

MUSIC: [BBC Sounds intro music plays]

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MUSIC: [organ music plays, then Gothic music]

HOLLIE McNISH: Hi and welcome to our Bitesize English Literature podcast. I'm Hollie McNish, and in this series I'm breaking down the key themes in "Frankenstein" to get you ready for your GCSE. Joining me to talk all things "Frankenstein" is Steven Camden, AKA Polarbear.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Hello. I'm ready.

HOLLIE McNISH: You're ready?

STEVEN CAMDEN: Are you ready?

HOLLIE McNISH: I'm ready! I'm so ready! So, before we get started, remember that there's more info on "Frankenstein" on the BBC Bitesize web pages, so check those out. I used Bitesize when I was studying for my GCSEs and it really helped me, so I'm so happy to be here doing this.

In this podcast series we're talking through the key themes in "Frankenstein". We'll take you through character by character and give you some quotes to remember.

In this Gothic novel, Victor Frankenstein wants to create life but ends up building what some have referred to as a monster. Victor Frankenstein takes one look at the creature he's created and is so horrified by what he sees that he runs away.

The creature is then shunned by everyone he comes across because of the way he looks, so the creature takes his revenge. In this episode we're looking at a key theme: prejudice.

MUSIC: [Gothic music plays]

HOLLIE McNISH: So, Steven, let's talk about the word "prejudice". What does it mean exactly?

STEVEN CAMDEN: So shall we define "prejudice", coming from "pre-judge", like deciding you don't like something or someone without getting to know them; you just make up your mind about something before you actually know anything about it.

HOLLIE McNISH: Okay. So let's hear a section from the text. The creature has realised people are scared of him because of the way he looks. He's been secretly watching a family called the DeLaceys and learning from them. He finally plucks up the courage to knock on the door when one of the DeLaceys, who is blind, is home and alone. So this is the creature talking to the old man and explaining what his plan is.

CLIP

THE CREATURE: I am going to claim the protection of some friends whom I sincerely love and of whose favour I have some hopes.

OLD MAN: I wish you luck.

THE CREATURE: These amiable people to whom I go have never seen me and know little of me. I am full of fears for if I fail there am I an outcast in the world forever.

OLD MAN: Oh, to be friendless is indeed to be unfortunate, but the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of charity.

THE CREATURE: They are kind, but where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend they may behold only a detestable monster.

END OF CLIP

HOLLIE McNISH: So, the full quote to look at here from the text, this is the creature saying this to the old blind man in the DeLacey family, so he says, "A fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend they behold only a detestable monster." So the prejudice against the creature is visual, it's all because of his appearance. He waits until this old man, De Lacey, who is blind, he waits till he's alone so he can go and talk to him.

STEVEN CAMDEN: He's learnt that the way he looks is what is repellent to people, so he chooses his moment, right? [HOLLIE: Yeah.] And if may-, perhaps if it was just the old man he'd be fine, but then the family come back.

HOLLIE McNISH: So let's keep talking about the DeLaceys because their prejudice is-, is really interesting in this text. Remember to write down quotes and key words. We're gonna come back to this quote in a minute. I find it so sad that the DeLaceys reject the creature, because they're in hiding themselves, aren't they?

STEVEN CAMDEN: The DeLaceys have fled because of a political problem, and the creature's been watching them and notices that they don't have much themselves either. Early on he's kind of stealing food from them and empathises with them so much over time that he stops stealing their food because he realises they don't have much.

HOLLIE McNISH: And he helps them out.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Exactly. If ever there was a chance for this kind of connection, here it is. But even then he knows to choose his moment.

HOLLIE McNISH: He's helping them, he's bringing them firewood, he's-, he's being their friend, but he knows that just 'cause of the way he looks they-, they'd run a mile if they saw him. He-, and he says – I come back to the quote: "A fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend they behold only a detestable monster." This is such a moment for me, [STEVEN: Yeah.] where we really know that the creature fully understands [STEVEN: There's an awareness there, right?] prejudice.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Right, yeah, completely, there's an awareness of what it is. And it's also that "fatal" prejudice. There's even a hint of like – it's almost like foreshadowing for what comes later, [HOLLIE: Yeah.] right? 'Cause it ends up being true. Lots of people die.

HOLLIE McNISH: Yeah, lots of people die. In terms of the language I think this is a really great quote as well. I'm gonna say it again. "A fatal prejudice clouds their eyes and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend [laughs] they behold only a detestable monster." I was only laughing there – it's not a funny quote, but it was because I found alliteration. [STEVEN: Alliteration, yeah, of course.]

I like to find alliteration in everything. But, "A feeling and kind friend," the "feeling" and the "friend" both begin with an F. That's alliteration.

It's-, again, it's the same, this "feeling" and "friend", this desperation for companionship. Also it's-, th-, it's really strong imagery. It's-, and this idea of "fatal prejudice clouds their eyes," it's as if it's-, it's not even-, it's not even their fault, it's just the prejudice is so strong that [STEVEN: Engrained in them.] it's just clouding their vision, like they cannot-, like they can't see who he is, [STEVEN: Yeah.] they can only see a monster.

And one more thing about the language I think that's important here as well is that it's very opinionated, [STEVEN: Yeah.] this quote: "A fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they OUGHT

to see..." The creature is actually saying they OUGHT to see; "I know who I am." They "ought to see a feeling and kind friend" – he's been helping them with the firewood, you know, he's stopped taking the food. And this is for me the point where it starts turning, that he really understands how-, how all the world is against him, and he uses the word "monster" importantly. He describes how other people see him as a monster. He understands this.

