

Frankenstein stereotypical gender analysis

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Can gender stereotypes and assumptions be incorporated into literary characters? In Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, published at first anonymously in London 1818, they are. The book tells the story of an alchemist named Victor Frankenstein and the monster he created while dabbling in occult sciences and natural philosophy. Additionally, it focuses on the interior life of Victor's creation after his birth. Throughout the novel, Shelley depicts stereotypical gender roles through Victor, the monster, and other characters.

A place stereotypical gender thoughts can be seen is in Shelley's portrayal of women. As the book plays out, the women are seen as weak individuals that depend on males. They are described as generous, selfless, and almost described to be saintly. Many of them are also perfect maternal figures, as many women were expected to be during that time. But, the women in this novel, although considered pure beings in the eyes of the men, are also continuously suffering for the actions and/or mistakes of men.

The first woman we encounter in *Frankenstein* that also shows gender stereotypes is Elizabeth Lavenza. She is described by Victor as a perfect individual but also as a thing that can be owned as she, early on, is betrothed to him by his/their parents. Frankenstein sees her as heaven-sent (Shelley, 20) and unflawed. Even when she was a small child, he describes her as, "...a creature who seemed to shed radiance from her looks and whose form and motions were lighter than the chamois of hills, (20) in saying this, Victor is equating beauty with goodness. Shelley shows Elizabeth possessing maternal traits too, as quickly after Caroline passes away Elizabeth steps in and assumes the maternal figure in the household.

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She begins to take on the various responsibilities Caroline once had, for instance caring for the children. Later in the story, Elizabeth suffers and dies because of Victor's naivete and selfishness when he repeatedly believes that the monster he created is coming to get him as revenge even though there is a clear pattern in where the monster is targeting his next victim. The monster is following the pattern of hurting Victor through the sufferings of his loved ones like his brother William and Justine. If Victor had looked beyond himself, at the bigger picture, he could have noticed from the previous occurrences that Elizabeth, his future bride, would be the bigger target than himself.

Subsequently, the almost-creation of the female monster also brings forth gender stereotypes even though she was never technically born. To start, Victor decided to create a male monster, why not a female monster first? Victor must believe that the male gender is superior to the female gender. When Victor promises the monster a female companion for the male creature to be with he accepts, but when Victor is making her he is rethinking his decision.

He says,...She who, in all probability, was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation(Shelley 144). He is afraid of the free will that the female creature will have and that there is a possibility of this creature not being able to be controlled by the male monster that he previously created. He then sees the male monster looking at him work and destroys the female out of fear and

enrages his first creation. In doing this he is showing how her creation was an easy thing to simply destroy because of his fear of a disobedient female.

Another occurrence of these stereotypes is the part telling the story of Justine. We are told that she is this selfless caring woman that has formed a strong relationship with the Frankenstein family after they take her in when her mother passes away. She is loved by Victor's family as she has been with them since she was 12 and grew up with Victor. Although during her time with him and his family she acted as a servant they held her with equal respect and never treated her like she was below them. But although she was so loved by Victor she too suffered because of his actions.

Justine is accused of murder, the murder of William Frankenstein a boy whom she cared greatly for, and is found guilty and executed as a result of Victor's selfishness and the creature's want for revenge. The creature wanted revenge on women because he could not find love or companionship of a female because they are too frightened by his appearance. He also desperately wanted Victor's love but is constantly denied it so if he cannot have his love, he wants his hate.

This leads him to plant framing evidence on Justine after he strangles William. The way Victor affects her is that he withholds critical information about his younger brother's murder's identity. Instead of telling people that it was not Justine who killed William, but the monster he created and let roam free, he keeps quiet and lets Justine die from a murder she did not commit. He acts selfishly in fear of being socially ruined. He is afraid of what

the town's people will think if he tells the truth so he stands by as Justine is executed instead of saving her.

In Shelley's work, there are many clear examples of gender stereotypes. Throughout Frankenstein, every single female character is shown as a minor character supporting the story of a male. The way Shelley depicts each of the females present in this novel aligns with the roles that women are stereotypically expected to play. Elizabeth's, the female creature's, and Justine's deaths caused by male narcissism all go to further point out these type assumptions commonly found in Shelley's time.