
Humanity in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"

Power always comes at a price. For humanity to gain power, a large price has been paid. Many Wars, genocides, murders, and scandals, have been used as methods to obtain power. But with each of these methods, the price has always been high. Whether one pays the price today or tomorrow for power is unknown. Regardless, the price for power will always have its due. That is why scientific research may come off as miniscule when its presented as a tool for humanity to use for power. But like all methods used to obtain power, a price will always be paid. This use of scientific research to obtain power and the price one pays is portrayed in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Mary Shelley lived in a time of great innovation and scientific research. Maybe this work of literature Frankenstein, was used as warning to humanity in its hunger for power. This work of Mary's was not only used to warn of humanity of its plight for power but also to show the consequence of pursuing power, and the struggle between humanity and nature, and the injustice women face.

In the pursuit of power, people can sometimes lose themselves in their pursuit of it until it ultimately consumes them. Victor Frankenstein portrays this well in Frankenstein. His thoughts are singled out on scientific technological advancement and discoveries. Victor goes as far to say "Besides, I had a contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy. It was very different when the masters of the science sought immortality and power; such views, although futile, were grand; but now the scene was changed. The ambition of the inquirer seemed to limit itself to the annihilation of those visions on which my interest in science was chiefly founded. I was required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth." (3.12) Frankenstein doesn't want to do find new plants or insects, he wants the secret to immortality. By doing this, Victor becomes blind to the consequences of pursuing such knowledge. The end result is the loss of control over his creation, and not only does he lose control of it but the creation ultimately leads to Victor's demise. Victor portrays anyone who pursues power, in the end it might be the pursuer or everyone around that person who pays the price. Even one critic, Professor Naomi Hetherington's writes, "Frankenstein 'indicate that the story is a retelling of the account of the origin of evil in a world where the only creators that we can locate are human ones'." (Keats-Shelley Review 11 (1997): 1-39.). Humanity proves time and time again, that most of the evil in the world is from itself. Especially because of humanity's endless pursuit of power, where science always continues to push the boundaries. The novel Frankenstein continues to echo unto this day and age. A warning from the Arthur, for anyone who chooses to go down the same path as Victor.

Throughout the novel, there is this constant fight between science and nature, that is, the unnatural and the natural. Victor's creation represents science, or the unnatural. Frankenstein's creation of this monster throws nature into a state of imbalance, which causes the future destruction of Victor and his whole family. Also, as this is a frame story, Victor's loss in the fight between nature and science is shown to be a warning for anyone who probes dangerously close to discovering nature's secrets when Shelly writes, "It's productions and features may be without example, as the phenomena of the heavenly bodies undoubtedly are in those undiscovered solitudes. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent

forever" (16). "You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been". This quote from the text is the perfect cautionary warning for readers, don't go pursuing knowledge or power, the end result may be tragedy. Perhaps the best summarization is from.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the author characterizes each woman as passive, disposable and serving a utilitarian function. Female characters like Safie, Elizabeth, Justine, Margaret and Agatha provide nothing more but a channel of action for the male characters in the novel. Events and actions happen to them, usually for the sake of teaching a male character a lesson or sparking an emotion within him. Each of Shelley's women serves a very specific purpose in *Frankenstein*.

First, Justine's character is a very passive, seldom vocal character in the novel. She is tossed back and forth between her family and the Frankenstein's, until she is ultimately framed for the murder of William Frankenstein. Justine defies the expectations of one wrongfully accused of manslaughter, remaining tranquil and peaceful. In her own words, she explains "God knows how entirely I am innocent. But I do not pretend that my protestations should acquit me; I rest my innocence on a plain and simple explanation of the facts..." (65). Not only do her speech and actions demonstrate passivity, but the simple act of being framed proves this to be the purpose behind her character: "But I have no power of explaining it...I am only left to conjecture concerning the probabilities by which it might have been placed in my pocket" (66). Thus, Justine becomes an inactive, docile victim of circumstance. The next female character encountered is the young cottager's daughter Agatha, whom the monster studies. Agatha's purpose, as a kind and gentle female, is to exhibit and embody all virtue and sensitivity. These are the first lessons learned by the monster; he has never seen such tenderness before now. Agatha most moves him in her interactions with her blind father, "Agatha listened with respect, her eyes sometimes filled with tears, which she endeavored to wipe away unperceived" (93). Perhaps the saddest moment in the novel is Frankenstein's betrothed Elizabeth. Described as a submissive, gentle character from the beginning, Elizabeth has always been a soft spot for her fiancé.

Frankenstein views her as a possession: "I looked upon Elizabeth as mine - mine to protect, love and cherish. All praises bestowed on her I received as made to a possession of my own" (21). Frankenstein's monster, well aware of this weakness and filled with the madness that results from parental neglect, murders Elizabeth in order to hurt his creator as deeply as possible. Even when her life is threatened, however, Frankenstein still holds the game of wits between himself and his monster above protecting Elizabeth. Instead of staying with her and guarding her on his wedding night, he patrols the premises, "She left me, and I continued some time walking up and down the passages of the house and inspecting every corner that might afford a retreat to my adversary...when suddenly I heard a shrill and dreadful scream" (173). Elizabeth has become another inert victim in this game of insanity and male-centered mayhem. She has been demeaned and reduced to a simple tool of revenge, along with the other female characters appearing in *Frankenstein*. Although the story does not show any power given to women, it shows the power of men who blindly pursue it and how it affects their counterparts. Women of the time, who are expected to sit at home, blindly supporting their significant other are still prone to the affects of men who blindly pursue power.

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