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Rethinking British Literature
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Essay

<u>Frankenstein, Hamlet and mental illness</u>

Signs of mental illness in Modern British Literature are especially apparent in the main characters of the famous stories written by Mary shelly, and William Shakesspere. The two main protagonist's Victor Frankenstein and Prince Hamlet, both share behaviors that can be described through their character actions and dialog. These types of behaviors share similarities with people with diagnosed mental illness today.

<u>Hamlet</u>

Starting with Hamlet, we must include environmental factors that would have affected his mental well being. The poisoning and death of his father seems the main cause for the misfortune events that happen during the rest of the play. It is hard to decide whether Hamlet's depressive quotes like "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, But in battalions" (William Shakesspere). Now this being only one example of many, We can see Hamlet is struggling with extreme emotional depression from his world. Being that this play is set in the middle ages, they did not have the knowledge and awareness we have today. As the reader slowly watches this character unravel towards the climax of the story, we see an outburst of hatred towards his mother followed by murder. This is where Hamlet bridges from a gap with depressive mood swings, to a more dangerous mindset. The Characters who notice do not seem to offer much help to his well being, and we are then stuck with a tragic character who is now dead in the story.

Victor Frankenstien

Now Victor does display psychological complexes that people today can relate to. This story by Mary Shelly portrays Victor as very smart and driven, always reaching to break ground in any way he possibly can. A quote from chapter two states "It may appear very strange, that a disciple of Albertus Magnus should arise in the eighteenth century; but our family was not scientical, and I had not attended any of the lectures given at the schools of Geneva. My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality; and I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life." This quote shows Victor's God complex. He studies medicine and science in order to understand and control the world around him, and he succeeded by creating life through the work of "science" if we could call it that.

Similarities and differences

Now these two characters were written in very different time periods, each with their own personalities and problems involving their storyline. We can point out some similarities in behavior both Hamlet and Victor share, that include a want and need for control. In both stories, all events leading up to the plot have shaped the characters into who we view them as, outside characters seem to be inferior to both Hamlet and Victor. But this superiority over the other characters has worked against these two, ultimately being the downfall. In contrast, the environmental triggers are very different in both of the worlds these characters are embodied in. Hamlet seems to have been sent over the edge by the traumatic event of his father dying, giving credit to Sigmund Freud's "Nature vs Nurture" theory, by displaying Hamlet's own nature, and

his capacity for stress management. Victor on the other hand shows us examples of a god complex that could be due to his upbringing. When introduced to his cousin Elizabeth, Victor is told by his mother she is his to protect and love. Scenes like this give us as readers a glimpse into how Victor was raised, his mother most likely would tell him things like this often, giving him a sense of entitlement over others, shaping him into a person that creates life under unethical actions.

Conclusion

Now I am not a doctor, nor do I study psychology. The claims that have been made are simply from a theoretical point of view. When reading the genre of British literature, characters that are shown to be unhinged provide the reader with a certain depth of character that "sane" characters don't have. Both Frankenstein and Hamlet provide us with characters who have the mental capacity to act out terrible and irrational deeds, but it's that same mental headspace that causes the tension for a great story.

Work Cited

- Shakespeare, William, and George Rylands. *Hamlet*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

- Shelly, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Dale, 1978.