

Popular Interpretations of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be seen as a metaphor for:

Patriarchy: Shelley is saying that the way in which people become "monsters" is closely tied to the role of men in families. She portrays Frankenstein as the typical male, and shows how he abandons his "child," which causes him to become a monster. Some passages in which the analogy is made include:

-The moment during the monster's creation where Frankenstein, commenting on his new, soon-to-be-created monster says "how much more then, will this new race owe me than any child owes its father."

-At the creature's awakening, it shows many infantile traits, including yellow skin (jaundice), lack of speech, awkward movements, etc.

-The creature must learn from the old man and his family in the woodland cottage, just as a child learns. He learns to read, write, and speak by observing their lives. This is also where he learns about families.

-When the creature meets up with Frankenstein in the woods, he tells him that he has learned that Frankenstein was his creator, and blames him for his misery. This is the first time that the monster refers to Frankenstein as "Father."

Enlightenment: In this interpretation, Frankenstein himself represents the enlightenment. Shelley is trying to say that the spirit of scientific "progress" and the "education" of the colonized people are overstepping the bounds of science. Frankenstein's irresponsible use of his scientific knowledge is representative of the dynamic she sees in a rapidly modernizing Europe.

-Frankenstein accomplishes a nightmarish task in the name of science.

-He thinks that just because he has certain knowledge (the knowledge to create life), he must apply it without considering the consequences. This is like the colonists believing that their knowledge is better than that of the people they conquer.

-Frankenstein then refuses to create a companion for the monster, because he thinks that he knows what is best. Compare this to the colonial powers having no mercy for the traditions and beliefs of indigenous people.

French Revolution: While Mary Shelley seems to support the cause of the proletariat (the creature), she also makes the claim that the uneducated masses lacked the ability to rule themselves.

-Frankenstein, representing the upper class, is shown to be very knowledgeable, though mistreats the creature (much as the educated nobility oppressed the working class).

-We sympathize with the creature, and we want him to improve his situation, but instead he becomes vengeful and turns to violence.

-Mary Shelley seems to be saying that she supports the cause of the proletariat, but does not endorse the violence with which the revolution came about.

-She seems to indicate that the massive bloodshed could have been avoided by providing the working class citizens with the means to improve their own situation responsibly.