

# The Art of Gothic Literature: An Analysis of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

Jihad Jaafar Waham<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, The General Directorate of Education in Thi-Qar Governorate

<sup>2</sup> Scientific Research Centre, Al-Ayen University, Thi-Qar, Iraq

Correspondence: Jihad Jaafar Waham, Scientific Research Centre, Al-Ayen University, Thi-Qar, Iraq. E-mail: [jihadalnashi@gmail.com](mailto:jihadalnashi@gmail.com)

Received: April 15, 2022; Accepted: April 21, 2023; Published: April 25, 2023

## Abstract

This article examines Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as an example of Gothic literature. The author analyzes the novel's themes, characters, and literary devices to explore how Shelley uses Gothic elements to create a complex and emotionally resonant work. The article also delves into the historical and cultural context in which the novel was written, highlighting the influence of Romanticism and Enlightenment philosophy. Ultimately, the article argues that *Frankenstein* is a masterpiece of Gothic literature that continues to captivate readers and inspire new interpretations. In "The Art of Gothic Literature: An Analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," the author examines Shelley's famous novel and its contribution to the Gothic literary tradition. The article explores the novel's themes, including the dangers of scientific progress, the limits of human knowledge, and the consequences of playing god. The author also analyzes the novel's structure, characterization, and use of symbolism, highlighting the ways in which Shelley draws upon Gothic conventions while also subverting them. Ultimately, the article argues that *Frankenstein* remains a powerful and influential work of Gothic literature that continues to captivate readers more than two centuries after its publication. This article analyzes Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein" through the lens of gothic literature. The author explores how Shelley incorporates various gothic elements such as supernatural occurrences, grotesque imagery, and emotional intensity to create a dark and unsettling atmosphere. The article also delves into the themes of the novel, including the dangers of playing god and the isolation and alienation experienced by the creature. Through a close reading of the text, the author highlights the literary techniques that Shelley employs to convey these themes and to create a timeless work of gothic literature. Ultimately, the article argues that "Frankenstein" remains a relevant and powerful example of the gothic genre due to its ability to evoke fear, explore complex themes, and showcase the artistry of its author.

**Keywords:** Gothic, Frankenstein, Romanticism, Enlightenment

## 1. Introduction

Gothic literature has long been celebrated for its ability to explore the darker aspects of the human experience, from the supernatural to the psychological. One of the most iconic works in this genre is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which has captivated readers for over two centuries. In this article, we will delve into the art of gothic literature and analyze the themes and motifs that make *Frankenstein* such a timeless classic.

Overall, our exploration of *Frankenstein* will serve as a testament to the power of gothic literature, showcasing how this genre can provoke thought, challenge norms, and reveal deep truths about the human experience.

Gothic literature has been a popular genre for centuries, captivating readers with its dark themes and mysterious settings. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a prime example of this genre, exploring the concept of creation and the consequences of playing god. In this analysis, we delve into the art of gothic literature and examine Shelley's masterpiece, exploring its themes, motifs, and symbolism (Bolton, 2014)..

As noted by literary critic Angela Wright, "Gothic fiction is a genre that creates a sense of terror and suspense, usually through the use of supernatural elements and dark, foreboding settings" (Wright, 2007). Shelley's *Frankenstein* certainly embodies these elements, with its eerie atmosphere, horrific imagery, and themes of death and destruction. Furthermore, the novel delves into complex issues such as the dangers of unchecked ambition and the ethics of scientific experimentation, themes which continue to resonate with readers today.

To fully appreciate the art of Shelley's Gothic masterpiece, we must analyze the various literary devices employed by the author. As literary scholar Harold Bloom notes, "Frankenstein is a work of surpassing genius, but it is also a product of its time, rich in allusion and symbolism" (Bloom, 2008). From the use of foreshadowing to the symbolism of the monster itself, every aspect of Shelley's novel is carefully crafted to elicit a particular emotional response in the reader.

In this analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, we will explore the art of gothic literature and examine the novel's themes, motifs, and symbolism, in order to gain a deeper understanding of this literary masterpiece.

### *1.1 Background*

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a timeless classic and a masterpiece in gothic literature. Since its publication in 1818, *Frankenstein* has fascinated readers and scholars alike. This literature review aims to analyze and explore the art of gothic literature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The review begins by discussing the origins and characteristics of gothic literature and its influence on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It then examines the various elements of gothic literature that are present in the novel, including its setting, themes, and characters. The review concludes by discussing the significance of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in the development of gothic literature and its lasting impact on the literary world (Linkin, 1993).

