



# Frankenstein: A Feminist Approach and Gender Studies

Ann Pathania

Shoolini University, Himachal Pradesh, India

Received: 30 Apr 2025; Received in revised form: 23 May 2025; Accepted: 01 Jun 2025; Available online: 07 Jun 2025  
©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* explores the themes of femininity and masculinity. The novel has captivated readers with its unique examination of the human condition, scientific ambition, and the consequences of unchecked masculinity. Using feminist and gender studies perspectives, this interpretation analyses how Shelley represents dualities and demonstrates how her education through social norms and family relationships surrounded her with gender roles. Shelley's tumultuous romance with the renowned romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and their unconventional marriage not only profoundly influenced his perspective on the world but also served as inspiration for his works. However, there was a persistent belief that the conflicts in their marriage fuelled his appreciation for the masculine power and scientific arrogance that were characteristic of Romanticism. The character of Frankenstein, embodied by Victor Frankenstein, serves as a focal point for Mary Shelley's critique of the overwhelming power of masculinity, which comes at the expense of human lives and leads to profound loneliness. This loneliness stems from the neglect of familial responsibilities. Shelley's admiration for her mother's feminist writings, alongside her complicated feelings toward her father, William Godwin, significantly influenced the development of themes such as parental abandonment and the longing for maternal affection in her novel, *Frankenstein*. The loss of her mother and her separation from her family were significant events in Mary Shelley's life that greatly influenced her writing of the novel. In "*Frankenstein*," she examines themes of parental responsibility and the consequences of indifference. This work emphasises how Shelley's personal experiences contributed to her feminist perspective and her critique of gender issues. By re-evaluating Shelley's family influences within the framework of feminism and gender studies, this article argues that her experiences provide valuable insights into gender representation and the role of women in nineteenth-century literature. The male characters in the novel are depicted as self-serving and ambitious, while the female characters consistently demonstrate fidelity and a willingness to obey.



**Keywords**— Mary Shelley, feminist perspective, criticism, gender, *Frankenstein*, exploration, and consequences of neglect.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Frankenstein*, or *The Modern Prometheus*, by Mary Shelley, is a seminal piece of literature and an epistolary novel. In addition to its Gothic elements, it explores themes of deep humanity, ambition, and the consequences of scientific shame. *Frankenstein*, written by Shelley at the age of 18 and published anonymously in 1818, has since become a cornerstone of English literature, captivating readers with its memorable stories and thought-provoking themes. It is set in the 18th century and follows Captain Robert Walton's

imaginary communication with his sister, Margaret Walton Saville.

Failed author Robert Walton embarks on an expedition to the North Pole to advance scientific understanding. *Frankenstein* centres around the story of creation and its effects on an ambitious young scientist, Victor Frankenstein, and he revives a sentient being through an unusual scientific experiment. However, beyond the superficial story, the novel explores deeper philosophical themes, addressing questions of gender, identity, and social expectations. *Frankenstein* refers to his creation with the

terms "creature", "devil", "ghost", "demon", "arch", "thing", "am", and "ogre".

Frankenstein offers a rich field in the context of feminism and gender studies to question traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and the power dynamics characteristic of patriarchal societies.

Although written by a young woman in the early 19th century, the novel is wonderfully nuanced about gender roles and the consequences of reinforcing them. Frankenstein's creation called itself "the monster" at least once, as did the villagers who saw the creature at the end.

Shelley characterised Frankenstein's monster as a 2.4-metre-tall creature with horrifying contrasts: his limbs were proportionate, and I picked his features to be attractive. "Beautiful!" Great God!" His yellow skin barely concealed the work of the muscles and arteries beneath; her hair was glossy black and shiny; his teeth pearly white; but this extravagance only added to the horror with his teary eyes, which appeared almost the same colour as the dark white eyes that contained them, his wrinkled skin, and straight black lips. One of the most significant protagonists in the film.

