

Frankenstein: a romantic novel



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What characterizes a piece of writing as a " Romantic" work? During the eighteenth century, writers began to move away from the cities and the technology to focus on the beauty of nature. The Romantic poets strayed from the typical didactic poems and began to place their focus on the reality and beauty of life. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's famous novel Frankenstein has been considered by many a Romantic novel for centuries; but should it? The graphic horror and death in this novel make some question its place in the Romantic canon. Though the death is prevalent in this novel, it should be considered " Romantic" because of its traditional themes. Frankenstein contains Romantic themes including: a reverence for nature, outcasts and neglected characters, supernatural events, and most prevalent is the identification of the Shelley her characters. Shelley's first use of Romantic themes is her fascination with nature. Not as prevalent as Wordsworth or Coleridge, her use of nature is slightly subdued. Nature does not serve an all beautiful purpose as other Romantic authors. It does, however, require reverence and awe from the characters. Shelley uses nature to show the importance of a scene in her novel. During all of the crucial scenes in this novel, the recurring theme of a storm is present. For example, the night that the creature first awakened was stormy and rainy. When Frankenstein heard of his brother's death, he traveled back home to Geneva. As he was walking through the night, the storm steadily grew more intense by the minute. " While I watched the storm, so beautiful yet terrific... This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits; I clasped my hands and exclaimed aloud, 'William, dear angel! This is thy funeral, this thy dirge,'" (Norton Anthology, 946). The storm complimented Frankenstein's mood; and though the storm was fierce and terrible, he could do nothing but be in awe of its power. It was then that the

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creature appeared to him, creating a climax in the scene and for the storm. On the night that the monster murdered Elizabeth, " suddenly a heavy storm of rain descended," (Norton Anthology, 1016). During the day the weather was completely clear, a beautiful day. Once night fell in, however, a storm blew in to indicate that something horrible was about to occur. Frankenstein felt that nature mocked him at times. Though he loved its beauty and stood in awe of its power, he felt it betrayed him when he was miserable. After traveling to Geneva, Frankenstein walks the land while contemplating his brother's horrific death during the day. While looking up at the beautiful mountains, Frankenstein cries out: "'Dear mountains! My own beautiful lake! How do you welcome your wanderer? Your summits are clear; the sky and lake are blue and placid. Is this to prognosticate peace, or to mock at my unhappiness?'" (Norton Anthology, 945). Shelley's use of nature in this instance shows that nature continues unchangingly, while the lives of people change from event to event, emotion to emotion. As night falls, however, and the storm begins, Shelley shows the tempests that occur in our own lives. At night, the storms mirror Frankenstein's mood, but during the day, he feels its beauty mocks him. Another common theme of the Romantic authors focused on the neglected and the outcasts from society. Shelley most definitely accomplishes this with the two main characters: Frankenstein and his monster. The creature was an outcast for obvious reasons. He looked like a monster - even his own creator was horrified of him. Frankenstein describes him: " A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch," (Norton Anthology, 935). His appearance caused him to be cast off from society completely. Even when he acted for the good of others, he was only repaid with anger, hatred, and violence. Frankenstein

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made himself an outcast: first from shying away from society while he worked feverishly day and night and secondly from the results of his creation's vengeance. Holed away in his laboratory, he thought: " I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed," (Norton Anthology, 934). As he creates the monster, he creates solitude for himself. His friends begin to worry about him because he stays shut up in his lab. As the novel progresses and the creature begins to destroy his family and friends, Frankenstein finds himself even more outcast. He realizes that he has brought this pain and suffering upon himself; he also realizes that he is better off cut off from society because he feels this is where he belongs. Frankenstein knows that he deserves what is happening to him because of his desire to create life.