

Genre in Frankenstein

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What is Genre?

Genre is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “a style or category of art, music or literature”. In this case, genre is the basic theme and atmosphere of a book. A genre is not a set of rules, it does not define any settings, ideas or character stereotypes that need to be in the book. Instead, it is a label used to group similar texts, with commonalities in their plot, setting, character development, and most importantly, mood. A book can fit in multiple different genres, or have none at all.

What is Gothic fiction?

Gothic Fiction is a subgenre of Gothic Horror, originated from Horace Walpole's 1764 novel The Castle of Otranto. The genre combines Fiction with Horror and has themes of death and romance. Gothic fiction has a tendency to have emphasis on emotion and pleasurable terror which serves as an extension of the romantic literary genre which was popular around the time that Horace Walpole's novel was published. A "pleasure" that is said to be felt while reading Gothic fiction was the indescribable feeling that takes us "beyond ourselves". The literary genre originated in England and was further enhanced by many authors such as Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, William Thomas Beckford and Matthew Lewis to name a few. The genre had widespread success in the 19th century with the publication of Mary Shelley's, Frankenstein and the works of Edgar Allan Poe. The name Gothic, refers to Goth which is stereotyped to be eerie, mysterious, complex and exotic. Gothic also relates to early gothic architecture of the medieval era of European history, where most of gothic fiction stories take place.

How does this relate to Frankenstein?

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is widely considered to be the most famous gothic horror novel. It not only pioneered incorporating fear into novels, but also defined the gothic horror subgenre. The basis of gothic horror; fear, death and romance, form the foundation of the text, upon which the plot was built. The novel is engineered to scare the audience, to challenge their idea of mortality and to entertain them with a thrilling story at the same time. This literary architecture can be seen in nearly all gothic horror texts that followed Frankenstein, such as the later works of Edgar Allan Poe, and, most famously, Bram Stoker's Dracula.

What is Romantic Literature?

Romantic literature is from the romanticism literary period, which spanned from 1790 to 1850. The term ‘Romanticism’ did not directly come from the concept of love, but rather from the French word *romaunt*, which means a romantic story told in verse. Romanticism emerged after the French revolution as a revolt against the Age of Enlightenment political ideas and social norms, as well as a reaction against the scientific rationalisation of nature. Romanticism has six key common features; the celebration of nature, focus on the individual and spirituality, celebration of isolation and melancholy, interest in the common man, and personification and pathetic fallacy.

Romantic Literatures Key Features Pt.I

Celebration of nature

"The Romantics believed in Pantheism, the idea that God existed in everything in nature and in human beings as well. They didn't believe that it was necessary to rely on ministers and books, or even to attend church to be religious. They felt one could find God everywhere in everything, especially in nature." This relates to Frankenstein as nature is celebrated frequently throughout Frankenstein, representing discovery and isolation through setting and interaction with characters Victor and the Creature. Nature is also celebrated in Frankenstein through the theme of 'messing with nature', where Victor changes the natural order by creating the Creature, and the repercussions of this with the death of his family and friends.

Celebration of isolation and melancholy

Isolation is a key theme in Frankenstein, where we see both Frankenstein and the Creature as isolated characters, however the key difference between them is that one of them chose to isolate themselves from their family and the rest of society, while the other was forcibly isolated against their wishes. We also see themes of isolation through Shelley's use of setting. Settings such as the Swiss Alps and the Arctic emphasise the feelings of isolation that Shelley is trying to show.

Romantic literatures key features Pt.2

Idealisation of women

The theme of women is important in Frankenstein and reoccurs throughout the novel. The main characters of Frankenstein are men, but women make up important characters for the progression of the book. The first woman who is 'idealised' is Frankenstein's mother, who is idealised by her motherly figure and physical beauty. Her death triggers Frankenstein's need to create life from the dead. We also have characters such as Elizabeth and Justine who represent beauty, femininity and innocence. The fourth way that women are idealised in Frankenstein is the Creature's need for a female companion. Women are objectified and treated as a prize, which is a reflection of the time period but interesting as Mary Shelley herself was a woman.

Personification and pathetic fallacy

Pathetic fallacy is a literary term for the attribution of human emotion and conduct to things found in nature that are not human. An example is 'Its fair lakes reflect a blue and gentle sky; and, when troubled by the winds, their tumult is but as the play of a lively infant, when compared to the roarings of the giant ocean.' Pathetic fallacies used by Shelley in Frankenstein to emphasise the role that nature plays in 'Frankenstein', as a powerful force that should not be messed with but also its healing abilities in relation to Victor. Personification and pathetic fallacies link with another key feature of romanticism; celebration of nature.