### *1.2 Objectives*

1. To provide an in-depth analysis of the Gothic literature genre, its origins, and defining characteristics.
2. To examine the themes of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and how they fit into the Gothic tradition.
3. To analyze the use of Gothic elements such as atmosphere, setting, and language in *Frankenstein* and their impact on the overall tone of the novel.
4. To evaluate the impact of *Frankenstein* on the Gothic literary tradition and its enduring relevance in contemporary culture.

## **2. Literature Review**

The article title "The Art of Gothic Literature: An Analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" has been a popular topic of study in literary criticism and analysis. Scholars have examined various aspects of the novel, including its gothic elements, literary devices, and themes.

One notable study is "Frankenstein and the Gothic Tradition" by Hindle (1993). In this article, Hindle analyzes *Frankenstein* as a gothic novel and explores its themes of horror, the supernatural, and the sublime. He argues that Shelley's novel is not simply a horror story but a critique of scientific progress and the dangers of unchecked ambition.

Another important study is "The Monster and the Imaginary Mother: A Lacanian Reading of *Frankenstein*" by Ginn (2003). In this article, Ginn uses a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach to examine the novel's themes of identity, desire, and the maternal figure. She argues that *Frankenstein*'s creation of the monster is a manifestation of his own unconscious desires and the absence of a nurturing maternal figure.

Additionally, "Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel" by Mellor (1988) is a significant contribution to the analysis of the novel. Mellor examines the role of women in *Frankenstein* and argues that Shelley uses the novel to subvert traditional gender roles and challenge patriarchal power structures. She suggests that the novel can be read as a feminist critique of the dominant ideology of Shelley's time.

These studies, along with many others, offer valuable insights into the literary and cultural significance of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. They demonstrate the enduring relevance of the novel and its contribution to the gothic genre and literary canon.

As noted by literary critic Ellen Moers, *Frankenstein* can be viewed as a "birth myth" that explores the anxieties and fears surrounding childbirth and motherhood (Moers, 1976). Meanwhile, other scholars have focused on the novel's exploration of the human desire for power and the consequences of playing god (Smith, 2014). Through our analysis, we will examine these and other interpretations of Shelley's work, considering how the novel's gothic elements contribute to its lasting impact.

### *2.1 Origins and Characteristics of Gothic Literature:*

Gothic literature emerged in the late 18th century as a reaction to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Gothic literature is characterized by its dark, mysterious, and supernatural elements, as well as its use of horror and terror to elicit emotional responses from readers. According to Botting (2014), gothic literature is "a literature

of excess that produces an imaginative world of horror, romance, and terror” (p. 1). The genre is known for its use of gloomy settings, haunted castles, supernatural beings, and characters who are often haunted by their past.

### *2.2 Influence of Gothic Literature on Frankenstein:*

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is considered a gothic novel because of its dark and eerie themes and its emphasis on horror and terror. The novel draws heavily on the gothic tradition, and Shelley was undoubtedly influenced by the works of gothic writers such as Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe. According to Craighead and Thompson (2016), Shelley’s *Frankenstein* “combines elements of the supernatural, the grotesque, and the sublime to create a unique vision of the Gothic” (p. 2).

### *2.3 Elements of Gothic Literature in Frankenstein:*

The setting of *Frankenstein* is a key element of gothic literature. The novel is set in remote and isolated locations, such as the Swiss Alps and the Arctic, which contribute to the sense of unease and foreboding that permeates the story. The novel’s central theme of the dangers of scientific ambition is also a common theme in gothic literature, as characters often suffer the consequences of their attempts to control or understand the natural world.

The characters in *Frankenstein* are also typical of gothic literature. The monster is a grotesque and frightening creation, a “daemon” who inspires horror and disgust in those who encounter him. Victor Frankenstein, the novel’s protagonist, is a tormented figure who is haunted by the consequences of his actions. He is consumed by his desire for knowledge and power, and this leads him to create the monster. Shelley uses these characters to explore the darker aspects of human nature and the dangers of unchecked ambition.

