

Student's name

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| CRITICAL ESSAY ON *FRANKENSTEIN* BY MARY SHELLEY

The world literature is full of names and titles which are on everyone's lips. The novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) written by a famous English writer Mary Shelley (1797-1851) is one of such works. The life of a Swiss scientist Frankenstein, who created a living being from the non-living matter and eventually became a victim and the executioner of this being, is considered to be a special mark which addresses almost all cultural layers. Although the discussion of the novel is sometimes far from the problem which was indicated by the author, it remains the first modern monster story. One of the prominent themes of "Frankenstein" is the problem of human existence and religion in general. Besides, there is a political and economic subtext in the novel which may be connected with the reading on Marx and Engels.

In the mass consciousness of the twentieth century, Frankenstein embodies the demonic features, transformed into a monster he created. Naturally, this novel, being the result of author's inspiration, was separated from the writer and began to live an independent life. Such a situation may be considered to be the result of numerous attempts at



screening of the novel and rewriting it.

Frankenstein went far beyond the notion of “gothic” novel in English literature, forming romantic novel structure. Redundant descriptions of monster’s cruelty could give a right to call the novel a “gothic” one, but as D. Varma claimed in his book “The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England” we cannot do this because of novel’s lofty intonation that is the characteristic feature of romantic literature.

In order to assess “Frankenstein” in a right way, one should take into consideration the fact that it occurred at the turn of three aesthetic systems: the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Gothic, so it is quite natural that it combines various ideological and artistic techniques.

Speaking about the reasons for the popularity of the novel, we may put the following questions. Why only first novel of Mary Shelley captures our attention and why is it considered to be the first modern monster story?

The answer seems to be obvious. In *Frankenstein*, the author raises a question of human existence, which was very important for philosophy, science and aesthetics for many centuries. Has the human being a right to act as a God and produce a living creature? Has he a right to interfere in the secrets of nature? Has he a right to know how the world was created?

Precisely this problem of creation of the universe, which was originally the God’s prerogative, attracts writers of the twentieth century, and many of them try to continue the story of Frankenstein. The permissiveness of Victor Frankenstein turned out to be conformable to many writers, who



followed the modernist and postmodernist aesthetics.

It seems that the sensational statements about the possibility of human cloning and the deciphering of the human genome influenced the investigation of the problem of a living being reconstruction in the literature greatly. The dilemma of Frankenstein, which is the contradiction between genius and scientist's responsibility for the implementation of his opening, is sure to be modified by other writers and is sure to be read by people. The novel *Frankenstein* formed the basic cultural view on mythology, which reflected the duality of the human mind.

It should be noted that Frankenstein's myth differs from the non-literature meaning and world reflection, when a person distinguishes himself out of the natural environment and gives the nature anthropological characteristics. *Frankenstein* is considered to be the product of romantic rethinking of cultural myth as well as becomes the basis of the modern neo-mythology.

The plot of the novel is a romantic interpretation of the myth of Prometheus, who stole the fire and saved the people from death. The multiple meaning of it made English romanticists use it and rebel against the norms of world existence.

We note that the problem of dichotomy of body and spirit, the Christian understanding of divine design in the Frankenstein's invention, the idea of monster's soul were introduced, not by Marry Shelley, but by interpreters of the text. Thus, such an interpretation is connected with the idea of new myth, when a secular story is viewed in the mainstream of Christian

culture.

Mary Shelley's novel, which was perceived by contemporaries as a kind of artistic experiment, arose at the turn of three aesthetics and managed to gain a firm standing in the culture of the twentieth century. It astonished readers with the strength of prognostics and turned out to be a peculiar warning and a message to future, which was realized like a mirror image.

Mary Shelley thought that her assumption was strictly forbidden to embody, and it was consonant to the civilizational context of the previous century, which gravitated to the entropy and authoritarian regimes. The belief in natural knowledge that seemed to be able to solve all the problems of humanity and support the idea of progressiveness, was dispelled by numerous wars, and real fear of Homo sapiens disappearance. The end of the twentieth century paid attention to the fact that cardinal discrepancy between civilization and culture may lead to the disastrous results.

Increasing interest to the humanitarian knowledge proved the following idea: the loss of moral values, the usage of culture for the civilization's sake lead to the almost irreversible consequences. The payment for scientific and technological innovations and for endless improvement for the sake of new improvements is so high that exceeds a critical level, and calls into question the existence of mankind, and the Earth in general.

Thus, at the turn of the XX and XXI centuries the novel *Frankenstein* is actualized as a memorial of literature and actualizes one of the most serious questions of civilization in general. Can the good intentions of the



scientist discover the path to Paradise? Are there some areas of knowledge that should remain unexplored? Victor Frankenstein, who was brought to life by the power of writer's imagination, gained a freedom for existence and generated a group of scientists by emphasizing the idea of humanitarian performance of scientific experiment.

One more aspect of the novel *Frankenstein* is based on the political and economic subtext, which becomes visible, due to the Marx and Engels' works on alienated labor. In their *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* they described the relationship between the worker and the object of his work. The principles of their philosophy described Frankenstein: the more time and efforts the worker uses for the creation of his object, the more detached it becomes. In this story, Frankenstein becomes a slave of his own creation, who in its turn becomes powerful and confronts the scientist.

The monster has much in common with the Marx's description of the products of labor. The monster does not know his creator as well as Frankenstein knows nothing about the monster and cannot predict his actions. The excessive effort of Dr. Frankenstein creates a being that he is not able to comprehend. Eventually, the scientist becomes a slave and the monster control the situation and creator's action.

Thus, relations between Victor Frankenstein and monster are a good example of the issues discussed by Marx and Engels though the novel was written before the manuscripts. Nevertheless, we may find some lines in their writing, which look as if they are the original commentaries to the Mary Shelley' novel.

Summing up the results, we may say for sure, that the novel *Frankenstein* written by Mary Shelley is one of the most prominent works of the nineteenth century. The main reason for the novel's popularity is that it makes readers discuss eternal problems such as existence, human power, knowledge, interaction between religion and science, politics and economics, creator and the object of his work. The importance of the major themes can be proved by the numerous attempts of many writers to continue or rewrite the novel as well as cinematography to film *Frankenstein*.

