AQA English Literature GCSE

Frankenstein: Character Profile

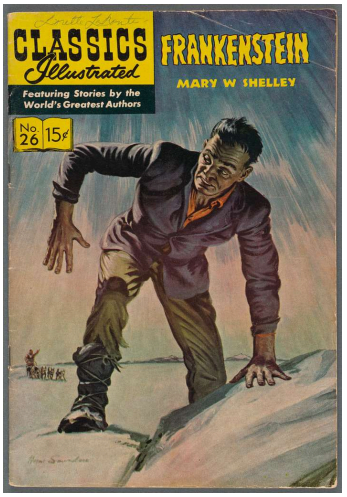
Minor Characters

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Minor Characters

Character Summary

Shelley introduces a **plethora** of **minor characters** in the novel to establish the themes of family, isolation, ambition, science and the role of women.



The Frankenstein Family

Victor's father, Alphonse reminds the reader of the importance of **family**, and helps the reader to understand how Victor's upbringing shaped his **desire for ambition** over relationships.

Similarly, Victor's little brother, William, is strangled to death by the monster. The murder of William illuminates how egregious Victor's actions are. The death of William marks the **death of innocence** and the triumph of violence.

Victor's mother, Caroline, embodies the **ideal Georgian woman**. Her self-sacrificing nature is revealed when she dies after nursing Elizabeth. Ernest, is the middle child, and is the only surviving member of the Frankenstein family at the end of the novel.

Justine is adopted into the Frankenstein family, but is blamed and executed after being wrongfully accused of William's murder. Through Justine, Shelley criticises contemporary society for **devaluing women's intellect**: in court, Justine proves to be highly eloquent and composed, but her testimony is still ignored.

The De Lacey Family



Mr De Lacey is the **patriarch** of the De Lacey family. Since he is blind, he is the only character to not judge the monster based on his appearance. Through De Lacey, Shelley taps into themes of **prejudice**. He represents **innate** human kindness and the absence of judgement.

Felix and Agatha are Mr De Lacey's children, and Safie is Felix's fiancee. Together, they help to **educate** the monster and teach him human behaviour. Through their teaching, Shelley reveals how human behaviour is learnt, not necessarily innate. Safie rebels against her father's wishes, **challenging traditional attitudes** to women.

Walton's Family

Walton's sister, Margaret Savile, is the recipient of his letters at the start of the novel and is integral to the **frame narrative**. Whilst the reader never meets her, she **symbolises** the importance of family relationships and how Walton keeps in touch with her.



Professors

Victor's chemistry professor, M. Waldman, supports Victor's interest in science, but dismisses his study of the alchemists. Likewise, Victor's professor, M. Krempe also dismisses Victor's study of the alchemists and encourages him to seek a different path. Ultimately, they were the **catalyst** for Victor's interest in science, which led to his demise.

Magistrate

Lastly, Mr Kirwin is the magistrate who investigated the murder of William. He is arguably **a symbol of justice**, demonstrating sympathy towards Victor whilst he recovers.



SCENE FROM "TRIAL BY JURY," AT THE ROYALTY THEATRE.

Key Themes

Justice and Morality

Shelley's use of the **frame narrative** structure allows the reader to view multiple perspectives in order to form a conclusion, mirroring the process of Justine's trial where evidence is evaluated in order to form a just judgement.

Nevertheless, Shelley's employment of Justine's trial also unveils the **flaws of human judgement** and the legal system. Shelley elucidates the difference between **legal** justice and **moral** justice. Victor's refusal to inform the court of his knowledge demonstrates how inaction can be equally damaging as wrongdoing.

Ultimately, Shelley portrays a society where the innocent are punished. Through the numerous tragedies of minor characters, Shelley **criticises** systems which prioritise appearances and reputation over the truth. Since Justine is female and not in a position of power, she is made to suffer.

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Female Inequality – The Ideal Woman

Justine arguably **embodies** the **archetype** of the **ideal** Georgian woman who is honest and noble. Shelley's choice of the name Justine **alludes** to ideas of **justice**. Even when under pressure in court and being wrongly accused of murder, she remains eloquent and composed, insisting ***"I hope the character I have always borne will incline my judges to a favourable interpretation".*** It is interesting that Shelley describes Justine as having ***"borne"*** her character, as if it is a burden she has had to carry with her.

