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How Does Frankenstein Show Nature vs. Nurture?

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is often celebrated for its exploration of the Gothic and the macabre, but it also delves deeply into the psychological battle between nature and nurture. Through the characters of Victor Frankenstein and his creation, Shelley eloquently poses the question: are we born the way we are, or do we become who we are through our experiences?

Nature in Frankenstein: The Inherent Traits of Victor and the Creature

Victor Frankenstein's inherent nature can be seen in his boundless curiosity and ambition. From an early age, Victor is drawn to the mysteries of science and the potential of transcending natural bounds. His innate characteristics drive him to create life, showcasing a natural disposition towards pushing limits and challenging societal norms. Similarly, the creature's initial nature is arguably benign and childlike. Upon gaining consciousness, he exhibits a gentle and curious nature, seeking affection and understanding from his creator and the broader world.

However, the theme of nurture begins to shape both characters drastically as their stories unfold. Victor's pursuit of knowledge is nurtured in an academic environment that praises scientific breakthroughs without equally emphasizing ethical responsibility. This skewed nurturing leads to his ultimate downfall, as his ambition blinds him to the moral implications of his actions.

Nurture in Frankenstein: The Creature's Transformation and Societal Rejection

The creature's transformation from innocence to monstrosity is a powerful testament to the nurture aspect of the debate. Left alone, confused, and rejected, the creature learns from his

environment. Each encounter with humans teaches him that society judges on appearances, not on intrinsic worth. His nurturing is harsh and devoid of compassion, filled with rejection and abuse. This societal treatment nurtures a deep resentment and a violent backlash that aligns with his treatment rather than his natural disposition.

Shelley further explores nurture through the creature's self-education. He learns to speak and read from observing the De Lacey family, and through books such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he reflects on his condition. These experiences nurture a profound existential crisis within him, prompting questions about his place in the world and the justice of his suffering. Thus, his nurturing through both direct and indirect societal interactions shapes his path more significantly than his natural form alone could suggest.

Interplay of Nature and Nurture: The Tragic Outcomes

The tragic outcomes for both Victor and the creature highlight the complex interplay of nature and nurture. Victor's natural disposition and the nurturing environment of academic hubris combine to fuel his blind pursuit of glory, leading to his neglect of the creature and, ultimately, his destruction. For the creature, his natural disposition towards kindness is overtaken by the cruelty of his nurturing, steering him towards a path of violence and revenge.

Shelley's narrative suggests that while our natural inclinations can set the course of our lives, the way we are nurtured can significantly alter that course. The creature might have remained benign had he been nurtured with kindness and acceptance. Similarly, Victor might have used his natural talents for the betterment of humanity if guided by ethical nurturing.

Conclusion: Shelley's Reflection on Human Nature and Society

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley serves as a poignant exploration of the nature vs. nurture debate. The novel suggests that both elements are crucial in shaping an individual's identity.

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Shelley prompts the reader to consider how different the outcomes might have been if both Victor and his creation had experienced more compassionate and ethical nurturing. Through her story, Shelley not only questions the limits of scientific endeavor but also reflects on the societal responsibilities we bear in nurturing individuals. In doing so, she offers a critical commentary on how we, as a society, contribute to creating the 'monsters' we fear through our actions and our neglect.