

# AP LITERATURE

## FRANKENSTEIN LITERARY ANALYSIS PAPER

Over the centuries, there have been scores of interpretations of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. It is now **your** chance to argue and defend your analysis of Frankenstein. While I encourage you to select a Literary Lens through which to analyze the work, I am open to other suggestions for your paper's focus. You will need to include research in your paper to support your analysis (such as author background if you are using the Psychoanalytic Lens), and you need to include a Works Cited page.

Literary Theory is a tool to inquire about meaning—underlying and overt—in literature. Employing Literary Theory allows us to move beyond our own “entertainment experience” when engaging with a text. It draws us to question and challenge the preconceived ideas and ideologies behind a text's production or a text's meaning.

Regardless of whether you are choosing to use a Literary Theory lens or not, the final product is a well-constructed 3-4 page essay with ample and relevant quotations and references to the original text and to **outside sources (minimum of 1)**. Your analysis will require you to focus on the key characters, scenes and events which best illustrate your chosen focus and argument. You will need to develop a thesis statement to guide your writing. The question you will engage for this paper is:

**What is an accurate and defensible reading of Frankenstein?**  
*While it may not be the most popular or easiest to defend, why is this interpretation strong and defensible in the text?*

### Sample ideas include:

- Who is the real monster?
- Are the creature's actions justifiable?
- What does viewing the text through the [Feminist/Marxist/Psychoanalytic/etc.] lens reveal?
- What is the central theme of the text?
- Does Mary Shelley's gender have any influence on the message of the text? How might Frankenstein be a different text if written by a male author?
- The frame device of the story and hearing from the multiple perspectives
- The purpose of Walton
- Does Victor learn and change in any way? Could you argue that this story is a quest/coming-of-age story then? If not for Victor, is it a coming-of-age story for another character?
- How does Shakespeare use the theme of revenge? What is his message? Why might this have been fitting for the time period?
- The role of Nature
- Appearances versus blindness
- Responsibility (in terms of creation, actions, parents, etc.)
- Is the creature more like Satan or more like Adam from Paradise Lost?
- Namelessness
- Analyze a character other than Victor Frankenstein or the creature. What is his/her role in the story? Is he/she necessary to the novel? Why or why not?
- Which character has the most agency (authority or power)?
- Nature vs. Nurture
- A need for companionship (the creature) vs. isolation (Victor)
- Literary devices → Theme

**Grading:**

**An “A” paper will include all of the following, done with quality:**

1. A clear focus to the entire paper, established in the introduction
2. A brief explanation of your Literary Theory or brief background of your paper’s focus (this may happen in the introduction or one of the 1<sup>st</sup> body paragraphs).
3. Analysis throughout your paper of the key characters, events, and other literary devices in the text that are pertinent to an understanding of your chosen focus. Some summary used when necessary.
4. Ample, apt, and properly wrapped and cited references/quotations
  - a. To the text of *Frankenstein*
  - b. This includes explanation of the evidence and how it ties to your focus/argument.
  - c. To outside sources
    - i. Outside sources are credible, published, academic sources
5. Smooth organization and thoughtful development of ideas, with transitions between paragraphs
  - a. Ideas discussed in their complexity, and not necessarily limited to a “5 paragraph essay”
6. Conclusion wraps up ideas of the paper in a way that brings them to a strong close.
7. A creative title that captures the paper’s main ideas (not just “Frankenstein Paper”)
8. 3-4 full pages in length (not including Works Cited) double-spaced, 12-point font, 1” margins all around, and MLA header in the upper left
  - a. It should be double-spaced, but if you’re writing it on your iPad on GoogleDocs, I understand that it will not let you single-space it. In that case, just leave it single-spaced at 2.5 pages minimum
9. All writing conventions (grammar, spelling, mechanics, formatting, etc.) fully meet expectations

**Works Cited for our book:**

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Strand, London: Penguin Classics, 1992. Print.

