

# Frankenstein and english romanticism



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The literary world embraced English Romanticism when it began to emerge and was

so taken by its elements that it is still a beloved experience for the reader of

today. Romanticism “has crossed all social boundaries,” and it was during

the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it found its way into almost every niche

in the literary world (Lowy 76). From the beginning of its actuality,

“Romanticism has forged its way through many eras including the Civil War”

(Hall 44). Literature such as “the famous *Gone With the Wind* was a good

example of Romanticism in that era because it had many of the required

qualities” but there were others that were even more clear as English

Romantic pieces (Hall 44). There are very few works that have a more accurate

portrayal and proof of the importance of English Romanticism than Mary

Shelley's *Frankenstein*. While later versions of the stories depicted a central

theme of a helpless monster caught in the fears of society the actual depiction

of the original work was based more closely on the English Romantic that was

so

popular at the time. The importance of emotions and feelings were paramount

during the era of English romanticism. In addition autobiographical material was

extremely popular. All of these qualities were present in Mary Shelley's

Frankenstein including a third and vital underpinning of romanticism, the

innocence and exaltation of the common man. An important element of romanticism

is the use of flowing feelings. During this time period, men as well as women

were full of raw emotions in literary works. They would freely vent their most anguished thoughts and worries. This was evident in several of the chapters in

Shelley's portrayal of the life of the monster and the people he encountered.

One of the finest examples of romanticism is when the monster who we must

remember is only learning emotions for the first time runs from the cottage

after startling the occupants. Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in

that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so

wantonly bestowed? I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me;

my

feelings were those of rage and revenge. (Shelley 746) This passage demonstrates

feelings that were a common theme during the Romanticist era, the monster was in

pain and cursing the day he was created. Another important element of

romanticism is the connection of the author to the story. The autobiographical

nature of Mary Shelleys Frankenstein is at first not openly obvious as it is

in many other literary works. One could ask, how a book about a monster could

have anything to do with the real life of the author, but if we peel the top

layer away and look closely at the undercurrent that is throughout the

monsters story it becomes clear that “ Victor Frankensteins creation is

symbolic of Mary Shelleys life” (Caprio). Shelleys mother left her at an

early age by dying. She had been Shelleys creator in much the same manner

that Dr. Frankenstein had been the monsters creator. When the creator of the

monster turned his back on him and deserted him he was forced out into the

world, much as a small child in that he had limited exposure to anything outside

the former security of his home. Shelley too, “ was thrust into the world, when

her mother died; the difference is that she was an actual child while the monster was a mental and emotional child” (Hamberg). This uses two of the needed ingredients for romanticism, autobiographical ideas and imagery.

The book

may also be a representation of a fear of childbirth felt by the author. This would not be surprising given that her own mother died giving birth to Shelley.

It would explain the monsters creation and in fact the very reason he is a monster at all. Shelley may have viewed herself as a monster who was so hideous

that she killed her own mother being born. This would fit right in with the autobiographical themes that were so prevalent during the English Romanticism

era of that period (Caprio). In addition one of the side themes of the book may

have been about creation and the painful things creation can cause. Just as

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Frankenstein did not ask to be created yet lived with the pain that his creation

cause, Shelley never asked to be born, yet had to live with the pain that her birth caused, not only herself but her family that was robbed of a loved one.

The book examines the many issues that come with being rejected by parents and

being abused by the societal expectations. It was also representative of the way

society held women in the time. Women were weak in literary works and prone to

fainting. The women who encountered the monster in the cottage “ indeed played

true to form and fainted while Felix attacked physically,” which was also true

to form when it came to the gender roles of the era (Zschrirnt 48). The

exaltation and admiration was a common and central theme during that era.

The

story of the monster is a shining example of the admiration we held for simple

men during that time period. The monster begins as a simple and somewhat

mindless creature who, by being tossed into the world with little knowledge of

the workings, is lost. As he finds his way by hiding and observing the cottage people he begins to understand the ways of humans. He learns to speak by observance and hard work and in addition teaches himself to read. The entire

system that the monster must use to survive touched the hearts of many readers

and still does, in that he was a common creature, not unlike the common man. His

ability to pull himself up by the bootstraps, and to “ overcome the problems such as lack of language skills underscored the common mans life” and still does to some extent (Brigham 195). In addition the theme that he worked hard at

becoming acceptable then was dashed once again when the world at large refused

to see past his physical attributes (or metaphorically his commonness)

“ further underscored the dilemma of the neoclassical society that the English

Romanticist author tried to combat” (Brigham 195). Frankenstein may not have

fit the mold for a regular literary work of English Romanticism however when we

examine the symbolism, the metaphors, and the central theme imparted by Shelley

we will see that it is actually one of the finest examples in the literary world

today of English Romanticism (Pipkin). The myths of the era of Greek

Mythological stories enjoyed resurgence during the time that Frankenstein was

penned. Frankenstein's creation could of course never be real; he was a” myth that mirrored society's fears and the author's self-examination”

(Cantor 411). This was “ common to many of Plato's writings and was popular

again during the English Romanticism era” (Cantor 411). Many feelings in

the story of Frankenstein were painted with verbal pictures. Picture that told a

story of society refusing to accept anyone who was different regardless of how

they attempted to get along and fit in with their norms. Authors of English

Romanticism often used their own life stories to play out supposedly fictions

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adventures. It was most likely a therapeutic attempt to unload the inner feelings of abandonment or other feelings and emotions that plagued people. It

was especially interesting that the genre had the men in the stories also being

open about the torturous feelings they were subjected to. This perhaps was” pinpointing the need to express feelings that were not characteristically allowed by men at that time and in fact are still depressed by society” (Heffernan

133). Frankenstein is a strong example of English Romanticism. It had the autobiographical qualities in by telling the story of author Mary Shelley's life. It also used the symbolism that was so often used in the novels of the period. This was illustrated by having a monster as the protagonist of the story. The monster was representative of the rejection and the abuse Shelley herself suffered. Frankenstein is a classic example of English Romanticism that has become a classic literary work.

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