Explicit vs. Implicit Themes
Reminder...

• Theme:
  – main idea or statement a work seems to be making about the subject matter
  • But is not the same as subject matter
  – usually a general statement, not specific description or detailing
  – concerns universal ideas (love, hate, betrayal, fear, joy, change, friendship, family, society, etc.)
Explicit!

• Stated or expressed clearly in detail
  – No room for confusion

• Explicit Theme: A theme that is clearly expressed or stated in detail at some point in narrative
Example of Explicit Theme

• Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Wakefield” (1835)
• Story begins as narrator remembers article in newspaper: man leaves wife for 20 years and then returns.
• Narrator gives reader a choice:
  – Can think on situation on their own
  – Can “ramble” through the rest to the message he got from it, “done up neatly, and condensed into final sentence”
Example of Explicit Theme cont.

• During the story, narrator makes general statements about human interactions
  – Wakefield didn’t know how insignificant he was in the world
  – It is dangerous to create a hole in a loved one’s heart: not because it will always be a hole, but because it can quickly close again
Example of Explicit Theme cont.

- Final Sentence paraphrased (which narrator identified as theme):
  - Individuals adjust to systems of interaction
  - By stepping outside that system, humans run the risk of losing their place in that system forever
  - Risk becoming Outcast of the Universe (like Wakefield)
Implicit

• Opposite of Explicit: Implied
• Details hint at it, but do not clearly express it
• Implicit Theme: a theme that is implied through
  – Characters, Plot, Setting, Stylistic Choices
Example of Implicit Theme

• Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831)
• Implicit Theme: Language, reading and writing lead to self-discovery and knowledge.
• Narrators make several general statements about the importance of language, writing, or reading throughout text
Example of Implicit Theme cont.

• Details that hint towards implied theme:
  – Books, letters, diaries, and manuscripts are included, referenced, and alluded to throughout the book
  – Creature learns to read, and reads about own creation in Victor’s diary (compares to other creation stories he has read/heard)
  – Creature leaves notes engraved on trees and rocks for Victor
Some texts include both explicit and implicit themes

• Explicit Theme in *Frankenstein*: pursuit of forbidden knowledge leads to destruction
  – Full title: *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus*
  – Prometheus stole fire from Gods and gave to man before banishment
  – Victor stole ability to create life from God before everyone around him is destroyed, leaving him alone (which he shouts to himself in frustration)