**Due Dates:**

**Thursday, Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>**  
**Thursday, Dec 10<sup>th</sup>**

Thesis due + brief notes about plan for the paper- in email  
Polished Draft Due- as best as you can make it on your own.  
We will work with these in class this day. **Have it printed.**

**Tuesday, Dec 15<sup>th</sup>**

Papers due- electronically.  
(Word or Google Doc- with permission for me to edit)

\*\*All due dates are for the beginning of class.

# Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: A Marxist Reading

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May 8, 2009

Horrifying, thrilling, bone-chilling: these are the characteristics of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The tale of a doctor whose creation to benefit humanity turns into a horrible monster, this horror story is as much a criticism of society as it is an entertaining science fiction fantasy. A Marxist reading of the text shows that this work is an active agent exposing and criticizing society's oppressive economic and ideological systems. The fear played upon in this work is in actuality a fear of revolution.

Every literary work is a reflection of the context surrounding it, including historical, social, and economic context (Rivkin 644). For this reason, it is pivotal to examine the context surrounding the text before delving into analysis.

*Frankenstein* was first published in 1816. Its author, Mary Shelley, was the daughter of two radical philosophers: Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin (Smith 7). While this biographical information may seem irrelevant, it is important in this case precisely because the radical ideas of her parents may give us an idea of the author's own opinions on the historical events surrounding the setting for her novel.

As Warren Montag argues, the novel itself is set in the 1790's, approximately one hundred and fifty years after the 1642 Revolution in England, which is mentioned in the text (385). Thus, the work itself alludes to revolution and is placed during a revolutionary time. In fact, there were two revolutions going on at this time: the French Revolution, and the Haitian Revolution.

The main historical event during the 1790's was the French Revolution. This idealistic revolution had as its main goal to establish a social order based on reason and justice and had many supporters even in Britain at the time, including Shelley's parents. Her father even wrote a work in support of the revolution, which would eventually be censored after the British government declared war on France in 1793 and began to prosecute supporters of French revolutionaries (Smith 8). It is logical, then, that Shelley would mention the English revolution in place of the French revolution so as to avoid censorship by her eliciting sympathy for an oppressed monster in her story.

The Haitian Revolution also took place in the 1790's. This revolution for Haitian independence began as a slave revolt and, once the slaves in Haiti defeated Napoleon's army, established the world's first Black republic (Reinhardt 246). It may be ideal, then, that the novel is situated at this time, as oppressed slaves fought and won their independence from oppressors. It is logical that Shelley would sympathize with these slaves, as her parents were both abolitionists. Her mother, a renowned feminist, often wrote of women as slaves to men, and she also criticized slavery explicitly in her review of Olaudah Esquiano's *Interesting Narrative* (Bugg 655).

As its historical context reflects, oppression is an important theme in the text. The novel itself is set in a time of social upheaval. While oppressed citizens are fighting for their rights, slaves fight for their independence on the other side of the globe. In the

novel, an educated scientist creates a monster that goes out of control. Shelley's work plays on society's fear of creating monsters that go out of control and create revolutions.

Clearly, Dr. Frankenstein represents the ruling class in this work. As Marx explained in his Communist Manifesto, only two true classes exist: the bourgeoisie, or the owners of the means of production, and the proletariat, or the working class (Marx "Manifesto" 220). It is important to consider, then, that Dr. Frankenstein himself is indeed an educated character from a wealthy business background: "My family is one of the most distinguished of [Geneva]. My ancestors had been for many years counselors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him, for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business" (Shelley 40). Further, the doctor, or creator, is the owner of the means of production in that he owns the means of creation, for just as the bourgeoisie creates the proletariat, this doctor creates a monster that ends up attempting to kill him. The experiment spirals out of control in the same way that oppressed people revolt: "Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (Marx "Manifesto" 225). Dr. Frankenstein is a symbol for oppressive society.