Frankenstein is an unnamed creature, often referred to as the monster, whose creation is a testament to the unbridled ambition and scientific shyness of Victor Frankenstein. Although initially portrayed as a grotesque and monstrous creature, Shelley goes beyond mere physicality to provide a nuanced exploration of his inner world of feelings and desires. Shelley uses the creature's experiences and interactions with society to denounce gender expectations that are very strict, as well as the deep loneliness that is a consequence of social rejection. Furthermore, the portrayal of Victor Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, apart from other things, talks of his journey to glory through scientific knowledge, which in turn turned out to be a source of estrangement for him from his homeland. Victor got so carried away pursuing knowledge and achievement that he isolated himself from traditional notions of family responsibility and emotional connection, which in turn is an example of the harmful consequences of patriarchal masculinity. Nine add-ons to the true narrative, the setting, and Shelley's personal life encounters bring about a feminist reading of the book with complexity. William Godwin, an extreme liberal thinker and philosopher, and a pioneering feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, were the parents of Shelley. She got an early start on gender equality and justice intellectual discussions.

Even Mary Shelley's unusual relationships, for example, with Percy Bysshe Shelley, a poet of the Romantic era, support her multifaceted and profound understanding of the questions of gender and female agency in Frankenstein.

This novel is an exploration of feminism and the feminist movement from different directions. The novel more clearly deepens into certain aspects of the genders that are being discussed in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, which are masculinity, femininity, and the power dynamic from a critical lens. By analysing the interplay between character dynamics, social expectations, and Shelley's own experiences, I aim to reveal this timeless literature's deep insights into gender psychology and social norms. The death of female characters in the novel alone raises enough feminist eyebrows to question how science and development are essentially a masculine enterprise and subjugate women (Feminism India). However, the most thought-provoking feminist reading of the novel has been done by scholar Anne Mellor in her book *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, where Mellor states that Frankenstein is a feminist critique of science itself.

## II. FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE CREATURE'S GENDER IDENTITY

The creature presented by Mary Shelley undergoes a thorough examination of sexual identity in the context of social expectations. Delving into a creature's experiences and interactions can reveal profound social pressures and limitations placed on individuals based on their gender. Questions arise as to how the creature's lack of agency and autonomy reflects the limitations placed on women in Shelley's society. Furthermore, we can explore how the creature's longing for belonging and acceptance meets the struggles of those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, *Frankenstein: A Feminist Interpretation of Gender Construction*, Jackie Docka (Docka-10) explores how the monster constructs his gender identity by exploiting the flaws of his deficient masculinity.

The text Frankenstein makes an argument against cultural attitudes, but at the same time, describes them. Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein: Towards a Feminist Figure of Humanity?* Pon deals with the idea of male creation outside of female influence. He argues that the monster as a creation is strictly masculine, without the influence of femininity. (Shelly 56) Authority is, of course, Frankenstein's most prominent feminist trait. At a time when women's voices were often suppressed or undervalued, Mary Shelley's voice shattered gender stereotypes through her courage and ingenuity. Generations of women writers were inspired to write after her because her masterpiece proved that women could succeed in a traditionally male-dominated field of literature. Most of the main characters in Frankenstein are indeed men. However, the women present are of different characters, and each acts independently and effectively in a

certain way. Victor Frankenstein's adopted sister, Elizabeth, defies gender norms, embodying both kindness and strength.

