

which Moers described literature written by women focused on the “maiden in flight” that is so often a feature of gothic novels—a “young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine.”<sup>213</sup> Moers connected *Frankenstein* directly with Shelley’s personal traumas surrounding birth, including guilt at having precipitated her mother’s death and guilt and grief regarding the death of her infant daughter.

Another significant early work in feminist literary criticism, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), devoted a chapter to *Frankenstein*, arguing among other things that Victor is a figure for Mary Shelley and for the woman writer concerned about bringing forth the “monstrous progeny” of her novel.<sup>214</sup> Many feminist critical works on *Frankenstein* are at least partly focused on biography. Mary Poovey’s *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* uses historicist cultural criticism to analyze the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen with a focus on the challenge of finding a way to coordinate being a woman writer with the demands of appropriate or “proper” behavior for women of their social class.

Other biographically informed studies have focused on Shelley’s identity as a motherless child with a distant father (a situation that connects to that of the Creature) or on parent-child tensions in the novel that reflect Shelley’s own family life.<sup>215</sup> The fantasy of making human life without women, and the overall tendency of the novel to exclude women, has been the focus both of feminist criticism and more recent work in gender and masculinity studies.

### ***Postcolonial Criticism***

There are numerous reminders in *Frankenstein* that a fixation on appearances and difference has historically focused on specific categories of visible (or believed to be visible) differences, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability. Criticism on representations of race in *Frankenstein* has been limited but significant, often working through the lens of postcolonial criticism, which in literary studies focuses on writing that emerges from European nations colonizing other nations as well

as writing by people in those colonies, especially after the colonies have become independent nations. A particular interest is how Europeans’ literary works demonstrate a set of underlying beliefs and attitudes about colonized peoples. An example is Gayatri Spivak’s foundational study of *Frankenstein*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, which investigates the representation of women of color in these novels—in *Frankenstein*, the character of Safie.<sup>216</sup>

Elizabeth Young’s recent study historicizes “black *Frankenstein*” as a recurrent metaphor in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American culture. As Young argues, “racial issues in *Frankenstein* are intertwined with colonial ones.”<sup>217</sup> Both Victor and the Creature use the language of slavery to describe their relationship, a reminder that slavery across the British Empire was a huge concern of the Shelleys as well as Mary’s parents. The slave trade was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1807, and slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833. Young notes that aspects of *Frankenstein* “evoke the slave narrative of [Olaudah Equiano](#), which circulated widely in Shelley’s world.”<sup>218</sup>

Shelley’s representation of Safie both exemplifies and critiques Orientalist attitudes that contrast the exotic but “uncivilized” East with the “civilized” West.<sup>219</sup> Safie’s father’s imprisonment points out the discrimination that Muslims faced in the West, but he himself is vilified as untrustworthy and a representative of repressive treatment of women that Shelley associates with Muslim countries.

In short, *Frankenstein*’s representations of race are complex. The novel also suggests the ways in which social identities can reflect a person’s participation in more than one identity category. For example, a young Latina physics major represents categories of age, gender, and race/ethnicity, as well as status in terms of educational attainment. When identity categories that are discriminated against combine, disadvantage and discrimination combine as well (intersectionality). A description of the Creature’s “hideousness” that incorporates “yellowness” of skin and eyes, as well as wrinkles, may both combine the categories of race and age while devaluing both as “ugly.”