Similarly, the monster is a symbol for oppressed people. He is the proletariat that revolts against the bourgeoisie in class struggle. First, his mere composition reflects that of the proletariat. For instance, he is created by the bourgeoisie, and of various different parts at that: the monster is composed of bones from charnel-houses, parts from dissecting rooms, and pieces from slaughter-houses (Shelley 58-9). This is similar to the proletariat in that it "is recruited from all classes of the population" (Marx "Manifesto" 228). The monster, like the proletariat, is a mixture of different segments from various parts. In addition, the monster is larger than his creator. The doctor recalls, "As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large" (Shelley 58). The monster's gargantuan stature reflects the tremendous population of the working class, which far outnumbers the few aristocrats. Further, he is tougher than the doctor, just like the proletariat is stronger than the bourgeoisie: he reminds his creator, "thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple" (93). The monster's simple lifestyle reflects the lifestyle of the workers; he does not need the luxury of the aristocrats but only a meager amount of nutritious food to eat and a simple bed. Thus, his very composition is symbolic of the laborers who were composed of many different types of people, larger in numbers, physically stronger, and less dependent on luxury than the upper classes.

It is also important to consider that the monster elicits sympathy, which further demonstrates Shelley's criticism of capitalism. The creature begins his life with good intentions but, after repeatedly experiencing malicious treatment from humans, understandably turns to violence. This turn from innocence to evil reflects the way the working class began the French revolution with good hopes and beneficent intentions but grossly ended the revolution with the Reign of Terror, horrific violence, and numerous guillotine slaughters. He began his life with good intentions, just as the working class, in its attempts to overturn capitalism, often begins revolution with

hopes of ending poverty: "Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me" (94) Then, just as the French revolution at length turned sour, the monster explains his change in temperament in response to being shot by a man after saving a drowning child: "The feelings of kindness and gentleness, which I had entertained but a few moments before, gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind" (125). Detested for his mere appearance, the monster explains that he is worthy of sympathy, and his anger towards mankind only develops because of his abuse, just as the working class goes through stages of development: "The proletariat goes through various stages of development. At first the contest is carried on by individual laborers, then by the work people of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them" (Marx "Manifesto" 228). The monster is hardly to be blamed for his outbursts, as the working classes could hardly be blamed for resorting to revolution in hopes of improving their living conditions.

Perhaps we should consider that the tale of *Frankenstein* also seems to go beyond economics to criticize the very superstructure of Shelley's contemporary society. Its tale of monsters being created is not simply a history of capitalist society but a criticism of the oppressive institutions that guide our society. Among these are capitalism and slavery, which may fall under capitalism in that it is economic. Let us consider, however, that the tale reciprocates the role of master and slave, just as the Haitian revolution did. Indeed, although Doctor Frankenstein creates the creature to improve life for humanity, in the end, the slave becomes the master, returning to intimidate its creator and eventually kill him. The monster uses his intimidating physique to threaten and abuse his creator: "Slave, I have reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have my power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master; - obey!" (Shelley 146). It is notable, then, that Shelley is playing with the master/slave relationship, for in this binary, the privileged term is dependent on the second term, giving the slave power over the master. By doing this, Shelley is calling into question the very institutions and ideologies of society, and criticizing capitalism is only one way of doing that.

According to Marx, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx "German" 656). The ideologies in question here include both Enlightenment thought and religion. First, it is clear that the idea of progress and individualism is being questioned when the monster is created. The doctor is working toward progress when the monster is created: the doctor reflects in creating the beast that "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into the dark world" (Shelley 58). This torrent of light represents what Enlightenment thinkers thought of progress in science and technology. However, science and technology are the very reason that the monster is created (Montag 388). Shelley's own voice comes through in her book when she states that "If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere

with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have been spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed" (59). Shelley completely rejects Enlightenment ideology in her story.