The female Monster, on the other hand, poses concerns about female identity, the importance of patriarchal rejection, and judgment. The monster is exposed to gender norms because of his education through pilfered literature. He watches the De Lacey family, seeing in particular Agatha's nurturing role and Alphonse's patriarchal dominance. To reconcile both roles, he picks up a language and communicates his need for company, reflecting a typically feminine need for belonging. But he cannot truly embody this femininity because of his hideous physique, underscoring how gender is socially constructed. His makeover into a villain was a consequence of the social rejection that bothered him most. The violent behaviour of the De Lacey family that the creature observes, and which is inherent in society in general, can also be termed a distorted representation of this violence. *Frankenstein: A Feminist Interpretation of Gender Construction*, Jackie Docka. (Docka-9) William and Justine's deaths are a good example of the dangers of male power, which occurs in situations where the individual is alone and not accepted by society. It is also an act of giving the creatures a chance for a harmonious life and the denial of the feminine aspect. This act is what maintains patriarchal control of creation and shuts down the creature's ability to defy social expectations. Feminist critique can discern a being's gender, a complex and multifaceted aspect of its personality. The narrative applies male pronouns to the creature yet does not define or confine its gender identity to traditional gender dichotomies. Instead, the creature's path and interactions ask questions of how gender is constructed, what society demands, and what it is to be a woman in a patriarchal society. Exploring the origin of the creature and later interactions with human society is one approach to embark on feminist research on the sexual identity of the creature. With ambition and scientific knowledge, the creature's originator, Victor Frankenstein, creates it through artificial means and not natural reproduction.

This innovation contradicts old-fashioned perceptions by being outside the pre-defined gender roles and expectations of both gender identification and reproduction. Victor's rejection of the monster not only reflects society's attitude towards marginalised genders but also portrays the patriarchal society's rejection of creation and motherhood. The creature is torn between his own identity and self as it tries to understand the world. The creature acquires a sense of sex through the observation of interpersonal relationships and social conventions without being taught or socialised. The necessity of human contact and social interaction is the most powerful driving force associated with gender norm

issues and the feeling of being accepted by a group. The social exclusion that he is enduring, which is caused by his behaviour and looks, becomes proof of how deeply-rooted gender prejudices and biases function, especially towards those who are non-conforming in terms of traditional femininity or masculinity. Secondly, this shows that Victor's creature indeed is a wish, as the partner expresses the want to be close to them, the very concepts of which are typically the same as those by societal norms and expectations of the genders in the traditional system. The being, in having a wife, is undoubtedly in violation of the concept that a person's gender is something predetermined or set in stone, and the acknowledgement of their individuality and desires is profoundly given.

While making it crystal clear that he was shutting the creature's plea down, Victor describes the power dynamics and control in sexual conversations, comparing it to how the patriarchal institutions keep in check the prevailing gender and desire. The creature's use of language also makes gender detection even more complicated. The creature's process of self-expression through the inability to communicate its feelings and thoughts is comparable to the process of struggle that marginalised genders undertake in speaking and assuming identity in a patriarchal discourse and language-based society. While doing this, the monster has not only been talking and understanding the social norm but also has been questioning the binary construction of gender as a whole. A feminist interpretation concerning the gender identity of Frankenstein's monster is essential to better understand the hidden aspects of that complex relation among power, social expectation, and gender construction. By creating, refusing, feeling attracted to, or recognising and developing themselves through masculinity, feminine identities are shown as produced, resisted, desired, and redefined by the monster, which can also mean the patriarchal society. Through the character of the creature from a feminist perspective, we can understand the relationship of gender, power, and empowerment, which are interwoven.

It forces us to reevaluate our notions of gender identity and expression. This section from Mary Shelley's clever *Frankenstein*, said by the creature made by Frankenstein, catches the creature's serious dejection and need for human association. The creature addresses his maker, Victor Frankenstein, straightforwardly. This exhibits his conviction that Victor, the person who resurrected him, owes it to him to give him a companion. Despite their strained relationship, it likewise features its need for its maker. This is the fundamental contention made by the beast. He yearns for a companion, yet more than that, he needs somebody who can connect with and understand him.

Out. The expression "trade of feelings" indicates a psychological and close personal contact that is equal.

The beast feels that these "feelings" are important to his endurance. Society has disregarded the beast because of its revolting looks. He has never known acknowledgement, friendship, or love. His emotional well-being has endured because of this withdrawal. The creature yearns for somebody who can look past his visible presentation and grasp the sentiments and thoughts that dwell inside. He longs to be with somebody who comprehends what being an outsider is like. He figures that kinship will assist him in avoiding disdain and brutality. He trusts that the key to being a good individual might lie in affection. The creature's solicitation for a female buddy is an impression of the major human requirement for closeness and friendship.

