

Topic: *Frankenstein*

Course Title: Introduction and Motif

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## *Frankenstein*- Mary Shelley(1797-1851)

For most students Mary Shelley is best represented first as the woman who eloped with Percy Bysshe Shelley and next as the author of *Frankenstein*. However, we must reckon with the fact that not only was she the child of two most formidable free thinking philosophers of the post Enlightenment era- William Godwin and Mary Woolstonecraft (a pronounced Feminist)- but also a woman who survived all kinds of upheavals, personal, political and professional, to produce one of the finest critique of Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* : The novel first published in 1818, has gained more fame and popularity in popular culture and films, as a Science fiction than mainstream academia. For instance, University of Calcutta included it in the syllabus for students of English Literature for the first time only in 2018. And dealing with this text at this point of time, when the world is in the firm grip of a deadly Corona virus, makes it all the more significant. The reason is not hard to find: *Frankenstein* offers a blistering critique of the Western world's newly found obsession with radical Science and it's after effects.

## Myths and motifs In the novel

**Prometheus:** The title of the novel *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*, draws our attention to the Promethean myth. Prometheus in Greek

religion and myth is the supreme trickster Titan, the God of Fire. His name means 'Forethinker'. He is depicted as the master craftsman associated with fire and creation of humanity from clay. When Zeus hid fire from the mortals, Prometheus stole it back for humanity only to earn the wrath of Zeus. As a result Zeus nailed Prometheus to a mountain and sent an eagle to eat his immortal liver (liver was regarded as the seat of human emotions in Greece) So the God of science and technology- Prometheus' immortality is not compromised but he is bound and doomed forever for his transgression.

### ***Paradise Lost***

There are repeated references to Milton's text and the identification of Victor Frankenstein's "creature" with the arch enemy/ fiend is very obvious. The story of the Creator and His

Creation is grotesquely mimicked by Mary Shelley.

### ***Rime of the Ancient Mariner***

There are repeated references to Coleridge's poem in the novel. The guilt, anxiety and burden of the ancient mariner is almost shared by Victor Frankenstein, bringing to the fore the central question of the novel. How guilty is Victor Frankenstein? Allied to this motif, the myth of the wandering Jew and the legend of Cain and Abel, also brings another perspective.

Approaching the text:

Though there are three editions of the text between 1818 and 1831, the standard textbook edition for students of English Literature, is the 1818 edition.

1. The contexts and sources of the text to begin with is Scientific and Political.
2. Making the monster.
3. The relationship between the creator and the creature.

(One has to consider allied narratives such as the myth of the wandering Jew, the story of Cain and Abel in this context)

### ***Narrative style***

The novel is written in a confessional style. There are two narrators apparently but the second narrator is placed within the ambit of the primary narrator.

The novel proceeds in the form of letters written by Walton to his sister Mrs. Saville and they read more like a personal journal (like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*)

