

### **Question addressed by Essay:**

Freud writes (p. 33) "The next discord is caused by women, who soon become antithetical to cultural trends and spread around them their conservative influence--the women who at the beginning laid the foundations of culture by the appeal of their love. Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life: the work of civilization has become more and more men's business: it confronts them with ever harder tasks, compels them to sublimations of instinct which women are not easily able to achieve. Since man has not an unlimited amount of mental energy at his disposal, he must accomplish his tasks by distributing his libido to best advantage. What he employs for cultural purposes he withdraws to a great extent from women and his sexual life. his constant association with men and his dependence on his relations with them even estrange him from his duties as husband and father. Woman finds herself thus forced into the background by the claims of culture, and she adopts an inimical attitude towards it."

To what degree does this statement capture the nature of the relationship between Elizabeth and Frankenstein in Frankenstein" Are Freud and Shelley on the same wavelength about the relationship between female and male in the development of society and culture? To answer this, explain carefully what Freud is saying here (placing it in the context of his overall argument) and then test the match between what he says and the roles Shelley assigns to Elizabeth and Frankenstein. Be sure to draw on the full story of the Elizabeth and Frankenstein relationship.

## **Repression and Ruin in Relationships as Analyzed by**

**Sigmund Freud and Mary Shelley**

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The next discord is caused by women, who soon become antithetical to cultural trends and spread around them their conservative influences--the women who at the beginning laid the foundations of culture by the appeal of their love. Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men's business; it confronts them with ever harder tasks, compels them to sublimations of instinct which women are not easily able to achieve. Since man has not an unlimited amount of mental energy at his disposal, he must accomplish his tasks by distributing his libido to his advantage. What he employs for cultural purposes he withdraws to a great extent from women and his sexual life, his constant association with men and his dependence on his relations with them even estrange him from his duties as husband and fathers. Woman finds herself thus forced into the background by the claims of culture, and she adopts an inimical attitude towards it. (Freud, 33)

Mary Shelley illustrates this analytical statement, taken from Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, in her novel *Frankenstein*, in the relationship between Elizabeth and Victor Frankenstein. Freud claims that women represent love, and want to channel that love into sex and a family. At first, the man represents civilization and is not inclined to accept the woman's readiness, because other aspects of his culture demand his attention. Thus the woman becomes frustrated and begins to see society as undermining what she represents, therefore repressing her basic desires for love and sex. The relationship between Elizabeth and Frankenstein clearly depicts Freud's description, as

Elizabeth sets the grounds for a loving relationship but Frankenstein's other involvements abate any desire and prevent a successful union between them.

Freud explains what a woman initially portrays, women, “who at the beginning laid the foundations of culture by the appeal of their love” (Freud, 33). He asserts that, in a relationship, it is the woman who initially plants the basis for culture, meaning a general desire to settle down and raise a family. He suggests that women are capable of this by presenting to males the being of their femininity and their capacity to love in a manner that proves pleasing and alluring. As Freud says, culture sprang forth because women began to display, “. . .the appeal of their love” (Freud 33). Elizabeth, of *Frankenstein*, clearly exhibits this idea and Victor Frankenstein displays its potency. As Victor relates, "Everyone loved Elizabeth" (Shelley, 35), he establishes the esteem with which Elizabeth was regarded. She obviously exuded much charm to all those around her, as Frankenstein describes the delightful hold her character and being had on the adoration of her family, " Her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us” (Shelley, 37). To her family, Elizabeth was the epitome of a woman, and because of this Frankenstein is able to classify her as, “the living spirit of love to soften and attract” (Shelley, 37).

Frankenstein recognizes in Elizabeth what Freud says she is made to elicit, and Elizabeth's love has laid the foundations for culture in their relationship. This establishment subtly puts them in the direction that Freud predicts, towards “. . .family and sexual life" (Freud, 33). Frankenstein's feelings for Elizabeth are deep, "The passionate and almost reverential attachment with which all regarded her became. . .my pride and delight” (Shelley, 35). His life, in a sense, centers around giving attention to the

love that Elizabeth warrants, and Frankenstein is clearly aware of his attachment, "No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me. . ." (Shelley, 35). This feeling from Frankenstein, elicited by Elizabeth's womanly nature, is the foundation for the initial stage of their relationship, which proves successful, "Harmony was the soul of our companionship. . ." (Shelley, 36). However, as Freud predicts, the two companions begin to realize their separate cultural roles, therefore jeopardizing the love and passion within their relationship.

