

Frankenstein by mary shelley argumentative essay



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New Historicism Criticism attempts to relive a textual work through the time of the author who created it, taking into account norms, ideals, prejudices, and any other subjective experiences that the author of the time would hold. Basically, a literary theory that suggests that literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of both history of the author and history of critic and time period.

Historical Context

New Historicism is the modified and contemporary version of Historicism and challenges literary critiques to evaluate a text not only based on how it mirrors the historical background of society and literary qualities of a work of literature but also the social sphere and cultural aspects of the text.

New Historicism focus on analyzing and critiquing text through knowledge of the social, political, historical and cultural forces that interrelate with the text and with the writer of the text.

“ Historical Criticism looks for evidence about the economic, social, and political events going on at the time a literary was produced to explain the content of its literary works.” (Sandford)

Key Contributors

Stephen Greenblatt was a Renaissance scholar and the father of the contemporary literary criticism, which consequently makes him “ as the major figure commonly associated with New Historicism” (Felluga). In his work, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1980), he delivers insight on Renaissance values. Greenblatt provides readers and Renaissance

scholars with accounts that are derived from personal experiences rather than facts. This work provided the foundation of New Historicism as a form of cultural studies and also made the public and scholars aware that questions about the power relations underpinning the production of the historical texts are vital in literary analysis.

Michel Foucault was a philosopher that solidified the true definition of New Historicism by encouraging critiques to take account of all the possible social, political and cultural aspects of an author or literary creator. Foucault believed “there is no “essence” of a human mind, but rather “outer” knowledge-or history.” Foucault explains that to appreciate the purpose and true depth of a text critiques must “understand the work through its historical context and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature”(Felluga). In his work *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault builds on the idea of history as a chain of major ideologies that have shaped and have in turn been shaped by the culture of each historical period. In short, Foucault believed that “there is no pure truth, only ideologies.”

Analysis of Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

In Mary Shelley’s 1818 Novel *Frankenstein*, she illustrates personal psychological and social cultural aspects that develop the basis of criticism through New Historicism. Literary analysts believe that Shelley’s novel acted as a tool for her to reflect her personal experiences into her writing. This personal revelation of Shelley’s mental and familial state allow readers to comprehend the depth and true meaning of *Frankenstein* by understanding the hardships faced by the author that caused Shelly to produced a literary

masterpiece. Using New Historicism one is able to conclude that Shelley used her beliefs on the French Revolution, beliefs of feminism, and familial ties as an advantage to create Frankenstein.

French Revolution of 1787 is said to be the most controversial historical act in the classification of what constitutes what human beings deserve and what they receive. Shelley's novel discusses the aftermath of the iconic revolution. Since Shelley lived in England during the publication of Frankenstein, she witnessed the impact on the public of Europe, and the freedom sensed once the oppression of the middle class or bourgeoisie was lifted. Shelly connects the French Revolution to her literary masterpiece by painting the scene of the outcome of the revolution in her novel.

Furthermore, Shelley evidently displays "the idealistic desire to liberate all men from the oppression of tyranny and mortality" (Boyd).

Shelley forces her readers to understand what it truly means to take responsibility for our actions (or in this case our creations) and face what consequences come with wrong decisions, decisions which lead to a loss of one over the gain of another. Victor wanted to create or play the role of God as part of an experiment but what he neglected to realize was what is that the creation wanted to play God too and control his own destiny, like the oppressed people in French society. In parallels to French society, the monster wished for equality and freedom from oppression by society.

Mary Shelley was an advocate of feminism and finding a voice to express women. In her novel Frankenstein, Shelley creates a plot where an outcast is abandoned by his creator and is forced to survive on his own instincts and

resources. Shelley creates a parallel to the role of women in society to her novel by expressing the need of survival through knowledge. Frankenstein acts as a symbol to what women in society (at that time) were forced to behave like and the monster in a constant reminder of self-education and the struggles and hardships of women. In the following excerpt from a personal research paper by Katherine Swan the need for education by women and by the monster it explained; " The monster's method of education in Shelley's Frankenstein parallels the situations Shelley alluded to.

When the monster meets his creator at last, there must be an explanation of how he came so far in the world; to this end, Shelley creates a whole history for the monster, in which he educates himself by eavesdropping on the De Lacey family. At first, the monster strives only to understand language: " I cannot describe the delight I felt when I learned the ideas appropriated to each of these sounds, and was able to pronounce them" (Shelley 109)."

Shelley emphasizes the importance of knowledge and how knowledge was limited to women, which ultimately resulted in the restriction of the power of women in English society.

Mary Shelley's challenging life is portrayed through her novel by showing her value of family and life. In Shelley's private journal she writes about a peculiar dream; " Dreamt that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived. Awake and find no baby. I think about the little thing all day."

In this passage Shelley had a dream in bringing her deceased child back to life through " fire" Shelley creates a tone of pity and compassion, she

appeals to mothers and describes how the loss of a loved one can make one think the impossible. Much like Victor, Shelley dreamt to play God and take fate into her hands, to make something so unnatural seem acceptable. The monster that Victor sought to create is a direct reflection of what drives people to insanity. The affect of loneliness and the desire to create compelled Victor and Shelley to defy nature and the difference between logic and emotion.