with food and material and guiding him through his first days of being alive.

From an ecocritical viewpoint, the creature thus embodies the conflict between culturally motivated exclusion and a biocentric, more inclusive understanding of life. This contrast emphasises Mary Shelley's critique of a human-centred worldview and neglect of ecological interconnectedness. Becoming the symbol of a repressed ecological consciousness, the creature challenges readers to reconsider what constitutes life and belonging beyond the human gaze.

7 Ecofeminism in Frankenstein

In her novel, Mary Shelley explores multiple aspects of ecofeminism that relate patriarchal dominance over nature to the systematic oppression of women, issues which are mirrored in the 19th-century society and continue to be relevant to this day.

7.1 The Marginalisation of Women

In *Frankenstein*, female characters, including Elizabeth Lavenza, Justine Moritz, and Caroline Frankenstein, are primarily portrayed as beautiful and "gentle" (Shelley 8) care-givers and "comforter[s]" (Shelley 33), devoting their lives to domestic work and male characters' needs. The female characters are thus passive, deprived of self-determination and lacking autonomy and personal perspectives. This objectification is reinforced by choosing Viktor Frankenstein as the main narrator, whose perspective is shaped by male perception, fantasy, and evaluation – in short, the male gaze. Women are used as projections of male ideals and anxieties, often being cast into the roles of a saint, whose purpose is the satisfaction of men, or a sinner, who serves as a scapegoat in patriarchal structures. Ecofeminism points out the marginalisation of the female voice and draws attention to societal power imbalances, mirrored in male-dominated narrations.

Ecofeminism suggests that marginalised groups, including women, predominantly suffer from the consequences of environmental destruction. This issue is reflected in *Frankenstein*, where Viktor's transgression leads to the tragic fates of the female characters: Justine's innocent execution and Elizabeth's murder. Consequently, while Viktor himself is not the first to be seriously affected by his reckless actions, women are portrayed to be the real

victims of a patriarchal society. Safie DeLacey is the only woman who is depicted as courageous, acting according to her own desires and capable of making her own choices. Mary Shelley includes her as a character that contrasts the patriarchal passivity of other rather voiceless female characters, serving as a silver lining in a novel which is shaped by patriarchal control and domination.

7.2 Patriarchal Dominance

In the novel, Viktor Frankenstein serves as the embodiment of male domination over nature. By actively and violently interfering in natural processes, Viktor mirrors the patriarchal tendency to dissect, control, and dominate nature. Instead of cooperation and respect, the novel depicts exploitation fueled by patriarchal desire for power and control. Mary Shelley's profound critique of man-dominated structures, which exploit and oppress women as well as nature, is furthermore reflected in the destruction of the creature's female companion – a symbolic femicide. The female creature is deprived of her right to exist due to Viktor's fear of her reproductive ability of reproduction, and in a broader sense, the patriarchal need to suppress female power and autonomy.

7.3 The Creature's Unnatural Birth

Viktor creates life in the absence of any female participation. Thus, the creature represents a product of violating the natural biological order of male and female contributions. An ecofeminist approach suggests this act to be an instrumentalisation of nature, which is abused as a mere resource. Nature's creative power and women's unique ability to give birth are replaced by a mechanised process. Viktor, as a male character, takes it upon himself to arrogantly assume a role, which is traditionally attributed to women and mothers: the creation and birth of life. By depicting the creature's suffering under the consequences of this unnatural birth, Mary Shelley criticises the oppression of and alienation from female principles.

Conclusion

By outlining the theoretical and historical background of ecocriticism, this thesis has shown how *Frankenstein* reflects core themes and motifs of the discipline, offering an effective framework for exploring the relationship between humans and the environment.

From an ecocritical perspective, Mary Shelley's work can be perceived as an early warning of the dangers of modern science and technology. By creating life artificially, Viktor Frankenstein disrupts the natural cycle of life and death. This transgression unleashes a creature that requires support and guidance in a world that he does not understand. Viktor's refusal to rectify the situation and reckon with the consequences of his reckless scientific pursuit signifies his inability to recognise his responsibility. Human responsibility is a term often discussed in the ecocritical debate – a moral and ethical obligation to prevent environmental destruction and foster environmental awareness, including the promotion of the protection and preservation of nature. Especially in times of global climate change, realising the full implications of one's actions and taking accountability for them is of significant importance to achieve societal change.

The depiction of nature in Frankenstein as a healing force as well as an unpredictable, independent entity invites readers to understand and question their own understanding of and approach to the environment. Shelley's work illustrates how social and cultural influences shape our perception and valuation of nature. The Romantic notion of idealising nature and instrumentalising it as a mere tool for aesthetics is reflected in modern society. In the digital era shaped by social media, this issue is particularly evident: national parks, mountains, and beaches are used and selectively shown as aestheticised backdrops, without providing any context for environmental issues and ecological awareness. These digitally filtered experiences of nature confuse apparent connection to the environment with consumer aesthetics.

While the novel does not explicitly address specific environmental issues, it does hint at ecological aspects that encourage readers to consider and reevaluate human-nature relationships. The novel's weather motifs are particularly worth considering, as they offer insight into troubling environmental shifts driven by human activity. In the novel, nature is

given a voice through loud, frightening thunderstorms, embodying a symbolic plea for attention and ecological mindfulness.

In spite of the prevailing narrative of ecological decline and human failure, the end of the novel offers a prospect of hope: Viktor might have been unable to mitigate the outcomes of his actions, but Walton, the captain of the expedition to the north pole, arrives at an understanding of the serious implications of tampering with natural systems, resulting in him turning his ship around.

Instead of demonising technological progress, *Frankenstein* addresses the complexity, hesitation, and ambivalence that shape the dynamics of interacting with technology. The pursuit of progress should align with social values and respect for nature, rather than being driven by personal ambitions for social recognition and success, as exemplified in Viktor's case. Shelley created a scenario in which scientific progress and human ambition fail to deliver the desired outcome of success and control. By illustrating harsh repercussions, including isolation, violence, and loss, Shelley shows the consequences of human hubris. Rather than romanticising nature, Shelley paints a picture of a vulnerable, reacting environment that mirrors the destruction and suffering caused by Viktor’s thirst for control.

By purposefully hinting at the marginalisation of women, the novel furthermore addresses issues that remain germane to current feminist debates. In addition, taking into account the historical background, the novel reflects environmental anxieties about climate change as a result of the eruption of Mount Tambora. While humanity cannot be held accountable for this change of climate pattern in the 19th century, the tale of Frankenstein nevertheless contains an ecological message that resonates now more than ever: Disregarding natural orders and abusing laws of nature by overstepping human boundaries is followed by far-reaching consequences – not only for nature but for humanity itself.

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley directly confronts readers with questions that are crucial to understanding the environment as well as humanity’s role within it. What are the consequences of ignoring natural boundaries? What is lost due to alienation from the natural world? How can a relationship that is based on respect instead of exploitation between humanity and nature be successfully maintained in a modern world? Questions about responsibility and moral consciousness when it comes to the destruction of ecological

balance due to an excess of human desire to control encourage a rethinking of entrenched attitudes. Mary Shelley created with *Frankenstein* a subtle, but insistent message: scientific progress is accompanied by immense responsibility and requires ecological understanding. 200 years after its publication, in times of global ecological crisis, species extinction, and uncontrolled biotechnology, *Frankenstein* still reminds us of the repercussions of human hubris.

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Declaration on the Use of AI-based Tools and Aids

Prohlašuji, že jsem při tvorbě práce využila AI následovně:

1. Využití ChatGPT pro úpravu stylistiky
2. Využití Grammerly pro úpravu pravopisu