

GUIDELINES

Writing an Extended Literary Analysis

An extended analysis presents a critical understanding of a literary work (or works). This form of analysis should be based primarily on your own interpretation of your subject. But you should also refer to the viewpoints of important critics either to support your main ideas or to offer alternative interpretations. An effective extended analysis synthesizes information from multiple sources into a thoughtful, unified essay. Use the guidelines below and the model that follows to help you develop your writing.

SEARCHING AND SELECTING

Reviewing ● You will probably be provided with a list of suggested titles (or authors) to choose from. Consult with your classmates or your instructor if you have any questions about the choices.

Selecting ● Focus your attention on authors or titles that match up well with your own thoughts and interests. If you want a greater challenge, consider literary works that anger or even confuse you. (Why a particular text confuses you can be an excellent starting point for analysis.)

GENERATING THE TEXT

Collecting ● Establish a thorough understanding of your subject: carefully read (and reread) the text, generate personal responses, review class notes, consult your instructor, refer to secondary sources, and so on.

Focusing ● Decide upon a suitable focus for your essay once you have established a good critical understanding of the subject. (You might have discovered an interesting point of comparison between two texts or simply developed a new understanding about a particular work. See 272 for ideas. Also refer to 201-202.) Plan your writing accordingly.

WRITING AND REVISING

Writing ● Shape your first draft according to your planning and organizing. Develop each main point in as much detail as possible, working in direct references to the text(s) and to secondary sources when appropriate.

Revising ● Review your work for clarity, coherence, and depth of thought. Revise and refine accordingly.

EVALUATING



Does the writing demonstrate a thorough understanding of a subject?

Is the writing focused, clear, and organized?

Are direct references/quotations properly cited?

Will readers appreciate the treatment of this subject?

Extended Literary Analysis

In this analysis, Sonya Jongsma explores a major theme in the nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Notice that the writer “extends” her analysis by citing a number of important literary critics. Also notice that she displays a thorough understanding of the text, from the plot structure to the characters’ motives.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: Friendship, Alienation, and Relationship Dynamics

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is one of the most well-known novels of the Romantic era. The story is one that has seeped into the popular imagination, albeit in a completely confused version. The novel’s prophetic voice continues to be echoed today in modern science fiction, showing the impact of scientific knowledge on human life and institutions. Although the theme of scientific progress and the pride that often accompanies it is important and often understood to be the entire purpose of the novel, *Frankenstein* also focuses on the theme of isolation and the human need for friendship and relationships. This theme is central to the novel and is woven throughout the story-within-a-story structure. In this paper I will examine the theme of friendship and alienation as it plays out in Walton’s letters to his sister, in Frankenstein’s cautionary tale, and in the story of the monster.

Frankenstein begins with four letters from Walton to his sister Margaret. Walton is on a voyage to the North Pole. Although he looks forward to discovering “the wondrous power which attracts the needle” (Shelley 14), and he is aglow with anticipation of the completion of the journey and the resulting glory and fame which await him, he admits that he has one want which he has “never yet been able to satisfy” (Shelley 17): he has no friend. He bemoans this fact and shares with his sister his feelings about friendship. Walton sees a friend as someone who can participate in his joy when he is glowing with the enthusiasm of success, and someone who can sustain him when he is feeling dejected because he has failed to accomplish his goals. He says, “I need a great enough friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavor to regulate my mind” (Shelley 18).

Robert Kiely, in a collection of essays titled *The Romantic Novel in New England*, says Mary Shelley shows the Coleridgean side of herself in this novel. He says, “She sees a friend as a balancing and completing agent, one who is sufficiently alike to be able to sympathize and understand, yet sufficiently different to be able to correct and refine” (167).

The opening paragraph establishes the thesis or focus of the analysis.

A secondary source provides authoritative support.

This view is carried out even in the structure of the novel itself. It is written as three stories, with the monster's story at the center, surrounded by Frankenstein's personal story as told to Walton, and framed by Walton's narrative, which takes the form of a letter addressed to his sister. According to Mary Ppovey, in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, focusing on a network of personal relationships enabled Shelley to write a credible story as a woman. She says, "Shelley is able to create her artistic persona through a series of relationships rather than a single act of self-assertion; and she is freed from having to take a single, definitive position on her unladylike subject" (31).

The stories take the form of three confessions to people with whom the speaker has unusually close ties. In the case of the monster's story, the tie is the creature/creator relationship. In Frankenstein's story, he and Walton share the common bond of wholehearted commitment to a "glorious enterprise" that each had hoped would bring himself fame and glory for his unprecedented scientific discovery. Walton and his sister share the close bond of a family relationship.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, says, "The most holy band of society is friendship . . . this is an obvious truth" (113). Wollstonecraft continues to explain, asserting that friendship is a special, rare kind of love because it is more than just appetite or emotion. This kind of friendship is evidenced in the early relationship between Frankenstein and Elizabeth, and it is something Walton desires to have with Frankenstein.

In Walton's fourth letter to his sister, he relates how he has met a stranger drawn on a sled over the ice. He writes, "I said in one of my letters, dear Margaret, that I should find no friend on the wide ocean; yet I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart" (Shelley 26).

Walton tells Frankenstein about his burning desire to reach the North Pole with this stranger. Frankenstein, in turn, sees himself mirrored in Walton's single-minded pursuit of this quest. Walton then tells him that simply achieving his goals will not make him happy, sharing his conviction that a man without a friend "could boast of little happiness" (Shelley 27).

