

"frankenstein" by mary shelley essay sample

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Frankenstein is regarded one of the best Gothic novels because it beautifully and artistically blends the natural philosophy, scientific spirit of 19th century, Mary Shelley's own literary influences and her individual vision and literary craft. A close analysis of her (Mary Shelley's) subjective approach and critical evaluation of the text of novel reinforces the truth that Percy Shelley's proclaimed of his wife's writing. He says:

(Frankenstein is) one of the most original and complete productions of the day. We debate with ourselves in wonder, as we read it, what could have been the Series of thoughts what could have been the peculiar experiences that Awakened them which conduced, in the author's mind, to the astonishing Combinations of motives and incidents and the startling catastrophe, which Compose this tale (Shelley 4).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* offers a variety of thematic interpretations for example, " marxist economics, radical feminism, green politics, and, most recently genetics and biotechnology", (Goulding, 2002). Furthermore, moral, sociological and creative implications of her story are also manifold that further broaden its scope. Shelley also takes into account the social and historical perspective and tries to interpret the social and psychological phenomenon in relation to contemporary historical factors.

The two major characters of the novel, Victor Frankenstein and his monster, are conflation of each other. As the novel progresses, Frankenstein and his monster vie for the role of protagonist. The monster that Frankenstein created manifests itself as an identification of the traits and qualities of his creator. Although no physical and social resemblance exists between them

but their personality traits, thought patterns and their intents toward humanity make them analogous. Levine (1973) illustrates that the monster and Frankenstein are two sides of the same coin. He depicts that Frankenstein creates the monster and that, as they pursue their separate lives, they increasingly resemble and depend upon each other so that by the end Frankenstein pursues his own monster, their positions reversed, and the monster plants clues to keep Frankenstein in pursuit. As Frankenstein's creation, the monster can be taken as an expression of an aspect of Frankenstein's self: the monster is a sort of New Critical art object, leading an apparently independent organic life of its own and yet irremediably and subtly tied to its creator, re-enacting in mildly disguised ways, his creator's feelings and experiences. (Levine. 1973).

Benevolence is a substantial feature of Frankenstein and development of the story shows that monster also possesses such personality traits of kindness and humanity. Frankenstein friends admire him. The ship captain, Walton, who rescues him, had all praises for him. Captain Walton refers him as a fallen angel who is still graceful in his devastation and says, "What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity," again writes Walton, "when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin!" (Shelley. p. 210). Frankenstein's greatness lies in the fact that he is revered by his worst enemy (monster) who describes him as, "Oh, Frankenstein! Generous and self-devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me?" (Shelley. p. 219). His evils and malevolence do not mar his good characteristics and tendencies. Same is the case with monster. Although he is often regarded as a savage devoid of any human tendency but in reality,

he is as benevolent and kind as his creator, Victor Frankenstein. So evil manifested by monster in the later part of the novel is not innate and an essential part of his being but it was the materialization of revenge. It was a reaction of the pathos and miseries he was afflicted with by humans. For example, his acts of kindheartedness to cottage-dwellers and saving the life of a child were returned with unsubstantiated abhorrence. But yet again his intentions toward humans were nobler and full of benevolence.

In addition to Frankenstein's benevolent aspiration to "banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death" (p. 40), his self-devotion is an important factor in the creation of monster. These two motives create a dual nature in him. Although his intents are virtuous but his ambition or self devotion capacitates him to go to any extent to get his objective accomplished. Levine reinforces this idea in these words that "His vices are the defects of his virtues: it was the desire both for glory and to aid mankind that led him to create the monster." (Levine, 1973) The monster displays a parallel duality of nature and generates the paradoxical feelings in reader toward him i. e. of sympathy as well as of dismay. For example, his love for Elizabeth and murder for the purpose to get him is reflection of this ambivalent personality.

Monster ambitiousness is similar to Frankenstein. Furthermore, it makes him to learn and devise new ways of expressing himself. The major dilemma with his ambitiousness is not devotion like Frankenstein but it is self-identification. He educates himself by reading such phrases of *Paradise Lost*. "Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come?" (p. 125) that generates in

him an urge to locate his identity and that becomes the ultimate cause of his tragedy.

By their own accounts, both Frankenstein and the monster start with munificent intentions and turn out to be murderers. The monster may appear more considerate because he is by nature an outsider, whereas Frankenstein intentionally eliminates himself from society. However, in the end, both cease to live with 'troubled hearts in a troubled society.'

Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* has also been characterized as feminine book with feminist agenda. Earlier feminist critics have attributed various feminist themes to Frankenstein. They analyzed the whole novel in the feminist framework and tried to interpret the various themes associated with feminism. These expressions of feminist view clearly manifest that Frankenstein is an epitome of Shelly's concern for feminine status and stature in the 18th century patriarchal society.

Mellor, the highly acclaimed feminist critic of Shelley's work, is of the view that *Frankenstein* is an epitome of feminist assessment on the progression of science in gender-biased socio-cultural milieu. She is of the view that "*Frankenstein* is rapidly becoming an essential text for our exploration of female consciousness and literary technique" (Mellor 6). On analysis of women character, she finds that women characters are frail and feeble. To explore this theme further, she concentrates on the character of Elizabeth and says that her role in the family is larger than other characters in the novel but like other female characters, her role lacks the essence of a powerful disposition. She further asserts that "Mary Shelley was aware of <https://assignbuster.com/frankenstein-by-mary-shelley-essay-sample/>

the damaging consequences of scientific, objective, alienated view of both nature and human labor" (Mellor, 114).

Johanna M. Smith (1989) also explores feminist themes in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. She asserts that in *Frankenstein*, female and male sphere are separated and females are subjugated to male characters. She further tries to reinforce the view that only purpose of female characters in the novel is to replicate and support the male characters.

Shelley uses the form of the novel i. e. weak characterization of the female characters and their triviality in the overall development of the plot to illustrate the weak social position of women in the 18th century. Shelley has created a complete disparity in the domestic life of the two genders and separation of their spheres of activities. Another characteristic of Shelley's work is that she subtly and beautifully merges these feminist themes in the grand structure of her novel.

There are some inherent weaknesses in novel, thematically and technically. (Bloom, 1985) *Frankenstein* is merely a mirror image of the " Romantic mythology of the self" (Bloom, 4). Technically, Bloom indicates novel's " frequent clumsiness in its narrative and characterization" (Bloom 4) and criticizes that it " lacks the sophistication and imaginative complexity" (Bloom, 4) as compared with other romantic works such as Lord Byron's *Manfred* and Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* . Despite these facts, *Frankenstein* is regarded as a masterpiece in the contemporary literary world that examines female condition in 19th century society. Overall, *Frankenstein* is a thought provoking Romantic novel that catches the

attention of the readers and critics alike and urges them to contemplate over some issues pertaining to social and scientific morality.

References

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