Following Freud's remark, "women represent the interests of the family and sexual life. . .," (Freud, 33), Elizabeth focuses on the home. While Frankenstein's mother lies on her deathbed, she tells Elizabeth, ". . .my love, you must supply my place to my younger children" (Shelley, 43). Elizabeth will soon begin to play her societal role as a mother. Frankenstein's father, in a letter to his son, mentions the hitherto repressed prospect of Elizabeth and Victor' marriage: " I confess, my son, that I have always looked forward to your marriage with our dear Elizabeth. . . " (Shelley, 144). The father feels that it is now the correct time to mention this marriage, as he watches Elizabeth conform to her role as mother, he looks for her to fulfill the love and sexual aspect of her womanly position. Frankenstein confirms his father's expectation by stating, " My future hopes and prospects are entirely bound up in the expectation of our union" (Shelley, 144). This indicates that he, too, has begun to perceive Elizabeth in the light of her want of a sexual and family life.

Similarly, Frankenstein begins to mold himself according to Freud's suggestion that, ". . .the work of civilization has become " more and more men's business. . ." (Freud, 33). Frankenstein enters upon his understanding of society when he begins his education,

"When I had attained the age of seventeen my parents resolved that I should become a student at the university of Ingolstadt" (Shelley, 42). This endeavor launches him into his own "business", and he turns all his attention towards his studies. He is filled with ambition, ". . .I will pioneer new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (Shelley, 47). His study of "natural philosophy" (Shelley, 49), pervades his being, " My application. . .soon became so ardent and eager that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning while I was yet engaged in my laboratory" (Shelley, 49). Frankenstein's work confronts [him] with ever harder tasks. . ." (Freud, 33), and he sets his goal of creating life. This goal further immerses him in his studies, ". . .I could not tear my thoughts from my employment. . ." (Shelley, 54). Frankenstein's intense occupation, a fulfillment of the male role that Freud suggests, has a diminishing effect on his relationship with Elizabeth.

Freud predicts that a men's occupation with their work, ". . .compels them to sublimations of instinct. . ." (Freud, 33). He realizes that as a man fulfills his role in civilization by immersing himself in a profession, it is necessary and actually quite simple for him to suppress sexual feelings. Freud points out, " Since man has not an unlimited amount of mental energy at his disposal, he must accomplish his tasks by distributing his libido to his best advantage" (Freud, 33). Frankenstein chooses to direct his libido into his intent on creating life, and is therefore perfectly able to subdue his love and sexual desires for Elizabeth. Frankenstein even realizes his negligence, "And the same feeling which made me neglect the scenes around me cause me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time" (Shelley, 53). Yet, Frankenstein is unwilling to revisit his feelings, " I wished. . .to

procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection. . ." (Shelly, 54). Frankenstein exhibits exactly what Freud says, as he, "withdraws to a great extent from women and his sexual life" (Freud, 33). Frankenstein has estranged himself from his relationship with Elizabeth, and has firmly repressed any love he has towards her. His actions are not, however, mimicked in those of Elizabeth. Her love for Frankenstein does not abate and she attempts to maintain their relationship.

Freud realizes that the woman, following her instinctual propensity for love and desire, cannot quell her feelings, as he refers to ". . .sublimations of instinct that women are not easily able to achieve" (Freud, 33). Elizabeth has not stifled any of her womanly instincts of love and affection towards Frankenstein. Her letters hint that she feels estranged from Frankenstein, ". . .even the constant letters of dear kind Henry are not sufficient to reassure me on your account" (Shelley, 62). She feels, as Freud says she will, "forced into the background by the claims of culture. . ." (Freud, 33). She yearns for contact and emotion from him, "I eagerly hope that you will confirm this intelligence soon in your own handwriting" (Shelley, 62). She is concerned for his health and desires his company, "Get well- and return to us" (Shelley, 62). Elizabeth's letter does not conceal her fervent love for Frankenstein, nor her to desire as a woman to build upon that love.