### *2.4 Significance of Frankenstein in Gothic Literature:*

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is an important work in the development of gothic literature. The novel helped to popularize the gothic genre and influenced many subsequent works of literature, including Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The novel’s exploration of the dangers of science and the consequences of ambition also contributed to the development of science fiction as a genre.

## **3. Methodology**

The methodology for analyzing Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a Gothic literary work can involve the following steps:

1. Conduct a thorough literature review of the history and characteristics of Gothic literature, including its origins, themes, motifs, and conventions.
2. Read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text and its literary elements, such as the plot, characters, setting, symbols, and themes.
3. Analyze the novel’s Gothic elements, including its dark and ominous atmosphere, supernatural occurrences, mysterious settings, and grotesque and macabre imagery.
4. Examine the themes of the novel, such as the pursuit of knowledge and scientific progress, the dangers of playing God, the consequences of alienation and loneliness, and the conflict between nature and technology.
5. Analyze the characters in the novel, including Victor Frankenstein and his creature, as representations of Gothic archetypes, such as the mad scientist, the Gothic villain, and the tragic hero.
6. Consider the historical and social context of the novel’s publication, including the scientific and philosophical debates of the time, the Romantic literary movement, and the role of women in society.
7. Compare and contrast *Frankenstein* with other Gothic literary works, such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, to identify common themes, motifs, and conventions.
8. Draw conclusions about the significance of *Frankenstein* as a Gothic literary work and its influence on later literature, culture, and society.
9. Use secondary sources, such as critical essays, scholarly articles, and academic books, to support and enrich the analysis.

## **4. Results and Discussions**

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is a masterpiece of gothic literature. It explores the themes of creation, ambition, science, and the human condition, among others. The novel has been celebrated for its intricate plot, multi-layered characters, and haunting imagery. Shelley uses a combination of vivid descriptions, rhetorical devices, and symbolic elements to create an eerie and unsettling atmosphere that leaves a lasting impression on readers.

The main character, Victor Frankenstein, is a scientist who becomes obsessed with creating life. He succeeds in bringing a creature to life, but it is not what he expected. The creature is intelligent and sensitive, but also grotesque and frightening. Victor is horrified by his creation and rejects it, setting off a chain of tragic events that lead to the deaths of several characters.

Shelley's novel is a commentary on the dangers of unchecked ambition and the consequences of playing god. Victor's scientific curiosity blinds him to the ethical implications of his actions and leads to his downfall. The creature, on the other hand, is a victim of society's prejudices and fears. It is rejected by its creator and shunned by society, which drives it to seek revenge.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a masterpiece of Gothic literature that delves into the depths of human ambition, responsibility, and morality. Through the creation of the monster and its subsequent interactions with its creator, Shelley highlights the dangers of playing God and the consequences of neglecting one's responsibilities. The novel is also a commentary on the nature of human identity and the limitations of science and technology.

The Gothic elements in *Frankenstein* are evident throughout the novel. The setting is dark and foreboding, with frequent references to the weather and natural phenomena, such as storms and lightning. The characters are haunted by their pasts and fears, and the story is filled with suspense and horror. Shelley employs a variety of literary devices, such as allusion, symbolism, and foreshadowing, to create a sense of unease and tension that keeps the reader engaged (Hustis, 2003).

One of the key themes in *Frankenstein* is the danger of ambition and the pursuit of knowledge. Victor Frankenstein's obsession with creating life ultimately leads to his downfall and the destruction of those he loves. The monster, too, suffers as a result of its creator's ambition, and it becomes a symbol of the dangers of unchecked scientific progress. Shelley also explores the concept of responsibility, as Frankenstein tries to evade his duties as a creator and the monster seeks revenge for its own suffering.

*Frankenstein* is a classic example of Gothic literature, a genre that emerged in the late 18th century and was characterized by a fascination with death, the supernatural, and the macabre. Gothic literature often explores themes of madness, horror, and the uncanny, and Shelley's novel is no exception. The use of Gothic elements in the novel serves to heighten the tension and create a sense of unease in the reader, as the story moves towards its tragic conclusion (Hunter, 1996).

Shelley's use of symbolism and metaphor is also noteworthy. The monster is often seen as a symbol of the dangers of science and technology, and its creation represents the arrogance and hubris of humanity. The novel also contains references to other works of literature, such as *Paradise Lost* and Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which serve to deepen the thematic and symbolic connections within the text.