Equally, ***"interpretation"*** may indicate that Justine is not truly good, but she hopes the judges will view her that way. Shelley describes character as a **performance**, elucidating how Justine is playing the role of the ideal woman in the hope she will be perceived that way. Given that the judges do not believe Justine, Shelley may be criticising the **superficial nature** of Georgian society for encouraging women to put on an act.



Victor describes his mother as ***"angelic"***. Whilst on the surface, this appears to be a positive description of Caroline, it also taps into the **Gothic tradition** that women are only present in the novel so they can die.

Prejudice



It is **ironic** that Mr De Lacey tells the monster of people's lack of **prejudice**. As a blind man, De Lacey appears to also be blind to the judgemental nature of humans: ***"the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity".*** Shelley's use of the **abstract nouns** encourage the reader to expect the monster to be received positively ***"love and charity"*** by society, rendering the monster's unfavourable treatment later in the novel even more shocking. Shelley emphasises **Rousseau's** belief that people are born good, but become **corrupted** by the environment they live in.

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Context

Blake, Rousseau and the Gothic



William Blake explored ideas of **good and evil** as a **binary** opposite. Blake was inspired by the philosopher Rousseau's publication 'On Education' (1762). Rousseau rejected the idea that people were born innately flawed or evil, and emphasised that children were born **innocent** and were **corrupted** through experience.

In **Gothic** novels, death is seen as the most extreme **corruption**. It is interesting that William only appears once in the novel before Shelley kills his character at the hands of the monster. Shelley arguably constructs William as an **archetypal caricature** of Rousseau and Blake's boundaries of good and evil to demonstrate how corrupting society can be.

Mary Wollstonecraft

In Georgian literature, women were often presented as a **caricature** of their true nature: demure, submissive and vulnerable. Emotions were considered **feminine**, whilst rational thought was associated with masculinity. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, criticises the notion that women are **naturally inferior** to men. Rather, women appear to be less intelligent due to their lack of education.



Women's Gothic - Jane Austen

Shelley's employment of William's death taps into and subverts the **Gothic tradition** of the victim dying, however, typically these victims are female. Shelley was writing at the same time as Jane Austen, an author known for her **satire.** Austen published *Northanger Abbey* one year before *Frankenstein*. In her novel, Austen pokes fun at the Gothic tradition of portraying a **female victim** who is terrified of everything. It could be argued that Shelley constructs female characters such as Caroline as a **satire** of the ideal Georgian woman.

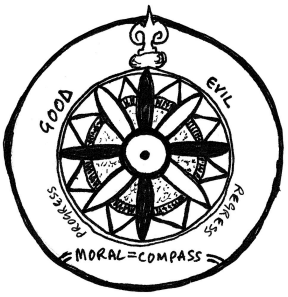
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Key Quotations

"Exquisitely beautiful"

- Even when Justine is on trial, being accused of murder, Victor focuses on her physical beauty, emphasising how a woman's beauty prevails over her moral character in a **patriarchal society**.

- Shelley's addition of the **intensifier** ***"exquisitely"*** reinforces the extent of Justine's beauty. **Ironically**, Victor is more interested in praising Justine's beauty over her moral character. Despite beauty often being associated with goodness, in court, Shelley outlines how Victor occupying a position of **power** in a **patriarchal society** means that Justine's previous moral character is ignored.



"Felix had accidentally been present at the trial; his horror and indignation were uncontrollable when he heard the decision of the court"

- Shelley's use of the **abstract nouns** ***"horror and indignation"*** upon hearing the news of Justine's sentence indicates Felix's strong sense of **justice**, especially in contrast to the monster's murder.

- Likewise ***"uncontrollable"*** indicates how Felix's **moral compass** is something naturally ingrained in him which he cannot repress. In contrast to Victor's passivity, Shelley constructs Felix as capable of empathy.

- Shelley's use of **dramatic irony** where the reader knows Justine is innocent, only renders the court's judgement more unjust.

"The poor sufferer who tried to comfort others"

- Even when Justine is in danger of being executed, Shelley emphasises how Justine remains selfless, focusing on comforting others as opposed to herself. Justine adheres to the **archetype** of the **female martyr** in literature, remaining calm in the face of death. Her willingness to suffer embodies **Christian** ideas of self-sacrifice.

- Shelley's use of the **emotive language** ***"poor"***, evokes **sympathy** from the reader, emphasising how Justine is merely a **victim** of unfortunate circumstances. Arguably, Shelley constructs Justine in order to **criticise** contemporary expectations of women where they are expected to be entirely selfless.

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