*Frankenstein* is as much a rejection of society's crippling oppression and exploitation as it is an entertaining read. Shelley not only rejects capitalism but also the ideology that supports it. Shelley's monster reminds us that oppression creates monsters and a threat to itself. More than anything else, it reminds us that "What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (Marx "Manifesto" 233). Any society that exploits and oppresses creates opponents who are capable of overthrowing that society. It is precisely this fear that is played upon in the horror story.

## Works Cited

- Bugg, John. "“Master of Their Language”": Education and Exile in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." *The Huntington Library Quarterly*. 68.4 (2005). 6 May 2009. 655-666. JSTOR.
- Marx, Karl. "The German Ideology." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2nd ed. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell, 2005. 643-646.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Penguin Classics, 2002.
- Montag, Warren. "The 'Workshop of Filthy Creation': A Marxist Reading of *Frankenstein*." *Frankenstein*. 2nd ed. Ed. Johanna M. Smith. Boston: Bedford, 2000. 384-395.
- Reinhardt, Thomas. "200 Years of Forgetting: Hushing up the Haitian Revolution." *Journal of Black Studies*. 35.4 (2005). 6 May 2009 246-261. JSTOR.
- Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan. "Starting with Zero." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2nd ed. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell, 2005. 643-646.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. 2nd ed. Ed. Johanna M. Smith. Boston: Bedford, 2000.
- Smith, Johanna M. Introduction: Biographical and Historical Contexts. *Frankenstein*. 2nd ed. Ed. Johanna M. Smith. Boston: Bedford, 2000.

*Frankenstein* Essay Rubric

Category	Excellent (A)	Standard (B)	Not yet (C) but evidence of attempt	Missing/ Lower than C
<p><b>Thesis Statement</b> A well-constructed thesis statement that identifies the subject, hints at the discussion to come, and makes an argument.</p>	5 pts.	4 pts.	3.5 pts.	3 or less
<p><b>Ideas:</b> <b>Thesis Development/Evidence of Thought and Depth of Analysis</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> The paper remains focused on the thesis and care is given to construction of a solid, original argument.  <input type="checkbox"/> Claims related to the thesis are significantly developed in each paragraph.  <input type="checkbox"/> Essay demonstrates a clear understanding of the prompt.  <input type="checkbox"/> All aspects of the text are discussed in depth, including a detailed and accurate analysis of key characters, scenes and events pertinent to the thesis.  <input type="checkbox"/> All paragraphs warrant their evidence and discussion in a tie-back to the thesis.  <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion of thesis develops rather than repeats itself and includes analysis rather than over-reliance on summary.</p>	10 pts.	8 pts.	7 pts.	6 or less
<p><b>Support:</b> Quotations and textual references to <i>Frankenstein</i> and outside source(s)  <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence/quotations are carefully selected, thoroughly used, explained clearly and accurately, and effectively wrapped into your writing.  <input type="checkbox"/> The writing clearly explains how the evidence supports the claims using analysis and synthesis.  <input type="checkbox"/> Ample references to <i>Frankenstein</i> are made effectively; that is, they add significantly to the understanding of <i>Frankenstein</i> and the focus of your paper.  <input type="checkbox"/> Outside sources included when necessary</p>	10 pts.	8 pts.	7 pts.	6 or less
<p><b>Organization:</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Clear intro that includes a hook and bridge to the thesis.  <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting info is presented in a logical, effective sequence with clear, strong paragraph claims.  <input type="checkbox"/> Smooth transitions throughout.  <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraphs develop ideas in a way not limited to a “5 paragraph” essay  <input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion gives fresh wording for insights and arguments made in the essay.  <input type="checkbox"/> A natural flow exists in the paper.</p>	10 pts.	8 pts.	7 pts.	6 or less
<p><b>MLA and Writing Conventions:</b> Spelling, grammar, formatting, etc. are formal, academic, and polished.  <input type="checkbox"/> It is evident that the essay has been carefully edited. No errors apparent.  <input type="checkbox"/> Sources (including <i>Frankenstein</i> and outside source(s)) are cited correctly both within the paper and in the Works Cited (MLA).  <input type="checkbox"/> 3-4 full pages minimum</p>	5 pts.	4 pts.	3.5 pts.	3 or less

