

Dark Science and Damned Souls: Ethics and Gothic in Marry Shelley's *Frankenstein*

¹Mr. Yogesh ²Ms. Thulasi Bala V



¹ MA English, Department of English, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57067/ir.v2.i9.413>

Abstract: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley provides a thorough examination of the moral ramifications of unbridled intellectual ambition and the human yearning to surpass natural boundaries. Through the tragic tale of Victor Frankenstein and his creation Mary Shelley combines gothic themes with moral analysis to show that true monstrosity is found in indifference, neglect, and the lack of compassion rather than in outward appearance. This paper explores the novel's ethical, emotional, and gothic aspects examining the conflict between creator and creation, societal bias, and the fallout from pursuing ambition without empathy. This Study examines textual evidence and intertextual references such as *paradise lost* to show how Marry Shelley creates a story that is both horrifying and ethically enlightening.

Keywords: Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, Gothic literature, Ambition, Creation and neglect, The creature.

Introduction

One of the most Significant gothic books in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) which combines terror with deep philosophical and ethical issues. Victor Frankenstein obsession with creating life and the ensuing agony of the creature he creates and chronicled in the story. Gothic tropes like bleak landscapes, hideous images and otherworldly implications are essential to the story but they have a function beyond simple terror they illustrate the moral and psychological repercussions of ambition separated from accountability. In her exploration of the concept of monstrosity Mary Shelley asks if physical deformity or moral failure is what constitutes horror. Through the intricate relationship between Victor and his invention the book highlights how crucial empathy, responsibility, and interpersonal relationships are to the quest for knowledge.

Literature Review

The ethical, Gothic and sociological aspects of *Frankenstein* have been the subject of much scholarly investigation. Shelley's examination of the creator's moral obligations is emphasized by Anne K. Mellor (1988), who also highlights the negative effects of ambition that isn't restrained by empathy. Chris Baldrick (1987) places the book in Gothic traditions and examines the moral and psychological horror that results from human carelessness rather than otherworldly powers. A framework for comprehending Gothic tropes that Shelley used to highlight moral quandaries, such as isolation, monstrosity, and crossing of natural bounds, is offered by Fred Botting (1996). Furthermore, Shelley criticizes societal prejudice and shallow morality in her discussion of the subversion of Gothic tropes and the role of women writers (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979). This Study highlights how Gothic terror and moral reflection interact in the book setting the stage for more in depth textual research.

Analysis

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley is a serious examination of moral responsibility, human ambition and the results of ignoring moral obligations. Victor Frankenstein the protagonist of the book starts off with good intentions but is corrupted by hubris and impatience in his relentless quest for scientific knowledge. "Life and Death seemed like perfect boundaries that I should show cross", he muses (Shelley 36). This quote perfectly captures the gothic obsession with sin and the human urge to go beyond what is natural. According to Anne K Mellor Victor's failure to foresee the repercussions of his acts is a critique of enlightenment principles emphasizing the ethical perils of unbridled scientific ambition (Mellor 45). Shelley challenges the moral obligations of artist in rapidly developing scientific era by presenting victor Frankenstein ambitions as both heroic and conceited.

The way Victor Frankenstein responded to his creation right away "The beauty of the dream vanished and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" further demonstrates his moral and emotional failure (Shelley 39). It is clear from this change from excitement to disgust that victor evaluates the creature only on the basis of his hideous look not its capacity for emotion or reflection. "She uses the grotesque as a gothic device to dramatize the consequences of violating societal and natural norms emphasizing the psychological and social ramifications of victor's transgression" according to Fred Botting (Botting 112). As the protagonist rotting corpses storm-lashed landscapes and solitary laboratories it shows

how emotional and physical isolation compound moral flaws.

On the other hand, the creature demonstrates emotional complexity and the ability to think morally. "I admired virtue and good feelings and loved the gentle manners and amiable qualities of my cottagers" he writes describing the De Lacey family (Shelley 101). According to Gilbert and Gubar Shelley's criticism of snap decisions based solely on appearance is emphasized by the creature's empathy and admiration for human goodness. They contend that rather than the physical shape of the creature the real horror of the book is found in the prejudice and rejection of society (Gilbert and Gubar 156). The moral growth of the creature shows that monstrosity is socially manufactured rather than being an inherent evil the creature's violent behaviors are a response to neglect and exclusion.