He wants something to be remembered that is essential to the human condition. Significantly, the monster's or creature's craving presents troublesome moral difficulties. Is it conceivable to produce adoration? Is the creature right to demand an accomplice? Shelley gives the reader time to think about these focuses. The creature's comment successfully conveys his requirement for acknowledgement, understanding, and association. It underscores how fundamental compassion and social cooperation are to the human experience — needs that the creature, regardless of its engineered starting points, intensely seeks.

It is crucial to remember that the creature's desire presents difficult moral dilemmas. Is it possible to generate love? Is the creature correct to insist on having a partner? Yes, the creature in *Frankenstein* presents charming moral problems that relate to women's activist ideas. The creature yearns for a female accomplice just like himself; the beast sees his female accomplice as a manufacturer. This is demonstrative of a man-centric perspective in which ladies are seen as men's assets or expansions.

This thought is challenged by the women's activist hypothesis, which upholds ladies' organisation and independence. It is conceivable that the creature is incidentally reflecting the social standard that sees ladies as men's "helpers" or friends when they explicitly request a female. This ordinary information is not acceptable for the feminist movement anymore. The women's liberation movement calls for the development of organisations based on respect and equality. Is it okay that the monster gets a partner? Feminists believe that everybody is deserving of empathy and a chance to form human relationships. His murderous inclinations spring from the monster's low spirits. Maybe a friend could give him the recognition and support that he yearns for, avoiding negative activities. The right to independence and decision over one's body is a

basic women's activist perspective. Did the female creature have freedom of thought when she was made? Do you think that the female had free will and was conscious of what was being done to her? Could she have the option to pick whether she lived and whether she reinforced with the creature? The fragmented female being is obliterated by Victor, denying her independence. The creature's restricted perceptions of associations influence his concept of fellowship. He notices Safie and Felix's tender association, yet it is not evident on the off chance that he understands the nuances of relational communications, like orientation roles and assumptions.

Orientation jobs are twofold, and women's activist reasoning backs rising above them. Perhaps all the creature needs is a companion who, whatever their orientation, goes through what he does. This raises the question of whether companionship can endure social designs. Victor has incredible command over the beast since he is the creature's maker. The power differences in the public eye, where men often marginalise women, were reflected in this unique manner. This is censured by the women's activist hypothesis, which requires the obliteration of these sorts of frameworks.

Considering that Victor gave the animal life, one might argue that he has an ethical constraint to watch out for his requirements. In any case, making one more creature without that being's permission is untrustworthy. Regard for the two creatures and legitimate correspondence would be fundamental parts of an answer. However, the creature's requirement for an accomplice raises doubts about acknowledged social mores, orientation jobs, and consent. Utilising a women's activist viewpoint to look at this problem, we can see how the work both reflects and challenges the power structures predominant in Shelley's day. It makes us contemplate the ethical quality of creation, the worth of sympathy, and the opportunity to fabricate profound connections — all thoughts that are appropriate to women's activist hypothesis and current culture.

I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. (Shelley 118-9) By comparing himself to Adam and the fallen holy messenger, the creature challenges conventional notions of organisation and manliness in his pursuit of individuality and identity. Through allusion to Adam, the main character in Christian mythology, the creature implies that he should have been created as a perfect, sinless person who was quite like Adam. Nevertheless, he feels more in line with Lucifer, the fallen holy angel who was sent out of paradise for disobeying God.

This rejection of the Adam original suggests upending traditional orientation tasks and presumptions, challenging



the notion that manliness is inherently noble and dominating. The creature's association with the deceased celestial messenger highlights his sense of being taken advantage of and corrupted discipline. Despite not having engaged in any negative action, he perceives himself as being driven by happiness, complete with the chaotic notion of his suffering. This is comparable to the experiences of several undervalued groups, mainly women, who are typically subjected to man-centred regulation and punishment for perceived transgressions against cultural norms.