### **AP Prompt Ideas for a Paper Topic:**

2004. Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Choose a novel, or play, and, considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2004, Form B. The most important themes in literature are sometimes developed in scenes in which a death or deaths take place. Choose a novel or play and write a well-organized essay in which you show how a specific death scene helps to illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2005, Form B. One of the strongest human drives seems to be a desire for power. Write an essay in which you discuss how a character in a novel or a drama struggles to free himself or herself from the power of others or seeks to gain power over others. Be sure to demonstrate in your essay how the author uses this power struggle to enhance the meaning of the work.

2008. In a literary work, a minor character, often known as a foil, possesses traits that emphasize, by contrast or comparison, the distinctive characteristics and qualities of the main character. For example, the ideas or behavior of a minor character might be used to highlight the weaknesses or strengths of the main character. Choose a novel or play in which a minor character serves as a foil for the main character. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the relation between the minor character and the major character illuminates the meaning of the work.

2009. A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning. Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2010, Form B. “You can leave home all you want, but home will never leave you.” —Sonsyrea Tate Sonsyrea Tate’s statement suggests that “home” may be conceived of as a dwelling, a place, or a state of mind. It may have positive or negative associations, but in either case, it may have a considerable influence on an individual. Choose a novel or play in which a central character leaves home yet finds that home remains significant. Write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the importance of “home” to this character and the reasons for its continuing influence. Explain how the character’s idea of home illuminates the larger meaning of the work. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2011. In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.” Choose a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole.

2012. “And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.” Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*  
Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole.

2013. A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.

2014. It has often been said that what we value can be determined only by what we sacrifice. Consider how this statement applies to a character from a novel or play. Select a character that has deliberately sacrificed, surrendered, or forfeited something in a way that highlights that character’s values. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the particular sacrifice illuminates the character’s values and provides a deeper understanding of the meaning of the work as a whole.

2015. In literary works, cruelty often functions as a crucial motivation or a major social or political factor. Select a novel, play, or epic poem in which acts of cruelty are important to the theme. Then write a well-developed essay analyzing how cruelty functions in the work as a whole and what the cruelty reveals about the perpetrator and/or victim.

## Some Reminders about Writing

**MLA formatting:** double-spaced (unless on GoogleDocs), Times New Roman 12-point font, 1-inch margins all around, header at top of page (name, teacher, class, date).

- Include an introduction paragraph and a conclusion.
  - Introduction: Hook → Bridge/background info → Thesis
  - Include author's full name and the title of the work in your intro
  - Refer to the author by last name after the first instance
- Each paragraph should have a clear, identifiable topic.
- Include transitions from paragraph to paragraph.
- Use ample and applicable evidence and quotations throughout, along with explaining their significance.
- No use of "I"

### **Quotations Examples:**

A) Elie Wiesel explains that on the first night, he "became a different person" (Wiesel 37).

B) In "How to Get Out Alive" Amanda Ripley says, "The vast majority of people do very little [in a crisis situation]" (Ripley 3). Similarly, the people in Elie's hometown of Sighet do nothing when they first hear warnings from Moshie the Beadle.

C) In "How to Get Out Alive" Amanda Ripley says, "The vast majority of people do very little [in a crisis situation]," which is similar to how people in Elie's hometown react (Ripley 3).

### **Reminders:**

- Always introduce the quote (wrap it into your own words).
- Explain the quote after using it.
- Choose a quote that is significant and adds to what you are trying to explain
- The quotation marks go around the original words. At the end of the sentence, put the (Author and page number) in parentheses, THEN the period.
  - Look at example B and C above, especially.
  - Use brackets [ ] for when you need to add something within the quote to make it make sense (see example B and C)