

Macbeth and frankenstein: compare and contrast essay

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



In 1818, Mary Shelley published her most famous novel – Frankenstein, which became incredibly popular, and which is often thought to have spawned the whole genre of Science Fiction in literature. It has been praised for its originality and appeals to wide audiences while at the same time having great artistic value.

On the other hand, Macbeth is a play written by William Shakespeare around the year 1605. Apart from their popularity and fame, at first glance, one would have trouble finding any similarities between the two works.

Frankenstein is a science-fiction novel written in the Gothic tradition in the 19th century, while Macbeth is a classic play written in the Elizabethan period by William Shakespeare.

However, on a closer look, it is easy to see how these two works are very similar when it comes to the overall message and idea. This is particularly evident when we compare the character of Macbeth with that of Frankenstein's monster in terms of their tragic flaws. The transformations that corrupted Frankenstein's creature and Macbeth are both triggered by envy, making these two characters analogous.

First off, it is important to realize how Frankenstein's monster and Macbeth were not corrupted from the beginning, but rather that the corruption was something that happened to them. The first impression the characters give is not that of someone who can easily become corrupted.

In the being of the play, we assume that Macbeth is akin to the king, a loyal soldier, and a person “ full of the milk of human kindness.” We expect nothing evil from Macbeth until the witches approach him for the first time.

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His hunger for power increased after realizing that becoming a king is an open possibility. Frankenstein's creature, on the other hand, used to be " kinder, more loving, and more poetic than his creator (Bissonette 110).

All that Frankenstein's creature ever wanted was to be accepted by humans. He helped the family in the cottage to do the chores. He learned the language and the way in which humans interact so he could have a chance of acceptance. They both fell into evil because of their desire. Their tragic flaw was that their desire was stronger than their morals. Both of these characters started out as innocent beings but then turned into beasts.

A beast is depicted as a cruel, filthy, inhuman creature. Macbeth and Frankenstein are great examples of beasts. Macbeth shows no emotion towards the things that should matter to him. When Lady Macbeth committed suicide, Macbeth only uttered the following words, " She should have died hereafter; / there would have been a time for such a word." (Shakespeare 5. 5. 18).

The realization that his wife is dead did not affect him on the emotional level. His killing spree caused him to become heartless and inhuman. Macbeth changed from a person " full of milk and human kindness" into a person for whom " death has no meaning (Waith 66)" Macbeth was willing to kill his friends and slaughter a whole family to get what he wants.

We can clearly see that Macbeth is really a symbol of a Machiavellian character in the world of literature when Eugene Waith (64) says, " His mental torments grows out of the conflict between the narrow concept of

man as the courageous male and the more inclusive concept of man as a being whose moral nature distinguishes him from the beast” While Macbeth became a beast, Frankenstein’s creature really was a beast, at least in the physical sense. His physical appearance is nothing like the human body. As Kate Ellis puts it:

Had Victor not been so furtive about his desire to astound the world, he might have allowed himself time to make a creation his own size, one who mirrored the whole of him, not just the part of himself he cannot bring home. Nobody would accept him. He is just a beast in everyone’s eyes. Robert Walton could not recognize the sight he saw “ a being that had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature” (Shelly 13)(Ellis)

However, when he saw Victor Frankenstein, he immediately recognized him as a human and pulled him aboard to help him. Frankenstein’s creature, similarly to Macbeth, became a beast on the inside, too. Frankenstein’s creature murdered everyone who mattered to Victor, and he did anything he could to get revenge on his creator.

These characters are good examples of beasts, but, again, they were not beasts from the start; it is rather that their personalities contained tragic flaws, which lead them to become ones. The difference, as I see it, is only in that Macbeth’s flaw was within himself, but Frankenstein’s creature became a beast out of the feeling of rejection and despair.

Both of these characters are creations for someone else’s benefit. Macbeth was happy with the power and the rank he already had, but people incited

him to think differently. It all started when the weird sister told Macbeth of a prophecy of becoming king.

Without the weird sister, Macbeth would not have thought about killing Duncan. Lady Macbeth persuaded Macbeth to assassinate the king for her own benefits. The only way for her to gain power was to use Macbeth's advancement and gain more power as he becomes more and more influential.

Things changed once the first murder happened. Macbeth became a new person, a person who can kill anyone that stands in his way, even friends and family. It is as Bernance Kliman says, " her [lady Macbeth's] actual power over Macbeth, now that the murder has been committed is diminishing" (Kliman 73). This is because, after that, Macbeth's ethical views change, and he himself becomes thirsty for blood and power.

Frankenstein's creature is a creation of Victor Frankenstein for a reason, which is also, in a way, related to power. Victor Frankenstein created the creature for fame, fortune, and to be recognized as the father of a branch science. Victor Frankenstein is " trying to play God or usurp divine power in order to get fame" (Baldick 43). At the point when he succeeded in creating life, we become " confronted immediately by the displacement of God and woman from the acts of conception and birth" (Ellis).

The realization that humans are able to create life causes an immense feeling of power and self-sufficiency. Victor Frankenstein never thought about what the consequences of creating life would be. He rushed into it and

did not even realize what his creation could be like until it actually came to life. “ Victor doesn’t value the life he is to create so much as what the creation will give him (Lunsford 175)”.

If he had actually looked at what he was creating, instead of thinking only about the fame that the creation would give him, maybe he would have thought about it a little more. Once the creature came to life, he fled because the creature’s appearance was too monstrous and scary. “ Victor’s worst sin is not the creation, but his refusal to take responsibility for it. It is as though God had withdrawn from his creation (Ellis)”.

