

# Mary shelley's "frankenstein" essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



' In Frankenstein, a man arrogantly takes on the responsibility of giving birth, and the female characters pay for his arrogance.' How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

Reading Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1831) from a feminist perspective brings to light many questions of moral and ethical importance, particularly those associated with the idea of the male protagonist taking on the birthing role as expressed in this view. I very much agree with the negative stance on his usurpation of the mother as it inevitably proves to be destructive, clearly demonstrating a quality of arrogance and disregard. In order to appreciate this viewpoint, we must interpret Victor's ' workshop of filthy creation' as a kind of womb and the ' labour' of his ' toils' as a parallel to the process of labour in natural childbirth. This would suggest that he has taken on the responsibility of giving birth and literally usurped the position of the mother. The issue is, as observed by Anne K Mellor, that in doing this ' Frankenstein has eliminated the female's primary biological function and source of cultural power'<sup>1</sup>.

In Shelley's time, the function and freedom of women in society was already incredibly limited, so this can certainly be viewed as an arrogant act as it ' supports a patriarchal denial of the value of women and of female sexuality'<sup>1</sup>, arrogant because it suggests he views himself as a male to be superior to the female. This can be extended as evidence of a wish to ' eliminate the necessity to have females at all', supported by his violent destruction ' with trembling passion' of the female being he creates at the thought of her reproducing as he realises ' the first sympathies' of the elopement of the creatures ' would be children'. Also in this ' passion' we can

interpret Victor's horror at natural sexual relationships. Victor's other motives for taking on the responsibility are also undoubtedly arrogant: ' Life and death Appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into a dark world.

A new species would bless me as creator and source... No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs' Here, he demonstrates not a wish to assume the position of the female in the birthing process, but a wish to take God's place as creator. In his hyperbolic use of divine imagery, wishing to ' pour a torrent of light into a dark world', he likens himself to an enlightening angelic or God like figure. This almost surpasses the OED definition of arrogance - ' having or revealing an exaggerated sense of one's own importance or abilities', particularly in the sense that he has expressed a wish to be ' bless(ed)... as creator and source' and is expectant of ' gratitude'. Shelley appears to be suggesting that Victor has committed some sort of crime against humanity. He has tried to usurp the role of women and to take God's place, yet his inability to carry out the task successfully - creating an imperfect being and failing to nurture it demonstrates the fact that as a human male it is not possible for him to withstand the responsibility of either of these roles.

Conversely, Victor's endeavor to discover a new method of reproduction could be seen in a positive light. Perhaps Shelley was exploring the idea of an alternative to the trauma of natural childbirth in her experience, having lost a mother and her first child in the process already by the age of eighteen. In Victor's more clinical approach to creation, both the physical

suffering of pregnancy and labour and the potential emotional suffering of loss are eliminated. However, despite the avoidance of pain at this stage, overall the new method is not successful as the product is rejected by society and 'payment' is made by other means. Thus, I feel this argument is limited. This 'Payment' for Victor's crime against humanity can explicitly be seen to target the female characters in the novel, although it is important to note that there male characters who are meet similar fates at the hand of the creature.

The first casualty is Justine Moritz, whose death is, though indirectly, induced by Victor in two ways. The first is that she is condemned due to the actions of the very product (the creature) of his 'arrogant' endeavor (giving birth); and the second is in his choice not to aid her in her struggle, deciding not to speak out in favour of her innocence at her trial in cowardice and once again arrogance. This arrogance is clearly demonstrated when he laments that the 'tortures of the accused did not equal mine'. Blinded by self-indulgent anguish, Victor even views his emotional pain as superior to that of Justine. She pays for this with her life. Victor's arrogance also has a damaging affect on Elizabeth. In his seeking a new method of creation, he is rejecting Elizabeth as a sexual partner and child bearer – her primary function as a woman and destiny since arriving with the Frankenstein family – 'a union' was always intended. So, she spends the years of Victor's absence awaiting his return so she can fulfill her purpose.

As a result, she pays with the burden of an intense longing and sexual deprivation, 'tortured' by 'anxious suspense'. This process has clearly been

taxing as Victor notices her ' temper...continually gave place to distraction and reverie' when he finally returns to her. Shelley uses the nouns ' distraction' and ' reverie' to denote a dreamy aimlessness or emptiness that quite contrasts her former ' radiance' and ' concentrated disposition'. Time has altered her – years of wandering anticipation trapped in the domestic sphere have drained her of her vitality. Here, Shelley is making a comment on the shunning of women in society: unable to reproduce, Elizabeth is useless and she suffers for it. This is the ultimate payment she makes, possibly even more significant than her death when Victor's selfish interpretation of the creature's threat: ' I will be with you on your wedding night!' leaves her vulnerable to the vengeful malice of creature as he lashes out against the neglect he has been subjected to thanks to Victor. To conclude, I very much agree with this statement.

Shelley has presented Victor Frankenstein as a fundamentally arrogant character, and his key crime (from this perspective) of usurping the female is inherently arrogant. Although female characters are given only minor roles in Frankenstein reflecting the compromised position of women in society at the time; they are fundamental in the demonstration of this key message. Restricted and vulnerable, they are the victims of Victor's arrogance just as women were victims of the arrogance of patriarchy in Shelley's time.