

Frankenstein as Science Fiction and Shelley's Scientific Imagination

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Introduction

Mary Shelley, the author of the novel *Frankenstein*, was a self-taught writer of the 18th century; from a very young age, she was able to write in complex niches, such as science fiction. History doesn't show any records of her formal education, yet her diaries reflected a contradictory view. Her writings were proficient enough to earn her the title of the "most well-read woman" of her era. At just the age of 17, Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, whose story revolves around an enthusiast, Victor Frankenstein. Victor's quest for determining the realities of life and conquering death turned into a legendary story, which has never been out of print since its first publication. Not only has it been published in multitudes, but it has also been portrayed on the screen many times. As the fame is being discussed, it is integral to mention that the novel has received both appreciation and critical reviews.

At a very young age, Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, one of the pioneering science fiction novels; the story revolves around Victor Frankenstein, who developed a strong interest in the life sciences and chemistry at the university, and his experimental ventures burgeoned his quest for science. He tried to unveil the reality of life in order to deceive death. His trials led him to the creation of an unrealistic creature whose powers grew out of his control. Thus, through Victor's character, the writer signified human nature's quest for control and its curiosity. And through the creature, she manifested many cultural and societal aspects.

EVALUATION

As already mentioned, the novel has gained both appreciative and critical feedback; this essay will focus on the evaluation of two critical reviews of *Frankenstein*. The [critical reviews chosen for the essay are Literary Panoramas](#) by an anonymous writer and Sherry Ginn's literary review. The critical reviews point towards strikingly distinguished limitations and points of the novel.

In the book *The Literary Panorama and National Register*, the review of *Frankenstein* has been published; the review is also openly accessible through many online resources, including *The Romantic Circle*. Though the publishers are specified, the author is veiled. Still, the review holds significant importance because it highlights the genuine concerns of the non-imaginative reader's cohort. The author of the review has criticized the novel on a factual basis and has claimed that the novel misses the puzzle pieces, and many subtle details are left to be filled solely by the reader's imagination, as the critic says:

“The work seems to have been written in great haste, and on a very crude and ill-digested plan; and the detail is, in consequence, frequently filled with the grossest and obvious inconsistencies (Literary Panorama).”

After briefly reviewing the plot of the story, the critic comes straight to the bone of contention in the plot, that is, the supernatural ability of the formed creature and the missing details about its origin. The critic highlighted the loopholes in the plot when the inanimate creature was brought to life, and it stood up, moved, and disappeared into the woods for two straight years, while the creator Frankenstein didn't do anything except sit there in wonder. The critic has also objected to the developmental progress of the creature, as the audience needed to know how he possessed inhuman attributes right after his creation.

Sherry Ginn has, however, employed an advanced psychological lens for reviewing Frankenstein. Thus, her review has two basic evaluation parameters: neuroscience and science fiction. Ginn's review differs from Literary Panorama in the sense that the writer has not found any inconsistencies in the development of the creature's faculties. Rather, Ginn has compared the developmental stages with Erik Erikson's theory of 8 developmental stages. Quoting pieces from the original extract, Ginn manifested the stages of confronting trust and autonomy, guilt, inferiority, identity, stagnation, and despair.

The writer has shown the loneliness of the creature in the text many times, which served as the basis of his demand for a mate. When the creature faced initial rejection by the creator, sentiments of mistrust were aroused; then, the escape of the creature manifested the need for independence. Later on, learning new things, struggling for survival, developing an inferiority complex due to his different physical appearance, experiencing solitude, and later seeking revenge are not only methodical but also logical. As the original text follows:

“It was a portrait of a most lovely woman. Despite my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments, I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned: I remembered that I was forever deprived of the delights (Shelly)”.

Thus, through this emotional perspective, the critic has strengthened the developmental stages of the creature by providing a theoretical psychological background. Moreover, the critic has also claimed that the writer, though in the 18th century, was well aware of the science of physiognomy, as she writes:

“The assessment of a person's character or personality from observation of their facial appearance is known as physiognomy... [Mary Shelley](#) was well aware of physiognomy and phrenology... She even evokes the horror of her Creature's facial features when Victor describes his creation (Genn)”.

As Mary Shelley writes about the creature:

“I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! —Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the

work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black and flowing, and his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but this luxuriance only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery [yellow] eyes (Shelly)".

Ginn has generously appreciated Shelley as a voracious reader and a science enthusiast herself, as without any formal education, she knew about the concept of galvanism and the stimulation of nerve impulses by the electric impulse, as she incorporates galvanism in the animation process of the creature.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, Literary Panorama did a surface-level analysis, considering the low-tech audience with minimal imaginative capability, and claimed that the writing was hasty and missing details. However, a deeper review by Ginn based on neuroscience and human psychology brought forward the accuracy of Shelley's writing and detailing, as the animation and development steps mentioned by her were consistent with the scientific theories. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that Shelley was one of the pioneers of the science fiction genre.

Work Cited

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