In the excerpt from Mary Shelley’s gothic novel*, Frankenstein,* (1831), the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, discusses his fateful decision to choose science over math using ominous and regretful tones.

The foreboding diction in the first two paragraphs of the passage creates a negative tone as Victor explains his early fascination with the sciences in his conversation with Walton. For example, in the second paragraph, he claims that before he had witnessed the lightening hit the tree, he had become disenchanted by his earlier studies of natural history and that these studies had become “despicable” and he now felt nothing but “disdain” for Agrippa and Magnus, men he had previously admired. His choice of the word, “despicable” to describe his feelings toward the study of sciences shows that he had no desire to pursue such a ridiculous topic any longer. He claims that his earlier obsession was one that he felt only scorn for now. Also, in that same paragraph, Victor calls the study of science, “deformed” and “abortive.” Both of these words show his change of heart now that he has had time to reflect on the consequences of his actions. Each word brings to mind the horrible image of an aborted fetus and it is intriguing that Shelley chose these words for Victor’s speech. It is easy to see that Victor is reflecting on his choices now that he has lost everyone that he loved and his negative diction supports his newfound understanding.

In the final paragraph, however, his diction shifts and becomes more remorseful and repentant. He tells Walton that when he thinks back on this moment of his life, and on the time when he when he decided to study mathematics, he felt “unusual tranquility” and a “gladness of soul.” He connects his decision to focus on mathematics in almost biblical terms. When one’s soul is calm and peaceful, all is right in one’s life. Unfortunately, Victor refuses to listen to his guardian angel an dhe reverts back to his earlier insatiable curiosity about the origins of life.