

“Throughout the novel the boundaries between good and evil are continuously blurred, leaving the reader with moral uncertainty.” How far do you agree with this view of the novel?

Frankenstein

One of the major themes within gothic literature is the struggle between good and evil. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* presents good and evil in an ambiguous way because the reader is never fully able to determine between the two. The three main characters: Victor, Walton and the Creature all show times in which they are good and evil, none of them are one or the other, proposing moral ambiguity as to who is the antagonist or protagonist. Instead, this view seems to change depending on who is narrating the story, due to Shelley's use of the framed narrative.

The framed narrative allows Shelley to offer readers different perspectives on each of the characters inner emotions and feelings. Walton's narrative acts as an introduction to the novel introducing the main themes of isolation and quest for knowledge of the unknown. It also allows Shelley to parallel Walton to Victor, since they are both trying to understand the unknown, but Victor acts as a warning towards Walton. Considering this, Walton is not considered to be good or evil but his narrative grants an unbiased view on Victor's story. On the other hand, we are made to sympathise with Victor during his narrative and hate the Creature, but during the Creature's narrative, we are made to feel empathy for the Creature and hatred towards Victor. For example, in Victor's narrative, the reader feels empathy for him because he has lost everyone he has ever loved to the "wretched" Creature, who is shown to be incoherently evil. However, when the narrative shifts to the Creature's, the reader sees that it was Victor's abandonment that led to him taking vengeance upon him, and the mistreatment from humanity. With the multiple narrators, it is hard to determine who is good and who is evil; Shelley causes the reader to continually change their opinions throughout the novel, redefining what is good and evil. Are the Creature's actions fully justifiable? In simple terms no, by committing acts of murder, the Creature lowered himself to the level of humanity, but if Victor did not abandon him in the first place, maybe none of the preceding events would have followed. Therefore, is it right to state Victor is the antagonist and the Creature the protagonist? Again no necessarily, Victor's initial intentions are to find a way to create life from death, and gain 'Godly knowledge' which is the cause for his actions. Mary Shelley is actually showing that the quest for "forbidden knowledge" is the real threat, not the actual characters. All three characters are trying to gain knowledge in some shape or form, and it is the reason for their downfall.

Isolation is another theme that leads the characters to become 'evil'. Like previously stated, the evil does not lie within the characters but through the isolation they both endure. Victor neglects his caring and loving family to achieve his "ardent desire" for knowledge, ultimately leading to the death of all those around him, i.e. Elizabeth, William, Justine, etc. Through his isolation, Victor forgets the impact it has on those closest to him, only focused on increasing his own hubris and egotistical desires. However, through Victor's narrative, Shelley causes the reader to sympathise with him, firstly through his "desire" to cure death and secondly the loss of his loved ones. In terms of the Creature, his abandonment, down to his creator, is the sole reason for him to take vengeance, by resorting to murder. The Creature's narrative shows his isolation from society, is down to his "hideous" appearance and the rejection at the hands of humanity. Shelley shows the education of the Creature in two ways: through reading of several books (e.g. *Paradise Lost*) and observation of