Frankenstein, in his preoccupation with the creation of the Monster, has placed Elizabeth in a position of longing, only to be met by his restraint. Their relationship is at just the state that Freud predicts, and the further repercussions of Frankenstein's actions manifest, as displayed in Freud's final conclusion that man will be, ". . .estranged from his duties as husband and father. . ." (Freud,33). The deaths of William and Justine by the

Monster's hands and therefore also by those of Frankenstein, is utterly devastating to Elizabeth, ". . . [she] was sad and desponding. . ." (Shelley, 88). Frankenstein's constant restraint of his feelings for Elizabeth that assisted in the creation of the Monster has now come full circle and is seriously affecting Elizabeth.

The effect that Frankenstein's actions ultimately have on Elizabeth is one that Freud predicts, ". . . women. soon become antithetical to cultural trends. . ." (Freud, 33). By this Freud means that women, because their desires are met with a seeming lack of interest, begin to resent men's work in civilization. Women long for men to comply with the cultural roles that women represent, to spend more time at home as husband and father than doing the work of civilization. Elizabeth's whole person changes as the ultimate result of Frankenstein's detachment. Her normal pleasure diminishes, ". . . she no longer took delight in her normal occupations. . .", as does her womanly expressions of love and inclination towards family, "She was no longer that happy creature who in earlier youth wandered with me on the banks of the lake and talked with ecstasy of our future prospects" (Shelley, 88). This, as Freud says, will finally lead to the woman taking an unfavorable view of culture itself, "..and she adopts an inimical attitude towards it [culture]" (Freud, 33). This negative attitude is reflected in Elizabeth as she states, "When I reflect. . . on the miserable death of Justine Moritz, I no longer see the world and its works as they before appeared to me. . . now, misery has come home, and men appear to me as monster thirsting for each other's blood" (Shelley, 88). Elizabeth, after constantly exhibiting the natural qualities and desires of women and being held back by the culturally absorbed actions of her husband, has abandoned this state of womanhood. She has become very disappointed in the state of culture and society and the roles it gives to

each person and begins to recognize the horrible extremes that men go to in their roles in civilization. Love, to her, has lost some of its luster and weight, and this loss will undermine the prospect of any happy relationship between Elizabeth and Frankenstein.

Freud's telling of a woman's increasing apathy related to that of a man continues to be related as Frankenstein and Elizabeth are married. Frankenstein's lack of joy is apparent, "As the period fixed for our marriage drew nearer. . .I felt my heart sink within me" (Shelley, 182). Elizabeth's feelings of love and her desire for sex and a family take their cue from those of Victor, as they are clearly stifled," Her prospect of the marriage is not promising, She looked forward to our union with placid contentment, not unmingled with a little fear. (Shelley, 182). On the day of the wedding, she is described as "melancholy", and ". her temper was fluctuating joy for a few instants shone in her eyes, but it continually gave place to distraction and reverie" (Shelley, 183,4). These dismal feelings over their marriage, clearly expressed by both Frankenstein and Elizabeth, come to a devastating conclusion as Elizabeth is murdered by the very being that Frankenstein placed all his energy into creating. Thus, the relationship between a man and a woman that seemed so suited for each other is tragically destroyed.

Freud explains the reason for repression of love and sexual desires in society through the interpretation of the character of women. He suggests that women, after establishing their desire for a family and sexual life, are disappointed by man's repression of these feelings, and therefore do the same. This cycle is expressed in the story of Frankenstein. Elizabeth is initially very passionate and loving, yet her desires are continually muted by Frankenstein's increasing occupation with his loathsome creation. As their relationship unfolds, it is apparent that Mary Shelley adds a twist to Freud's

theory. Frankenstein comes to represent an antithesis to the work of civilization as he wildly creates his monster. As Elizabeth's cultural desires for love and a family are repressed by Frankenstein's actions, she comes to identify what is terribly wrong with the way men go about their work. Therefore, Elizabeth now represents how men should carry out the work of civilization. The monster that drew Frankenstein's attention away from Elizabeth finally causes the dreadful expiration to their relationship. Perhaps, then, Freud errs in assuming that the discord he speaks of is, ". . .caused by women. . ." (Freud, 33). As Elizabeth exhibits, it is simply the woman's nature to be strongly in tune to loving, and it is clearly the actions of Frankenstein that cruelly rob her of that desire. Shelley, although accurately following Freud's logic, also points out that a man's selfish and complete involvement in the occupations his culture sets for him is detrimental to the spirit of his woman, and does not allow for the cultivation or survival of a deep and pure love.