

Good example of literature review on the dangers of man playing god

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley was first published in 1818 . It was updated and published again in 1831. It is the story of a genius who tried to create life and suffered as he had brought to life evil in the world.

It is a typical gothic novel that gained popularity during the 1800s. The period was referred to as the age of enlightenment or the age of reason. It was the time when many great philosophers arose. The period came after the Renaissance and the Reformation. There was greater freedom for philosophers to write about anything and even to freely condemn the Catholic Church. The middle Ages—or the Age of Faith—had become a distant past. Legends and mythical stories abounded about that earlier age and seem to have become stuff of the gothic genre. The wars, crusades and the Inquisition had brought about many tales of terror.

During Shelley's time (the age of reason), faith and many teachings and historical actions of the Church had been abandoned and questioned. Many Medieval structures continue to exist and be used. However, they have lost their meaning and significance. Gothic cathedrals and massive Romanesque castles have become enigmas. Their significance or importance was no longer relevant. Apparently, only the dark history of these edifices remains in memory.

Gothic literature of the period seems to be remarkably alike. They are set in gothic mansions or castles inaccessible to the world outside. They are set in locations beyond the authors' countries. Frankenstein's setting moves from the North Pole to Switzerland, travelling through France to England. These countries at that time were lands of mystery for the ordinary people or

readers of England. These are countries where a lot of castles, gothic churches and thick forests continue to exist. Interestingly, these are the same places where other novels—like *Dracula*—are also set. Even the use of letters or diaries in the narration of story is similar. Writing letters and diaries was fashionable at that time.

The age of reason also spawned the industrial revolution. It revolution was a period of rapid growth in the world led by England. The automation of many manufacturing processes has made many products readily available to every man. It has also made production of many necessities—textiles and garments—much faster. While many poor may have been exploited during the period, it also allowed many to increase their wealth. It opened opportunities to practically anyone to become rich.

The growth and development during this period was testament to man's ability and genius. It made man think that he could accomplish almost anything. In a world where faith has been abandoned in favor of reason and man, this could be a dangerous proposition. *Frankenstein* revolves on this theme. Man can do anything, even resurrect the dead and create new life. In spite of all the amenities and modernity, life seems to be difficult during the period. Compared to today, many comforts and conveniences were not available as they inexistent during those times. Even the rich—like Victor and Elizabeth in the novel, and like Shelley and her husband—would have to undergo many discomforts.

Shelley claims to have thought of the story in a dream when she wrote the first edition of the novel during a trip to Switzerland. Shelley had to endure suffering similar to those of characters in the story. She suffered

miscarriages and she was also ostracized for having an affair with a married man, Percy Bysshe Shelley, whom she would eventually marry. She thus understands the grief and loneliness of losing loved ones, of being abandoned.

While Shelley claims in the preface that the story was not based on her life but rather on her dreams, the novel nevertheless draws many parallels with her own experiences. She knew about how rough sea travel could be as she had experienced this herself on a trip to Italy. There were no electricity and no motor vehicles during her time. She knew how dark and scary travelling from England by sea to France and by carriage from France to Switzerland would be like. She would describe the sites on the road in the novel. The forests were thick and mostly dark and can be very sinister at nighttime. The blissful scenes of Victor and Elizabeth in Geneva are also similar to those of Mary and Percy in the same place.

True to the label of the time, there seems to be great liberality during the time. The novel itself is proof. It is a book that would not have been written—by a woman at that—in a more restrictive period.

The novel seems to be in a way commentary on man's situation of Shelley's modern times. In a way, it is a sad commentary on man's situation today. As a result of advances in sciences and wealth, man has turned further and further away from God. Reason and intellect are the same as truth in the age of faith. Since man possesses that power of intellect and reason, he has believed himself to be at the same level as God and is thus capable of creation.

Shelley seems to have used the subtitle *The Modern Prometheus* to convey

the idea that man could not equal the power of God. In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a Titan who tried to be like Zeus. He gave man certain powers or characteristics—like being able to stand upright—similar to those of Gods. He loved his created man more than the Gods of Olympia. He was eventually punished for his crimes. Man was similarly punished. Evil in the world was unleashed through a gift to Pandora.

Frankenstein was the Prometheus in Shelley's story. Unlike in the Prometheus story where evil was unleashed by the gods on the Titan's creation, Frankenstein's creation turned out to be evil in itself. "The monster has the perception and desire of goodness, but, by the circumstances of his abnormal existence, is delivered over to evil."

In older times, man might have found solace in his faith or in God. In the modern times of Shelley, man seems to find solace in his existence which he experiences in nature and his pleasant surroundings. When he cannot find happiness in his existence, his only escape is through death. Surprisingly, these were thoughts expressed by the monster as he read through the books in his encounters with De Lacey and in reading the books in the man's cottage. "Some years ago, when the images which this world affords first opened upon me I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation." This one moment in the novel that showed some glint of hope or goodness in the monster. The lamentation is not only for the monster. Apparently, it is also for Frankenstein himself, especially after the loss of his loved ones and the innocent have suffered for other's faults. "Polluted by crimes, and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?"

The novel seems to bemoan the period's lack of respect for religion or

prejudice against other religions. De Lacey and his were jailed for crimes they did not commit. Rather, the imprisonment was a judgment of their religion. “ it was judged that his religion and wealth rather than the crime alleged against him had been the cause of his condemnation.” The statement pertained to Islam. It seemed however to be referring to any religion given that the period was the age of enlightenment or reason. Without God or faith, man becomes lost and suffers. Life can become pointless for him. As Brother Jonathan, O. S. B. says—in the article, “ Mother Frankenstein: Thoughts on Mary Shelley’s Creation”, provided in 2013 publication of the 1818 edition of the novel, “ And maybe, just maybe, Shelley touches the child that cries helplessly in the darkness of our soul, feeling unloved, abandoned, forgotten, like Frankenstein’s child, left to fight a hateful world alone.” This is the situation that modern man finds himself in: Abandoned. From the point of view of faith, it is not God that has abandoned man. Rather, man because of his pride and belief in himself, is the one who has abandoned God and has thus become lost. Prometheus was punished by the gods of Greek mythology for his crimes. In the same way, Victor Frankenstein and his creation had to suffer for the crimes they had committed.

The closing imagery at the end of the novel captures this cold feeling of being abandonment and of being lost. “ He sprang from the cabin window as he said this, upon the ice raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.”

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