

(the monster's final desire is for self-destruction, and Frankenstein returns to his own death repeatedly).

Karl Marx (1818–83)

Karl Marx is best known for his great work *Das Kapital*, in which, with Friedrich Engels, he launched an outspoken attack on the capitalist system. His concept of 'historical materialism' has been highly influential in the Marxist school of literary criticism; this school seeks to understand literature as a form of material production that participates in and illuminates the processes of history.

There are many perceived social or political 'messages' within *Frankenstein*. The novel clearly poses questions with regard to the social implications of science; it also delivers forceful messages on social inclusion and exclusion and their potential consequences. The particular historical and sociological period of the writing of the novel can be linked to the key Marxist concept of class struggle. *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818, was written against the backdrop of European revolution; the monster can be seen as a symbol of the destructive forces of social and political revolution.

The reader also needs to consider how plot, characters and settings reflect the concept of class struggle, either by inclusion or by omission. *Frankenstein* gives a symbolic status to both Frankenstein and the monster, allowing for a wide variety of readings in terms of the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. Shelley also makes extensive use of 'wilderness' settings, the harshness of which reflect the harshness of the monster's life and the brutality of the struggle between the creature and the creator. Shelley's use of a wide range of European locations serves to emphasise the universal nature of the dangers signalled within the novel.

A final key concept here is the way that, through class struggle, characters become 'outsider' figures and are alienated from society. The novel is full of such characters. Frankenstein and the monster both become social outcasts and misfits; similarly, the De Lacey's, Safie and her father are victims of society's rejection. Justine Moritz and Elizabeth Lavenza are also social 'misfits' in that both are orphans.

Feminism

Feminism is a modern tradition of literary criticism and polemic devoted to the defence of women's writing or of fictional characters against the condescension of a predominantly male literary establishment.

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Significantly, one of the earliest proponents of the feminist cause was Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley's mother. A number of ideas central to the feminist point of view are highly relevant to *Frankenstein*.

The relative silence and passivity of female characters in Gothic texts has been noted by many critics. *Frankenstein* challenges many of the typical perceptions of women in Gothic; the women in the novel are no more helpless in the face of the monster than men; Frankenstein's mother, Elizabeth, Safie and Justine, in particular, are all notable for their strength of character. However, the stereotyping of female characters according to male fantasy is a criticism levelled at *Frankenstein*, in which Safie, Elizabeth and Agatha De Lacey are all presented as types of idealised female beauty and devotion.

The concerns and plight of women are dealt with in a number of ways. Frankenstein clearly perceives Elizabeth almost as a possession and as his by right. The text also highlights the position of women under Islam, through its presentation of Safie. Even though many of the women in the novel are strong characters, they are still largely obliged to live under the protection of males. As a text by a woman addressing the position of women in society, and women under threat, the novel explores the interesting relationship between the female author and her text, begging questions not only of male fantasy, but also of female fantasy. Given the importance of Freudian readings of Gothic texts, the reader also needs to consider the extent to which such issues could be seen as an expression of a female fantasy or wish-fulfilment.

Pause for Thought



Many writers of Gothic fiction have been women. What is there in the nature of Gothic that might explain this? Why would the Gothic appeal as a means of expression for these women?