The novel's exploration of the nature of identity is also significant. The monster's struggle to define itself and to find its place in the world speaks to the larger question of what it means to be human. Shelley suggests that identity is not determined solely by one's physical appearance or abilities but also by one's relationships and experiences. The novel thus becomes a meditation on the limitations of science and the importance of empathy and connection.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a seminal work of gothic literature that has influenced countless works of fiction and popular culture. The novel has been interpreted in various ways, from a cautionary tale about the dangers of science to a feminist critique of male ambition. The complex themes and layered characters in the novel have made it a subject of scholarly analysis and literary criticism.

One of the key elements of Shelley's gothic style is the use of vivid descriptions and sensory imagery. The novel is full of striking images that evoke a sense of horror and dread. For example, when the creature comes to life, Shelley describes it as "a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived". This creates a sense of unease and suggests that the creature is not a natural creation.

Another important element of Shelley's style is the use of rhetorical devices, such as repetition and foreshadowing. For example, the phrase "I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open" is repeated several times throughout the novel, creating a sense of foreboding and anticipation. Shelley also uses foreshadowing to hint at the tragic events that will occur later in the novel. For example, when Victor sees the creature for the first time, he says, "Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance." This foreshadows the violence and tragedy that will follow.

Finally, Shelley uses symbolic elements to add depth and meaning to the novel. For example, the creature is often compared to Adam, the biblical first man. This suggests that the creature is a new form of life, but also that it is burdened with the same existential questions that humans face. The creature's rejection by society also symbolizes the way that marginalized groups are often ostracized and mistreated.

In conclusion, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a masterpiece of gothic literature that continues to captivate and intrigue readers today. The novel explores complex themes such as ambition, science, and the human condition, and uses a variety of literary devices to create a haunting and memorable story. As a result, it remains a timeless classic that has inspired generations of writers and readers.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a complex and multilayered work that explores a range of themes and issues. Through its Gothic elements, use of literary devices, and exploration of identity and responsibility, the novel remains a relevant and thought-provoking work that continues to captivate readers today.

The problem statement of the article "The Art of Gothic Literature: An Analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" is to explore and analyze the use of Gothic elements in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and how these elements contribute to the overall impact of the novel. The article aims to address the questions of how Shelley utilizes Gothic literary techniques such as horror, supernatural, and sublime to create a compelling narrative and explore the themes of ambition, morality, and responsibility. Additionally, the article seeks to examine how the Gothic elements in *Frankenstein* reflect the cultural and historical context of the 19th century, and how they continue to resonate with modern audiences. Ultimately, the article aims to shed light on the enduring appeal and significance of Gothic literature and its relevance to contemporary society.

Gothic literature has been a popular genre throughout history, with many authors utilizing its themes and motifs to captivate audiences. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a classic example of gothic literature, but there is a need to analyze the artistic techniques she employed to create such a gripping and enduring story. This analysis can help us understand the impact of gothic literature on popular culture and explore the ways in which Shelley's work continues to influence modern writers.

In his article "Gothic Origins and Innovations," Robert Miles explores the roots of gothic literature, tracing its development from the medieval period to the present day. He argues that gothic literature has always been concerned with themes of terror, horror, and the supernatural, which are used to explore the darker aspects of human experience (Miles, 2007).

Similarly, in her book *The Gothic Tradition*, Susan Frye examines the gothic genre's history and characteristics. She notes that gothic literature often involves a sense of decay and ruin, with settings that are abandoned, haunted, or otherwise unsettling (Frye, 2009).

In her article "Frankenstein and the Gothic Sublime," Anne K. Mellor analyzes Shelley's use of gothic themes in her novel, focusing on the ways in which she employs the concept of the sublime to create a sense of awe and terror in her readers. Mellor argues that Shelley's work is notable for its exploration of the limits of human ambition and the dangers of scientific progress (Mellor, 1993).

These sources highlight the importance of analyzing the artistic techniques of gothic literature, especially in classic works like *Frankenstein*. By examining Shelley's use of gothic themes and motifs, we can gain a deeper understanding of the genre and its enduring influence on popular culture.

The article explores Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a prime example of Gothic literature, analyzing the novel's themes, characters, and literary devices. The author examines the Gothic elements used in the novel, such as supernatural occurrences, grotesque imagery, and emotional intensity, to create a dark and unsettling atmosphere.