When the creature says to victor "I ought to be thy adam but I am rather the fallen angel" the ethical complexity of Frankenstein is further revealed (Shelley 87). This reference to Milton's paradise Lost establishes the story as a morally and spiritually troubling tale. Mellor points out that Shelley criticizes victor's careless godlike authority by comparing the created Adam to Satan. She emphasizes that the tragedy arises not from the act of creation but rather from the inability to provide guidance and nurture (Mellor 78). The creature's dual connection with alienation and innocence sheds light on the moral obligation that comes with creation as well as the effects of abandonment.

The creature seeks love not retribution for company even after going through great pain.

Victor Frankenstein rejects his explanation of his desire for acceptance and connection asking “Shall I in cool blood set loose upon the earth a daemon?” (Shelley 144). According to Diane Long Hoeveler Gothic stories usually examine the psychological effects of pain and loneliness which in Frankenstein molds the creature’s identity and moral judgment (Hoeveler 93). Fear and prejudice drive Victor’s rejection which reflects an unethical failure to accept his obligations. Thus Mary Shelley highlights that monstrous are not only the result of physical deformity or supernatural power but also of moral apathy and cultural neglect.

And, the creature states “I am malicious because I am miserable” illustrating the moral ramifications of neglect. Do all people not despise and shun me? (Shelley 121). According to Mary Poovey, Shelley criticizes not just the author’s own shortcomings but also more general culture and ideological systems such as the exclusion of people who are considered “Other” due to their gender, appearance, or social status (Poovey 102). The creature’s experiences show that moral obligation encompasses societal responsibility, empathy, and guidance in addition to the act of creation.

The Gothic tropes such as gloomy landscapes stark arctic wastes, and catastrophic natural catastrophes enrich the novel’s ethical investigation. According to Botting Gothic iconography depicts moral and psychological solitude by reflecting the inner conditions of the characters (Botting 119). While the creature’s rejection pushes Victor Frankenstein into the forest Victor’s infatuation separates

him from his family and society underscoring the moral and psychological ramifications of neglect and discrimination in society. Mary Shelley combines Gothic terror with moral analysis in her story, demonstrating how social and physical contexts intensify moral quandaries.

The ultimate ethically contemplative death of the creature “I Shall die” marks the end of the book. In the midst of the agonizing flames I will gloriously climb my burial pile and revel in my suffering (Shelley 189). In contrast Victor Frankenstein clings to his pride and self-justification as he passes away. Mary Shelley represents the creature as a morally upright Gothic hero who exhibits self-awareness, remorse and a commitment to morality despite suffering according to Mellor and Gilbert and Gubar (Mellor 125; Gilbert and Gubar 163). True monstrosity according to Mary Shelley is not found in ambition or external appearance but rather in moral neglect, a lack of empathy, and a refusal to take responsibility for one’s actions.

It is clear that Frankenstein goes beyond basic Gothic terror when textual evidence and critical viewpoints are combined. The morality of creation the effects of neglect and how empathy defines mankind are all examined in the book. Victor Frankenstein is a timeless examination of human responsibility, prejudice and emotional intelligence because of the way Mary Shelley dramatizes moral and societal issues through Gothic imagery as shown by secondary sources such as Mellor, Botting, Gilbert & Gubar, Hoeveler and Poovey.

Conclusion

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley Shows that moral negligence, apathy and a refusal to accept responsibility are the underlying causes of monstrosity rather than physical deformities. The novel emphasizes the ethical ramifications of creation, the influence of social prejudice and the formation of identity via trauma and isolation through Victor's unbridled ambition and the creature's moral awareness. These topics are emphasized by gothic imagery which mirrors the character's internal moral and psychological conflicts. It becomes evident that Shelley's work is more than just a gothic horror tale when textual evidence is combined with critical analysis from academics such as Mellor, Botting, Gilbert & Gubar, Hoeveler and Poovey. It is a profound ethical investigation of human responsibility, empathy and the social repercussions of neglect.

References

1. Anne K Mellor- Mary Shelley: Her life, Her fiction, Her Monstrous (1988)
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mo-no/10.4324/9780203435588/mary-shelley-anne-mellor>
2. Chris Baldick – In Frankenstein's Shadow (1990)
<https://academic.oup.com/book/7786>
3. Fred Botting – Gothic (1996)
<https://archive.org/details/gothic0000bott>
4. Sandra M Gilbert & Susan Gubar – A madwoman in the Attic (1979)
<https://archive.org/details/TheMadwomanInTheAttic>
5. Diane Long Hoeveler – Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary (2010)
<https://archive.org/details/gothicriffssecul0000hoev>
6. Mary Poovey – The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer (1984)
<https://archive.org/details/properladywomanw0000poov>
7. Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus. Edited by Marilyn Butler, Oxford University Press, (1993)