

Ani Gazazyan

### Feminism in Frankenstein

For centuries, women have been forced to live in the outskirts of a male dominated society. During the 1800's, Mary Shelley does an excellent job in portraying the extremely limited opportunities for women in her gothic novel, "Frankenstein." In the novel, Shelley shows how society considers women to be possessions rather than independent human beings. We also see female characters heavily relying on the male characters for support and survival, thus showing their inability of independence. Now, women are more free to follow whatever path they choose and do whatever their heart desires. Freedom for women has created a, somewhat, equal environment for both genders and allows women to pursue their dreams.

Throughout Frankenstein, we see how men treat women as more of an object and possession than an actual person. Elizabeth and Justine were the two women who were seen to be used then anything else. Elizabeth is, by far, the most mentioned female in the book and she is portrayed as a gentle character. She is victimized by Frankenstein's view of her as a possession and her role in society. Victor says, "...I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally and looked upon Elizabeth as mine – mine to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed on her I received as made to a possession of my own" (Shelley 18). Here, Victor shows possessiveness and Elizabeth shows submissiveness as she did not object to her being considered an object. On the other hand, Justine was a very unimpressive character who hardly even spoke in the story. Her passive attitude led her to be wrongfully accused of the murder of William. Before her death she says, "...but I have no power of explaining it...I am only left to conjecture concerning the probabilities by which it might have been placed in my pocket" (56). This shows

Justine in a submissive vantage point where she has no chance in living and her acceptance of her lack of power.

Secondly, we see the female characters rely heavily on men for support and survival. In the novel, society views the female characters as delicate beings that can not survive by themselves. As a result, they need a man to protect, cherish and provide for them. In fact, all of the female characters have a male character to which they depend on. After Caroline's father's death, she is unable to survive on her own and ends up marrying Alphonse. Alphonse "...came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care..." (15). This compares Alphonse to a hero and Caroline to the weak and desperate women that she is portrayed as. However, Alphonse takes care of Caroline continuing, "...as a fair exotic is sheltered by the gardener, from every rough wind" (16). This metaphor describes Caroline to be a "fair exotic" who is treated more like a possession than a capable person. By making this comparison, Mary Shelley is alluding to the idea that the female characters are as delicate as flowers and can't survive without the male characters.

Now, woman stand up for what they want and believe. Woman such as Oprah Winfrey, Sheryl Sandberg, Anne Sweeney, and even J.K Rowling have shown the world what woman are capable of. Hillary Clinton spoke of woman's right in 1995 saying, "...let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights once and for all. Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely -- and the right to be heard" (Eidenmuller 1). Compared to the 1800's, woman's rights have changed profusely and continue to change overtime.

Overall, females of this novel are seen only to provoke, encourage and strengthen the development of the male characters. Every female throughout the novel goes through the same

storyline from calm, to suffering, to eventually inevitable death. In general, female characters are used as threads to connect the lives of the male characters to one another. Caroline Beaufort, Margaret Saville and Elizabeth Lavenza were all victims of a tragic yet mind-blowing novel where all three were imagined as weak and insignificant characters. Now social media helps create a voice for those who need it, especially women. Famous celebrities are an image to the younger generations who will grow and prosper in the future and show that feminism will not stand in the way of those who fight for success.

Works Cited

- Eidenmuller, Michael E. *American Rhetoric: Hillary Rodham Clinton -- United Nations 4th World Conference Speech "Women's Rights Are Human Rights."* 2 Sept. 2017. Web.
- Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. Dover Publications, 2009. Print.