Student 3

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The Status of Women in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, overtly male representation insinuates Shelley's opinion that women were being silenced and overlooked in that time period. *Frankenstein* has been highly debated amongst scholars as being a "feminist" novel. Although published in 1818, the novel continues to be a very popular literary piece because of the number of universal themes. Through male dominant narration and the death of all three main female characters Shelley reveals the status that women held in the time *Frankenstein* was written.

Devon Hodges of George Mason University wrote in his article "Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel", that "Shelley is concerned about the position of women in a patriarchal culture," (155). This is shown throughout the novel by several different occurrences and themes. One of the themes is the strictly male narration of the novel. *Frankenstein* is written in a frame narrative structure. The outermost layer to this is the most reliable of the narrators, Robert Walton. He writes to his sister Margarette Saville and informs her of the entire encounter with our second character and layer to the story, Victor Frankenstein (Shelley 15). Victor is the protagonist of the novel and recounts his experiences which lead him to meeting Walton (31). Within Victors own narrative, he has created a monster (58). After a few things transpire, Victor travels to Mont Blanc where he encounters the monster and the monster narrates his own experiences (102). Men dominate the narration in Shelley's novel and it is an indication of a lack of female voice in her own culture at that time.

Shelley also reveals the cultural status of women during the early 19th century through the deaths of all three of the main female characters. Hodges says in his article that "through much of the novel [Shelley] adopts a male voice while assigning her self-effacing female characters… to a marginal position," (Hodges 157). Not only are the female characters assigned to a marginal position, but all the female characters die throughout the novel except for Walton's sister. The first death is of Victor's mother. She died of scarlet fever at the beginning of Volume I, Chapter Three (Shelley 44). The next death is of Justine Moritz. Justine was adopted into the Frankenstein's home and acted as a caretaker to Victor's youngest brother William. She was accused of killing William Frankenstein and hanged for a guilty verdict (90). The third and final death of the main female characters occurs toward the end of the novel. Victor narrates that the monster was going to kill him on the night he married Elizabeth Lavenza (173). However, the monster finds Elizabeth on their wedding night and kills her instead (199). At this point in the novel, there is only one female character left, and that is Margarette Saville. She is never heard from since the novel is in the form of letters being written to her by Walton. Mary Shelley uses the death of these three main characters to imply the silencing of women in the beginning of the 19th century.

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley can be evaluated for many themes. The feminist quality of the novel is shown through Shelley's use of strictly male narration and the deaths of the main female characters. Through these techniques and the accompaniment of Devon Hodges Article "Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel", it can be gathered that Shelley was communicating the status of women in the early 19th century as lower than men.

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Works Cited:

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