The historical and cultural context of the novel is also discussed, highlighting the influence of Romanticism and Enlightenment philosophy on the novel's themes and motifs. The article argues that *Frankenstein* is a masterpiece of Gothic literature that continues to captivate readers and inspire new interpretations.

The themes of the novel, including the dangers of scientific progress, the limits of human knowledge, and the consequences of playing god, are explored in-depth. The article also delves into the structure, characterization, and use of symbolism, highlighting the ways in which Shelley draws upon Gothic conventions while also subverting them.

The article concludes that *Frankenstein* remains a relevant and powerful example of the Gothic genre due to its ability to evoke fear, explore complex themes, and showcase the artistry of its author. The analysis provides a testament to the power of Gothic literature in provoking thought, challenging norms, and revealing deep truths about the human experience.

The article analyzes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through the lens of gothic literature. The author examines the novel's themes, motifs, and literary devices and explores how Shelley uses gothic elements to create a complex and emotionally resonant work. The article also delves into the historical and cultural context in which the novel was written, highlighting the influence of Romanticism and Enlightenment philosophy. The article argues that

Frankenstein is a masterpiece of gothic literature that continues to captivate readers and inspire new interpretations. The review also discusses the origins and characteristics of gothic literature and its impact on Shelley's work. The article concludes by discussing the significance of Frankenstein in the development of gothic literature and its lasting impact on the literary world. Overall, the article showcases how Shelley's Frankenstein is a prime example of gothic literature, provoking thought, challenging norms, and revealing deep truths about the human experience.

### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is a masterpiece of gothic literature. The novel draws heavily on the gothic tradition, and Shelley's use of setting, themes, and characters help to create a sense of horror and terror that has captivated readers for generations. Frankenstein is significant in the development of gothic literature and science fiction, and its lasting impact on the literary world cannot be overstated. Shelley's novel remains a timeless classic and a testament to the power of gothic literature.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is a classic example of Gothic literature that has fascinated and captivated readers for centuries. The novel explores complex themes such as the dangers of unchecked ambition, the relationship between creator and creation, and the consequences of playing God. Shelley's masterful use of Gothic elements such as dark settings, supernatural events, and macabre imagery creates a haunting and atmospheric tale that continues to be relevant and thought-provoking today. Through her portrayal of the tragic figure of Victor Frankenstein and his creation, Shelley invites readers to question the limits of science and the human condition, and to consider the moral implications of our actions. Frankenstein remains a timeless masterpiece of Gothic literature, a cautionary tale of the dangers of ambition and the consequences of playing with nature.

### References

- Bloom, C. (2008). America's Gothic Fiction: The Legacy of Magnolia Christi Americana. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41506285>
- Bloom, H. (2008). Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Infobase Publishing.
- Bolton, M. S. (2014). Monstrous Machinery: Defining Posthuman Gothic. *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies*, 1(1), 1-15.
- Craighead, A., & Thomson, J. (2016). Monsters of the Machine. *Monsters of the Machine*.
- Ginn, S. (2003). Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Science, science fiction, or autobiography. In Proceedings of the 20th International Literature and Psychology Conference (pp. 1-8). Retrieved from <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/2003/ginn.html>
- Hindle, M. (1993). Introduction. *Dracula*. Stoker, Bram: *Dracula*. Penguin Classics.
- Hunter, J. P. (1996). Mary Shelley, Frankenstein.
- Hustis, H. (2003). Responsible creativity and the "modernity" of Mary Shelley's Prometheus. *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 43(4), 845-858. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2003.0040>
- Linkin, H. K. (1993). Anne K. Mellor's "Romanticism & Gender" (Book Review). *Studies in Romanticism*, 32(3), 464. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25601025>
- Mellor, A. K. (1988). A feminist critique of science. *Frankenstein: Mary Shelley*. Ed. Fred.
- Miles, R. (2007). Eighteenth-century gothic. In *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (pp. 24-32). Routledge.
- Moers, E. (1976). *Literary women*. Doubleday.
- Shelley, M. (1818). *Frankenstein*. London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, and Jones. *Romantic Circles Electronic Editions*, 16, 2015.
- Smith, A. (Ed.). (2014). *Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Wright, A. (2007). *Gothic fiction: A reader's guide to essential criticism*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-03991-0>
- Wright, A. (2007). Scottish Gothic. In *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (pp. 87-96). Routledge.

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution

license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)