

# Science and god in frankenstein



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What is science? In the nineteenth century many believed it was attempting to play God. During this era new scientific discoveries in Europe were immense, and controversy over them was extreme. Not only did this new movement challenge the principles of Christianity but the belief in God. “ Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein through Victor Frankenstein’s perilous journey shows the destruction behind man’s thirst for scientific knowledge and the ethical reasons as to why man should not play God (cite).”

Victor Frankenstein attempts to go beyond human bounds and undertake in the greatest mistake of his life. “ Victor’s experiment created in the name of science holds the key to which Victor believes is his future success (cite).” “ The Accomplishment of his toils” is described as a wretched male figure formed from the corpses of others (Frankenstein, 34). Through his efforts, Frankenstein brings this figure to life, and his desire to succeed and discover impel him to play God. “ It was the secrets of heaven and earth that [he] desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied [him]” (22) (cite.) However, Frankenstein is so deeply captivated with bringing about life that he fails to recognize the moral affects the creature will have on society, and most importantly that there could possibly be an explanation we can’t create life unnaturally or be immortal. After the completion of his experiment, Frankenstein begins to recognize some of the consequences when he states, “ how can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pain and care I had endeavoured to form?”(34) (cite).

Is it not irresponsible and foolish to create life from death, while what is alive is not fully comprehended? When Frankenstein saw his creation and admitted his dissatisfaction, some may ask why he would create such a monster knowing it would definitely not fit into society. The clear explanation would be he fears his own death, thus trying to obtain the knowledge of life to prevent it. " Frankenstein's scientific pursuit is for his selfish means, not for the betterment of society." Frankenstein remarks by saying, " The labours of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind" (34). " The novel goes on to prove this could be no farther from the truth. By simply addressing the issue that some scientists may be ' erroneously directed', Frankenstein shows he is considering the ulterior motives of his plans. He is recognizing that his motives may not be for the ' advantage of mankind', and that this would be simply a bi-product of his creation." Frankenstein also fails to realize what society would think of his creature and how the creature would be affected by the general public. The creature is sent out into the world with the temperament of man, but entirely lacking the guidance and nurturing that all creatures need. This role playing of God is not what man was intended for, and children are made of a sperm and egg, not the hands of man. Who could handle the responsibility of controlling life? Only a Divine Power could control such an intricate process, and is a responsibility no person could endure.

Victor takes many simple things for granted in his life, which are symbolized through the monster. " I am alone and miserable: man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to

me" (129). All the monster requests is someone to share his life with, to live happily, and be loved; and through these pleasures the monster witnesses happiness. Victor's scientific pursuit interferes with his life and ruins his happiness. He loses the desire for companionship because of his endeavors, and though Elizabeth longs for his return, he is too engaged in his work. Frankenstein has an opportunity to be happy, but the monster is never given the chance. " This presents Shelley's argument that when you allow things such as science to get in the way of your true needs, such as love, you will not live a life worth living. Frankenstein and his monster are both miserable because they both live their life without love." He solved the most incomprehensible question, he reached the peak of scientific understanding, he accomplished his goals, yet he is miserable. " For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (42). Shelley purposely lets Frankenstein accomplish his goal, but she makes a point that if the scientific knowledge of life can't bring happiness then no scientific knowledge can.

Victor is so infatuated with completing his task and achieving fame that he fails to realize the lasting affects or consequences of his breakthrough. Shelley makes a valid argument that in many ways, we would all be better off without complex scientific thought: " Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town

to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (38).

Victor advises Walton by declaring, " Seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries" (200). This passage evidently discusses Victor's selfishness in fulfilling his objective. Shelley argues that scientists who are only seeking fame and fortune do not consider the long term effects and will be considered notorious.