It is true that knowledge is power and power corrupts, and Macbeth and Frankenstein’s creature are two pieces of evidence for that claim. Knowing that he can become a king caused Macbeth to become a monster. Knowing something that should not be learned corrupts the mind, “ knowledge is shown to be double-edged, it has benefits and hazards.” Since Macbeth knows that becoming a king is not an impossible task, he starts to strive for it.

An example of this is when he says, “ Stars hide your fires, let not light see my black and deep desires” (Shakespeare 1. 4). Frankenstein’s creature, on the other hand, is quite different. If Victor Frankenstein had not had the knowledge or the motivation to create life, the monster would not have been made in the first place. Victor is an example of how having the wrong kind of knowledge can cause evil.

In other words, the knowledge itself is not valued neutral – there are simply facts about the world that are dangerous to know. Another way in which knowledge corrupted Frankenstein’s creature is the fact that he learned his true identity. Frankenstein’s creature believed that he resembles Adam in the sense that both of them have no knowledge. He realized that he is not like Adam and that he is more like Satan because Adam is a creation of God, and he ate the fruit of knowledge.

When he learned more about the lost paradise, he realized that he is very similar to Satan because Satan is a fallen angel. Realizing that he is not like one of the characters in Paradise Lost, lead him to conclude that he is a monster. This was when he decided to take revenge on Victor Frankenstein and kill everyone close to him. It is as Chris Baldick (54) says, “ The condition of solitude cannot be cured, only sharpened, by knowledge.”

Both of these characters are victims of their own culture. The time setting of the story in Macbeth is in medieval times. During that time, status was the most important thing. Macbeth’s culture contributed to his desire for power and advancement through the ranks. Lady Macbeth urged Macbeth to kill Duncan and become a king because, at that time, people would do anything to rise in status and create a better future for themselves and their heirs.

Frankenstein’s creature is a victim of his culture, too. It is society that rejected him so he is, then, only a metaphor of a monster. Frankenstein’s creature is not really a monster. It is just that people see him as one.

Frankenstein’s creature is actually a caring and loving person. He just needs to be accepted and not judged by his appearance.

The aspect of the supernatural is common to both characters. Macbeth caused supernatural occurrences when he killed Duncan. The play, as a whole, deals with the supernatural to a great extent.

The weird sisters cast spells, hover through the fog of filthy air, and even set a prophecy. Once Macbeth killed Duncan, everything just started to become supernatural. An example of this is when an owl killed a falcon, “ A falcon, towering in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed” (Shakespeare 2. 4) and when horses started eating each other.

Another supernatural occurrence is when Macbeth is haunted by Banquo’s ghost and the scene when Macbeth sees the future kings. Frankenstein’s creature is, in a way, supernatural too because it is very disputable whether humans will ever become so knowledgeable as to create life. The creation of Frankenstein’s creature defies God and life. The creature is supernatural because he is made out of other people’s body parts.

Macbeth and Frankenstein’s monster are quite different, as well. Macbeth is more vicious and proud. Macbeth cold-bloodedly “ cut [Duncan] from the nave to th’ chops, and fixed his head upon the battlement (Shakespeare 1. 2. 21)” Macbeth had no emotion. When Lady Macbeth died, he did not care and only said that she would have died anyway. Even though Macbeth knew he was going to die, he still fought till his death, “ at least we will die with the harness on our back (Shakespeare 5. 6. 50).”

He knew his death is inevitable because the forest began to move, and he met someone that was not born of a woman – Macduff. Macbeth never

regretted what he had done, but Frankenstein's creature did. The creature is ashamed of the fact that he became a murderer. Unlike Macbeth, when Frankenstein's creature noticed that Victor died, he was miserable and could not come to terms with what he had done. Victor Frankenstein was the only person that the creature could talk to and his only chance for acceptance.

Finally, there is one crucial difference that has to be mentioned, and that is the fact that Macbeth had a lot more control over his destiny and should, therefore, be thought of as responsible for his downfall much more than Frankenstein's creature. In the case of Frankenstein's creature, we can clearly identify several points at which other people determined his destiny.

The first point was when Victor created him without much consideration about the consequences. The second major point was when the family with which he spent time also rejected him for fear of being themselves rejected by the community. It is only after these two events took place that we could say that the creature should not have exerted such an act of terrible revenge upon his creator.

On the other hand, in the case of Macbeth, we did identify two external contributors to his downfall (his wife and the cultural setting), but it is clear that he was in a much better position than Frankenstein's monster. What he simply needed to do was to reject any ideas of committing immoral acts for the sake of gaining power. Therefore, it is natural to conclude that more blame should be placed on Macbeth because he clearly had more of choice.

In conclusion, although it might appear that there is no basis for comparing Frankenstein's creature and Macbeth, it seems that they are fundamentally similar in a number of ways, but they also have quite a few differences. I have pointed out that neither of them was corrupted from the start, and that corruption was rather something that happened to them.

In addition, it might be argued that the cause of their downfall was at least to an extent external to them, although this claim is much stronger in the case of Frankenstein's monster. Furthermore, the search for knowledge and power also played an important role in the downfalls of both of them, the only difference being that in the case of the monster, the terrible consequences came as a result of somebody else's search for knowledge.

The basic difference, which I would point out, is that it seems that Macbeth had more control over his destiny and thus had more responsibility for his downfall, while Frankenstein's monster was, in fact, a result of a series of unfortunate events, and other people's errors.

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