

## ***Frankenstein – The Female***

It was in the latter end of August that I [departed, to pass two years of exile. Elizabeth approved of the reasons of my departure, and only regretted that she had not the same opportunities of enlarging her experience, and cultivating her understanding. She wept, however, as she bade me farewell, and entreated me to return happy and tranquil. “We all,” said she, “depend upon you; and if you are miserable, what must be our feelings?”] [...]  
*Variant of Chapter 1, Vol. III (cf. p. 159)*

*Discuss the presentation of women in the novel. Do Victor and the monster differ in their view of women, and if so, how?*

Women in *Frankenstein* are generally pure, innocent, and passive. Though there are a few exceptions, such as Caroline Beaufort, who works to support her impoverished father, women are generally seen as kind but powerless. For example, Elizabeth stands up for Justine’s innocence but cannot prevent her execution. For both Victor and the monster, woman is the ultimate companion, providing comfort and acceptance. For Victor, Elizabeth proves the sole joy that can alleviate his guilty conscience; similarly, the monster seeks a female of his kind to commiserate with his awful existence. Each eventually destroys the other’s love interest, transferring woman’s status from object of desire to object of revenge; women thus are never given the opportunity to act on their own.

In the context of passive female characters, it is interesting to note that Mary Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was the author of the strongly feminist *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. One can argue that *Frankenstein* represents a rejection of the male attempt to usurp (by unnatural means) what is properly a female endeavour—birth. One can also interpret the novel as a broader rejection of the aggressive, rational, and male-dominated science of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Though it was long met with mistrust, this science increasingly shaped European society. In this light, *Frankenstein* can be seen as prioritizing traditional female domesticity with its emphasis on family and interpersonal relationships.