The creature challenges Victor's authority over him and declares his independence by complying with the fallen celestial messenger. He refuses to accept that Victor created his destiny and instead attempts to define his character and predestination.

This organisational journey resonates with the themes of empowerment and self-assurance that women activists pursue, as the creature struggles to assert his independence in a world that seeks to hold and control him. The fact that the creature feels that he is abandoned for no reason and is therefore upset, which is normally the situation when people are rejected, while at the same moment, there seems to be a reduction in the size of the creature, as well as the scarcity of good social norms. One could take the angle of feminist ideas to analyse it, bringing out what attributes of gender-neutral designs show that they are responsible for the perpetuation of inequality and that they control the formation of marginalised sectors, e.g., women and non-binary people. What the creature is stating is just a case of how he has an unsuitable orientation to the job, thus refusing to be a part of someone else's organisation, his development of knowledge about the independence and organisation of humans, and his research on the revolution of male-centric management and cultural norms.

Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley, investigates the condition of being an outsider, the power of the local community, the state of the mind, and personal tragedy as the primary topics. The being, whom we usually see as a male character because of Victor's creation, is having an identity crisis and is in search of warmth and affection. One of the traditional gender roles negotiations points out the role of sympathy and the power of local communities. Through the monster's dejection and his local life, we see that disregard and detachment affect empathetic and understanding relationships in society. Another part of the novel also deals with creation and maternity, where Victor's pursuit of power and control is depicted as a negative aspect of unrestrained male authority. The monster's absence of guidance and a role model underlines the mother's influence in teaching moral decision-making. The fallen angel motif, besides,

reveals the strength of the local community and the feeling of belonging; the demon's ostracism by humanity points to the necessity of inclusion and approval. As a result, Frankenstein discusses orientation, identity, and power from a feminist and social perspective, challenging traditional role stereotypes and the need for acceptance and empathy. However, it also mirrors the negative impact of social norms and a male-orientated society. On the whole, Mary Shelley's book becomes a detailed investigation of human nature, as well as the power and identity complexities.

In conclusion, Frankenstein delves into the themes of orientation, identity, and power using a feminist and social viewpoint to tackle the issue of traditional gender roles and also to make us realise the necessity of empathy and community. Yet, the novel sketches out how regulatory norms and male-dominated hierarchies have dangerous consequences. On the whole, Mary Shelley's book gives us an insightful look into human behaviour and the intricate issues of power and identity.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Caria Brannstrom. An Analysis of the Theme of Alienation in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. (2006, 25 pages).
- [2] Cynthia Pon. "Passages" in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein Toward a Feminist Figure of Humanity. Vol. 30, No. 2 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 33-50, (18 pages).
- [3] Colgan, Siobhan. Frankenstein is a Feminist Masterpiece. (8th September).
- [4] Docka, Jackie. "Frankenstein: A Feminist Interpretation of Gender Construction," Augsburg Honours Review: Vol. 11, Article 1 (2018).
- [5] Lee Jin Yoon. The Monster Mother in Frankenstein – Based on the Motherhood of Victor.
- [6] Pant Parth. How Mary Shelley Critiques Patriarchy and Science in Frankenstein. (June 13, 2019).
- [7] Randel V. Fred. "Frankenstein", Feminism, and the Intertextuality of Mountains. Vol. 23, No. 4, Romantic Wholeness: William Wordsworth & Women in Romantic Writing (Winter, 1984), pp. 515-532 (18 pages)
- [8] Rourke James O "Nothing More Unnatural": Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau. Vol. 56, No. 3 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 543-569, (27 pages).
- [9] London Bette. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and the Spectacle of Masculinity. (23 October 2020).
- [10] Victor Frankenstein: neglecting his creation.