MUSIC: [organ music plays]

HOLLIE McNISH: Let's think about the creature, 'cause obviously the creature is a main character through which we talk about prejudice in this text.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah, it's the first thing he experiences, right, basically the-, the person who created him taking one look and running away.

HOLLIE McNISH: Imagine.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Well, I don't want to, but yes. And like... and there's just the sadness of it, how much prejudice people have.

HOLLIE McNISH: There are also just words, like words that are so important in terms of the theme of prejudice. And I think it's easier to remember them all at once. So the creature is called...

STEVEN CAMDEN: Monster. Wretch. Filthy. Demon at one point?

HOLLIE McNISH: Yeah. Awful.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah. And they – more than once, right? There were-, there are references to these things more than once in terms of other people's but also his own perception of himself.

HOLLIE McNISH: That single word is still a quote.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah.

HOLLIE McNISH: So "monster", "wretch", "filthy", "demon", put them all in quotation marks, list them. If you can remember two, put them in.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Talk about why Shelley's choosing them.

MUSIC: [organ music plays]

HOLLIE McNISH: So remember that this Gothic novel is-, is written by someone. It's written by a teenage girl, it's written by Mary Shelley. She chose to write this, she chose the words and she chose the language. The author always chooses words and phrases to put into the characters' mouths on purpose. So just-, just always remember that.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Is it worth mentioning about her parents?

HOLLIE McNISH: Yes. So, who were her parents?

STEVEN CAMDEN: So, her mother was Mary Wollstonecraft who was a c-, active campaigner for women's rights, and her dad William Godwin was a philosopher and also interested in personal freedoms.

HOLLIE McNISH: So her life was imbued – like, so much discussion of prejudice–

STEVEN CAMDEN: –Yeah, it would have been around. Completely. That's what it looks like, yeah.

MUSIC: [Gothic music plays]

HOLLIE McNISH: William Frankenstein is Victor Frankenstein's little brother. And before the creature murders William, William calls him an ogre. So this is another word in that list of words we've had – monster, wretch, filthy, demon, and then ogre.

Let's talk about William quickly, because even though he's only in this text for one brief scene he's really important. And remember, Mary Shelley chose to include a child specifically being murdered, so why?

STEVEN CAMDEN: Well, it's almost like kind of saying that if-, if even a child is prejudiced then this-, this creature has no hope whatsoever. It's like how complete prejudice can be. It can affect – like, so

this-, this-, this child has heard stories about ogres. What I find interesting about this is that even in-, in the quote he said-, he calls him-, he says, "You are an ogre," but in the line before he says, "You wish to eat me and tear me to pieces." Ingrained in this kid are these stories of ogres, and here he is confronted by one, and-, and tells-, almost tells the creature what it's going to do.

HOLLIE McNISH: Yeah.

STEVEN CAMDEN: It's terrifying, man, when you think about it!

HOLLIE McNISH: It is terrifying. And it's really important because I think for-, for me this character just makes me question the prejudices that – well, we still have them in fairy tales, there's a lot of discussion of that nowadays, and this idea, this ogre, and monster, is the same, these are words that children know.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah, and are passed down through generations, right? And will carry on being passed down, who is good and who is bad based on what they look like.

HOLLIE McNISH: Yeah.

MUSIC: [organ music plays]

HOLLIE McNISH: The next character we're gonna talk about is Justine Moritz because she also experiences prejudice. She's an important character here. Get her in your exam. Even-, even with a sentence about Justine there are so many examples of prejudice in this text, but the character of Justine is the character through which Mary Shelley also demonstrates class prejudice.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah. She's a servant, she's a friend of the family, but she's-, she works for them, essentially.

HOLLIE McNISH: Yes. So just quickly.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Mm-hmm?

HOLLIE McNISH: What prejudice does Justine face?

STEVEN CAMDEN: Well, it's the idea of people in power being more important, right, and who is expendable. I think gender comes into it as well. When she gets framed for the murder, which we're gonna talk about in the Justice one, even Victor himself doesn't speak up, but there is a kind of-, an-, an unsaid thing that it's-, it's all right because it's somebody who's not on the same social status.

HOLLIE McNISH: Yeah, it's a working-class woman.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah.

HOLLIE McNISH: And she dies.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah.

HOLLIE McNISH: It's a really small but very important and very strong storyline for the theme of prejudice and also for the theme of justice.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah, we're gonna get into it more.

MUSIC: [organ music plays]

HOLLIE McNISH: So before we go we'll go over this once more. Prejudice is visual. People think the creature is evil simply because of the way he looks. He's called "monster", "wretch", "filthy", "demon"; he's called "ogre" by a child. The creature knows this, he learns about this prejudice, which is good for the theme of knowledge to talk about, and he tries to befriend a blind man because he thinks that only a blind man could possibly not judge him.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah.

HOLLIE McNISH: And the quote here: "A fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend they behold only a detestable monster." That prejudice clouding their eyes.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Worth mentioning the words as well, "prejudice against poorer people." Just being the servant, framed for the-, for William's death, and everyone believes she did it without-, even before the trial 'cause it makes sense because she is of a lower class. [HOLLIE: Yeah.] That prejudice of the above and the below.

HOLLIE McNISH: So so many different ideas of prejudice to get in, and a lot of different characters that you can use clear examples from.

STEVEN CAMDEN: Yeah.

MUSIC: [music plays]

HOLLIE McNISH: Thanks for listening to this Bitesize English Literature podcast. You can find even more help and advice from the Bitesize team, just search "Bitesize" on BBC Sounds.

In the next episode we're gonna be talking about a theme that links closely to prejudice: justice.

MUSIC: [Gothic and organ music plays]

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