
Frankenstein Feminism And The Role Of Women

Frankenstein is a novel written by Mary Shelley, an English female author, at around the year 1818, about a young scientist named Victor Frankenstein who makes a creature in an unorthodox scientific experiment. This specific book has generated a lot of critical analysis from its tear of publication till the present period on account of a few factors which these critics argue would have been the causes of the various literary styles utilized by the author and additionally about the author herself. This paper aims to analyze the following critiques; Shelley as a mother, social engineering, and feminism.

It is possible to discuss the topic of Frankenstein Feminism through Shelley's female characters and how the female characters are constructed and portrayed. In the novel, women seem to somewhat take a passive role within the narrative as a whole. Although it cannot be said that there is a shortage of women in the novel, the female characters who are in the story are often passive and do not take an active role within Shelley's narrative. For the purpose of this essay, I will focus on the characters of Elizabeth and the female monster.

Firstly, I will discuss the character of Elizabeth and how she is presented as a female. When she first appears in the novel, Elizabeth is described as being 'very fair' with hair that was 'the brightest living gold', with 'cloudless' 'blue eyes' and 'bearing a celestial stamp in all her features'. It is from aspects of her such as these, and other constructions of her appearance that make her attractive to Caroline (Victor's mother) 'above all the rest' of the orphan children she is with when she first appears in the novel.

This means that before we even are properly acquainted with her character, with her personality, talents or voice, we have been given this exceedingly positive construction of her solely because of her appearance. So, this would seem to suggest a certain importance in the looks of females; if they are attractive then that gives them a positive characterization despite personality. It can be argued that after this initial portrayal of Elizabeth she never really develops as a character, in fact she is almost defined by her appearance to Victor, one of our main protagonists and narrative voices in the novel.

Feminism can also be discussed in the novel through the female monster, a character that never actually comes to be. She is requested by the creature when he tells Victor 'I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as I am'. Although it can be said again that value is placed on females to only bring joy and pleasure to males in the novel, the creature seems not to focus as much on beauty. The monster declares that he desires a mate so that he is not alone, so that he can have a 'companion'. His request, although considerably selfish in the light of his misery to inflict another being the pain that he has felt as a monster and recluse, is understandable.

He has spent a large chunk of his life observing a family where Felix and Safie were making each other happy, and so he has perhaps learnt that male – female companionship leads to happiness and will free him of the loneliness he is plagued with. However, the fact that he requests her to be 'as hideous as I am' perhaps suggests an element of possession within his idea of her; if she is as 'hideous' as the creature, he might believe that no other man will want

to be with her like he believes no human female will ever want to be with him. So, he would have possession over her by the very fact of them being paired by ugliness.

The female monster is seen somewhat less affectionately by Victor. Whilst carrying out his creation of her he stops to think what he is doing by making another 'fiend' on Earth and decides to destroy her before she is ever given life. This decision, however, is made by Victor after he contemplates the possibility of children. Within his narrative it is said 'one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children'. Here Victor is presuming that because she is a female then the first thing, she will desire is children, defining feminine desire by the possibility of motherhood. After thinking of the 'race of devils' she and the creature would produce together, Victor 'destroys' her.

It is interesting to discuss this event. As her creator, Victor could make the female monster without a womb or the body parts necessary to produce children. This then would presumably solve the problem of the 'race of devils' and the creature would still have his companion to solve his loneliness. However, Victor destroys his second creation instead of making a woman who could not have children, perhaps suggesting that women are seen as mothers in Victor's eyes, and inferring that womanhood is defined by motherhood to him. So, women are there for their practical function of being mothers and can have no other desires or functions if they are not to be mothers.

In conclusion, Shelley's book mainly tells the story of a scientist who does not take responsibility for his creation. It is saturated with concerns and fears, typical of the author herself, such as the dread of childbirth and viable upbringing, absence of parental understanding, love, and attention, and childrearing in a motherless home. Shelley tries to identify herself with the general society because of the negligence she experienced and her rejection by her father, much in the same light as what Victor's creature experienced. In any case, her utilization of imagination and innovation in her mission to relate her story to the general society.