Frankenstein agrees, and says a person isn't whole if he doesn't have someone who is "wiser, better, dearer" than himself to "lend his aid to perfectionate our weak and faulty natures" (Shelley 28). Frankenstein once had such friends, but now he has lost them and can't begin life anew. He then tells Walton his story, explaining the origins of his desire for . . .

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: Friendship, Alienation, and Relationship Dynamics
(continued)

scientific knowledge and how his passion to create a living being has had disastrous consequences.

In her book *Women in Romanticism*, Meena Alexander describes Frankenstein's act of creation as an attempt to usurp the natural relationship of mother and father to child. She says, "Victor has abandoned the monster in his helpless infancy" (28); he alienates his creation because he is repulsed by its hideousness. Frankenstein tries to create something without the structure of a family relationship, and then fails to support his creature in a relationship after it comes to life.

Kiely also sees Frankenstein's scientific experiment as unnatural because he usurps the power of women by trying to create a new species that would "bless him as its creator and source" (164). In doing such a thing, Kiely says, Frankenstein eliminates the need for woman in the creative act. He also neglects his relationship with Elizabeth during his two-year period of time-consuming, obsessive work in the laboratory.

One wonders why Frankenstein doesn't marry Elizabeth earlier and, with her cooperation, finish the job more quickly and pleasurably. After all, if the two are soul mates and have shared all things since childhood, this would be the logical step. But Frankenstein neither marries his best friend and true love, nor does he confide in her about his true purpose and plan.

Kiely says Frankenstein's actions are "the supreme symbol of egotism, the ultimate turning away from human society and into the self which must result in desolation" (167). Having moved away from family, friends, and fiancée to perform his "creative" act in isolation, Frankenstein later witnesses in horror the monster, in an exaggerated reenactment of his own behavior, eliminate his younger brother, his dearest friend, and his beloved Elizabeth. . . .

After Frankenstein's story is told, he talks to Walton about the nature of friendship once again, and explains that he cannot ever have a close friend again. He asks Walton bitterly, "Think you that any can replace those who are gone? Can any man be to me as Clerival was; or any woman another Elizabeth?" He says friends like these "know our infantine dispositions, which, however they may be afterwards modified, are never eradicated; and they can judge of our actions with more certain conclusions as to the integrity of our motives" (Shelley 204). . . .

Frankenstein's story serves well as a cautionary tale and helps prevent Walton from making the same mistakes.

The connection between the wife's role and the husband's role in the creative act is explored.

A careful examination of two characters leads to interesting insights.

Unlike Frankenstein, Walton sees the possible consequences of continuing his quest, and abandons it for the greater good of those who are close to him, his crew. But Frankenstein himself has not learned from his story—he still considers his purpose one “assigned by Heaven” and asks Walton to undertake his unfinished work, to prevent the monster from living as an “instrument of mischief” (Shelley 210).

The monster returns after Frankenstein's death and in an impassioned outburst explains the agony he has gone through in carrying out the murders. He compares himself to Satan in his fall from glory, and says he accepts the fact that he will never find sympathy and is content to suffer alone, although “even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone” (Shelley 213).

Shelley is successful in showing the importance of friends and relationships for living creatures. The monster's loneliness and alienation lead to his destructive rampage, which he himself says would not have happened if he had had a companion. Frankenstein, although emphasizing the power of friends to help balance and refine a person, neglects his friendships and suffers the consequences. And Walton's newfound friendship with Frankenstein does provide the kind of guidance he needs—he learns from Frankenstein and changes his ambition, placing higher priority on his relationships, both with his sister and his crew.

In closing, the writer reaffirms her thesis.

Works Cited

Alexander, Meena. *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley*. Savage, MD: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989.

Kiely, Robert. *The Romantic Novel in England*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Poovey, Mary. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M. H. Abrams. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993. 101-126. ■

Ideas for Literary Analyses

The ideas listed below will help you choose a specific focus for your analysis.

THEME: You can write about one of the themes presented in your selection.

- ~~Does the author seem to be saying something about ambition, courage, greed, jealousy, or happiness?~~
- Does the selection show you what it is like to experience racism, loneliness, etc.?
- Does the author say something about a specific time and place in history?

CHARACTERIZATION AND PLOTS: You can explore aspects of character and plot development.

- What motives determine a character's course of action?
- What are the most revealing aspects of one of the characters? (Consider his or her thoughts, words, and actions.)
- What external conflicts affect the main character? (Consider conflicts with other characters, the setting, objects, etc.)
- What internal conflicts make life difficult for the main character? (Consider the thoughts, feelings, and ideas that affect him or her.)
- How is suspense built into the story? (Consider the important events leading up to the climax.)
- Are there any twists or reversals in the plot? (What do they add to the story?)
- Does the text exhibit traits of a quest, a comedy, a tragedy, or an ironic twist on one of these patterns of development?

SETTING: You may want to analyze the role of the setting in the story.

- What effect does the setting have on the characters? The plot? The theme?
- Has the setting increased your knowledge of a specific time and place?
- Is the setting new and thought provoking?

STYLE: You can give special attention to the author's style of writing.

- What feeling or tone is created in the selection? How is it created?
- Is there an important symbol that adds meaning to the selection? (How is this symbol represented in different parts?)
- Has special attention been given to figures of speech like metaphors, similes, and personification? (What do these devices add to the writing?)

AUTHOR: You can focus on the life and times of the author.

- How does the text reflect aspects of the author's experience or beliefs?
- How does this text compare to other works by the author?
- How does the literary work represent the author's particular time, place, and/or culture?